SIGNIFYING (RE)VISIONS: ANXIETIES OF MASCULINITY IN AFRICAN AMERICAN MALE ARTISTIC RESPONSES TO HARRIET BEECHER STOWE'S *UNCLE TOM'S CABIN*

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ABSTRACT

Signifying (Re)visions: Anxieties of Masculinity in African American Male Artistic Responses to Harriet Beecher Stowe's *Uncle Tom's Cabin*

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From the moment of its publication in 1852, Harriet Beecher Stowe's *Uncle Tom's Cabin* was a cultural phenomenon that generated much heated debate about slavery, race, and black masculinity. Indeed, the enduring power and importance of this novel and its central black male figure, Uncle Tom, is reflected in the fact that over 150 years later its influence is still felt in literary and cultural discourses on race and black masculinity. Stowe's novel, as I argue, has been a particularly burdensome text for African American men who believe that Stowe's characterization of Uncle Tom as a stoic Christian and "nurturing" slave feminizes, and thus, emasculates him, and by extension them. I contend that this feminization and perceived masculine lack in Uncle Tom produces in African American men anxieties of masculinity that catalyze a need to respond to Stowe's portrayal of black masculinity and heroism, and then proffer their own visions of black manhood. I term these black male artistic revisionary efforts "signifying revisions." I further argue that these artists are not only at war with Stowe, but that her novel also provides these black male revisionists a vehicle through which to challenge one another's definitions of black masculinity, and to address racial issues of their specific historical moment. My analysis therefore traces these revisions from nineteenth-century responses: Frederick Douglass's novella *The Heroic Slave;* Martin Delany's *Blake*; Charles Chesnutt's Reconstruction era novel *Marrow of Tradition;* James Baldwin's essay "Everybody's Protest Novel"; Richards Wright's *Uncle Tom's Children* and *Native Son*; Amiri Baraka's plays *Slave Ship* and *Dutchman* as pre and post-Civil Rights era responses*;* Ishmael Reed's *Flight to Canada*; Robert Alexander's play *I Ain't Yo Uncle: The New Jack Revisionist Uncle Tom's Cabin*; and finally Bill T. Jones dramatic dance performance *Last Supper at Uncle Tom's Cabin: The Promised Land* as 1970s, 1980s, and 1990s black male responses.

My project interrogates these signifying revisions in order to understand the African American male fixation on Stowe and her novel. More specifically, I unearth why black male writers find Uncle Tom and Stowe's other black characters so vexing that they return again and again to the scene, if not the sense of her text. My project answers these questions by suggesting that these revisionary texts are ultimately about black male explorations of their own masculinity, sexuality, relationship to the black and white feminine, and to black and white men. Indeed, these black artists wrestle the pen from Stowe, insisting upon their rights to present black masculinity from their own black male experiences.

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Introduction

> "Excuse me, I forgot the vitamin C," Quickskill said.
> "Of course," the short one said. "Thanks for remembering."
> They picked up a copy of a first edition of Harriet Beecher Stowe's *Uncle Tom's Cabin.* As Quickskill walked into the bathroom, he heard the short one say, "I hear she made a pile on this book." Quickskill, the property, moved past the bowl, the sink, and to the window. He opened it quietly. He climbed out and jumped, landing on the ground of an alley. He went by the window, ducking. The men could be seen talking. He started to run. (Reed, *Flight to Canada* p.61)

When the white slavecatchers arrive unexpectedly at his door, Quickskill, an escaped black slave, must think and act quickly if he is to remain free. He slips into playing the role of the deferential, nurturing slave and shrewdly works within the established racial hierarchy; thus he exploits myopic Anglo views of blacks to his advantage. Indeed, by all appearances, Quickskill is less concerned with the impending return to slavery than with the well-being of the slavecatcher [one of whom needs vitamin C to help relieve his cold], who cannot see beyond their stereotypical views of blacks. Convinced of their racial and intellectual superiority and the racial inferiority and lack of intelligence of blacks, the white men enter the house, certain that their bounty hunt is over. Self-assured and relaxed, they wait patiently for the slave to return and give them the promised vitamin C. In fact, they decide on a little distraction—they pick up a copy of Harriet Beecher Stowe's novel, *Uncle Tom's Cabin*, and engage in idle conversation about Stowe and her famous novel, unaware that their "catch" is dexterously slipping out of bathroom window. As the readers discover, Quickskill is no white man's fool. He is no Uncle Tom who hopes and waits for heavenly intervention or for white men to *feel right,* recognize his humanity and his manhood, and liberate him. Demonstrating the opposite of Tom's

passivity, once out the window, Quickskill continues his flight to Canada, relying on his own ability to think on his feet and outsmart whites.

This comical scene, excerpted from Ishmael Reed's 1976 parodic novel *Flight to Canada*, embodies a significant enterprise of many African American male writers since the publication of *Uncle Tom's Cabin*. In my view, understanding Reed's satire depends primarily on the reader's ability to recognize the intertextual connections between Harriet Beecher Stowe's 1852 abolitionist novel and Reed's novel. By ridiculing the white slavecatchers' myopic view of blacks, Reed derides Stowe's "romantic racialism." This now familiar literary concept, named by George M. Frederickson in 1971 and later used by Eric Lott in his seminal academic text *Love and Theft*, is particularly evident in Stowe's characterization of Uncle Tom, her black male protagonist.

Frederickson calls romantic racialism "a comparatively benign view of blacks" without which "it is impossible to understand the antebellum discussion of Negro character and prospects […]" (101). He defines romantic racialism thus:

> This doctrine—which we shall call romantic racialism—… was widely espoused by Northern humanitarians who were more or less antislavery. Although romantic racialists acknowledged that blacks were different from whites and probably always would be, they projected an image of the Negro that could be construed as flattering or laudatory in the context of some currently accepted ideals of human behavior and sensibility. At its most tentative, the romantic racialist view simply endorsed the "child" stereotype of the most sentimental school of proslavery paternalists and plantation romancers and then rejected slavery itself because it took unfair advantage of the Negro's innocence and good nature. (101-2)

Of course, Stowe was no "plantation romancer"; *Uncle Tom's Cabin*, in its time, was considered the sine qua non of antislavery literature. For Stowe, the "accepted ideal" was a Christian sensibility: devout with an unshakeable faith, even in the face of violence and death. This Christian romanticization of blacks is also evident in her commentary that "this race whom man despiseth have often been chosen of God true messengers of his

grace and temples for the dwelling of his Spirit" (*Key* 27). Thus she suggested that if God has imbued blacks with an innate religiosity, then slavery not only dehumanizes them, but also corrupts an otherwise childlike spirit. In line with sentimental Christian ideology, Stowe created a non-threatening black male hero—loyal and nurturing—whose physical manliness is subsumed under the purity of Christian piety, and thus neutralized. Although Tom is physically masculine—"broad-chested and strong"—Stowe declaws this masculinity by portraying him as a gentle giant or a feminized mammy figure. In fact, she first introduces the reader to a domesticated Uncle Tom inside that famous cabin. She also pairs him with the other symbol of purity, the white female child Eva, whose angelic, white feminine aura encircles Uncle Tom—the two are often portrayed in an idyllic garden scenery reading the Bible. In portraying Uncle Tom as the personification of the feminine element of Christ—the feminized Christ, a man of sorrows—rather than a man of action, Stowe unwittingly emasculates her black male hero and thus initiates a historical debate—a century-long battle—concerning black male self-reliance and heroism. Reed's Quickskill, as his name implies, exemplifies one black male alternative to Stowe's hero—not a slave suffering from Christian "Stowicism," but a self-reliant slave who employs his ability to think quickly to outwit his oppressors and achieve freedom.

Indeed, Reed indulges in the African American tradition of "signifying" in the title of *Flight's* first Chapter, irreverently named "Naughty Harriet." Here, the root of the matter surfaces when Quickskill/Reed accuses Stowe of theft:

> *Old Harriet, Naughty Harriet…. She popularized the American novel and introduced it to Europe. Uncle Tom's Cabin…. The story she "borrowed" from Josiah Henson…. She'd read Josiah Henson's book. That Harriet was alert. The Life of Josiah Henson, Formerly a Slave. Seventy-seven pages long. It was short,*

> *but it was his. It was all he had. His story…. Harriet gave Josiah credit in her The Key to Uncle Tom's Cabin. What was the key to her Cabin? … Josiah would never have thought of waging a plot-toting suit against her. Couldn't afford one anyway….* (*Flight* 8-9)

Reed asserts through Quickskill (as I delineate in Chapter Four) how one element of the conflict with Stowe is black men's desire to own their own narratives. This desire began with the slave narratives, through which, as Henry Louis Gates explains, the black slaves wrote themselves into being as an argument for their humanity[1] and insisted, "cogito ergo sum." By writing their own realities and history, slaves insisted that they were not mere chattel, and that they were in fact capable of intelligent and rational thought. For black men, writing their narratives was also integral to defining themselves as men. Hence, Stowe's appropriation of slave narratives such as Josiah Henson's and Frederick Douglass's to create a black passive, stoic, Christian black male hero is arguably a form of unauthorized re-writing of black male narratives, a rewriting that has produced a trans historical arena of contestation between Stowe and African American men. Reed thus signifies on Stowe's novel, in order to re-envision its characterization of black heroism and to challenge her "borrowing" of a black man's story. Reed's *Flight* is an example of a history of African American male responses to *Uncle Tom's Cabin*—what I term the "signifying re-visions." Indeed, *Uncle Tom's Cabin* has been an especially bothersome, as well as burdensome, text for African American men because they view it as a misrepresentation or distorted portrayal of black masculinity. Therefore, a number of texts by male African American authors since Stowe's time have re-envisioned Stowe's text, namely Frederick Douglass' 1852 novellas *The Heroic Slave* and Martin R. Delany's 1859 novel *Blake: The Huts of America*; Charles Chesnutt's post-Reconstruction 1901 novel *Marrow of Tradition;* Richard Wright's 1938 collection of

short stories, *Uncle Tom's Children* and his 1940 novel *Native Son*; James Baldwin's 1947 seminal essay, "Everybody's Protest Novel;" Amiri Baraka's 1964 play *Dutchman* and 1970 play *The Slave Ship*; Ishmael Reed's parodic 1976 satire, *Flight to Canada*; Robert Alexander's 1991 agitprop play *I Ain't Yo Uncle: The New Jack Revisionist Uncle Tom's Cabin*; and Bill T. Jones's political and complex narrative dance, "Last Supper at Uncle Tom's Cabin: The Promised Land," which was first performed in 1994.

My project examines these signifying revisions to explore the ongoing relationship between African American male artists and *Uncle Tom's Cabin,* to see how the black male responses to Stowe change over time, as well as how they reflect changing views of African American masculinity. The exploration starts with Stowe's Uncle Tom, whose physical masculinity is muted through a stoic and gentle Christian spirituality that feminizes him, if not unsexes him. In fact, I would argue that Stowe's emasculation of her hero produces in African American men an anxiety and crisis of masculinity that has necessitated ritualized artistic engagement with Stowe's novel for over a century and a half. The unmanning and objectification of her hero and of other black characters has been the crux of the Uncle Tom wars. When black artists invoke Stowe's ill-conceived archetypes, therefore, they bring them back to life so as to expose both her black characters' psychological shortcomings and, by extension, her misguided portrayal of the black response to being enslaved.

Even as Stowe critiqued slavery, she could only see blacks through the lens of her own gender, race, and class. Consequently, she created black archetypes that lack human depth and complexity: from the mammy figure Aunt Chloe, to the unruly, hobgoblin, "jes grew" black child Topsy, to the fragile mulatto female Eliza, to the sexually exploited

and damaged mulatto women Cassy and young Emmeline, to the bold, quick-to-anger mulatto male George Harris, to the minstrel-like pretentions of the mulatto slave Adolph, and the buffoonery of slaves clownishly named Sambo and Quimbo. Clearly, Stowe's stereotypes, drawn with the racist tropes of her time, display an inability to create fully realized black characters. The popularity of her novel helped to set in stone at least four of five black archetypes that have become ingrained in American characterization of blacks on stage and screen—namely, the Tom, the Coon, the Tragic Mulatto, and the Mammy. [2] Stowe's myopic and sentimental view of race is epitomized by her juxtaposition of the mulatto slave, George Harris, infused with Anglo-Saxon passion, and the Christian passivity of the "pure" African Uncle Tom. Just as the mulatto overcomes obstacles to attain freedom, the black slave stoically accepts his bondage, adhering to the Christian tenet of loving all, even his cruel master—the infamous Simon Legree. Indeed, it is Uncle Tom's Christian politics of pacifism and continued preaching of Christian love and redemption, as he is literary beaten to death by Legree, that most defines her protagonist's heroism for Stowe, and for black men, contrarily, his weakness and unmanliness. So many black men appear unable to move beyond Tom's pain and trauma, and by extension, from their own unmanning. In fiction this emasculating process is conducted by the white male character Legree (who represents the Anglo male), but in the literary sense it is carried out by Stowe. Thus, these authors return again and again to the scene of the crime: *Uncle Tom's Cabin.*

In interrogating these signifying revisions and their fixation on Stowe and her novel, I ask the following questions: Why have black male writers found Stowe's novel so vexing that they return again and again to the scene, if not the sense, of her text? In

challenging *Uncle Tom's Cabin* do these revisions give credence to Stowe's words, thus ensnaring black artists in the very paradigms of racial representation they seek to dismantle?[3] In answering these questions, I suggest that these signifying responses are ultimately about black male explorations of their masculinity (connected to their sexuality) and their relationships to the feminine (black and white), religion, and property. In order to create their own visions of black masculinity, black male artists not only fight Stowe with their pen, but they also insist upon their right to hold, as it were, the "keys to the cabin." Her apparent act of property "theft" sparks responses from black male writers, whose attempts to take back (his)story from the pen of the white female author leads them to war with her, as well as with one another. These texts become not only intertextual conversations with *Uncle Tom's Cabin*, but also often dialogues and debates with works by other black men.

Intertextuality and the African American Literary Tradition of Signifying

Whether the African American male signifying revisionists allude to, signify on, or revise Stowe's work directly or implicitly within their works, we cannot ignore the intertextual connections between their texts and *Uncle Tom's Cabin*. Indeed, for African American writers, "to rename is to revise, and to revise is to Signify" (Gates *Signifying Monkey* xxiii). As Gates explains in his seminal text *Signifying Monkey*, African American literature develops from the nineteenth to the twentieth century as a series of intertextual "links in an extended ebony chain of discourse" (Gates *Signifying Monkey* 164). I would argue that Gates's model is also useful for addressing the intertextuality between African and Anglo American texts.[4] To Gates' ebony chain must be added ivory

links, too, such as *Uncle Tom's Cabin*, which has become a sticking point in the discourse of so many black male writers. Signifying facilitates repetition, but not exact duplication—the aim is always to create difference. When African American male artists revise Stowe's text, particularly her depiction of Uncle Tom, they critique Stowe's representation of blackness and definitions of heroism, and produce what they believe to be a more meaningful and effective black heroism.

The *Oxford English Dictionary* defines intertextuality as "the need for one text to be read in light of its allusions to and differences from the content or structure of other texts; the (allusive) relationship between esp. literary texts" (OED "Intertextuality"). In this project, my use of intertextuality involves this practice of reading one text in light of another combined with the African American tradition of signifying—literary/artistic "repetition with a difference." My intertextual reading draws from Gates's concept of African American signifying, and from Aldon Nielsen's use of signifying to understand the intertextual relationship between African American literature and the larger field of American literature, what Nielsen refers to as "repetition, with signal difference" (51). Like Nielsen, I believe that, if we are to appreciate truly African American literary works, we must contextualize them in the larger body of American literature. Nielsen says,

> Intertextual readings would pursue the diffusion of racial signification across the textual mapping of American consciousness. Such a reading requires that we find meaning in texts in their relations with other texts. Rather than segregating our readings of African American literary creations, we must, as the very name African American literature implies, read black texts in their fulsome implication in all English writing. (51)

Following Nielsen's principle, I read the intertextual relationship between Stowe and African- American male writers as a conscious signal to the original text, with the

purposeful desire to revise and "improve" upon it. My intertextual readings reveal black male textual challenges to the thematic and ideological preoccupations of her text.

Although I embrace the concept of an intertextuality that reveals revisionary relationships between African American and Anglo-American texts, this dissertation does not read intertextuality within a Bloomian theory of an anxiety of influence.[5] That is, although the black artists/writers considered here actively seek their voices, they do not necessarily perceive Stowe as a predecessor worthy of their veneration. As my chapters illustrate, the relationship between Stowe and the African American authors in my project's purview is usually referential rather than deferential. In fact, as Reed's *Flight* demonstrates, black male writers' relationship with Stowe is often derisive. They clearly resent the fame and cultural authority of one they consider an appropriator, and by re-writing her text, they provide their own keys to Uncle Tom's cabin in order re-define the discourses on black masculinity, and thus, as Stowe had accomplished, influence the larger cultural and literary discourses on race and masculinity.

In re-envisioning Stowe's work, these signifying men employ a range of rhetorical strategies, from sentimental masculinity (as a rhetorical strategy for demonstrating a fraternal bond between men), to anger and subversive deference, to humor. Thus, Stowe's use of sentimental realism is often signified upon and revised by black male revisionists who employ literary styles antithetical to the sentimental genre, such as naturalism, parody, and humor. Signifying, as Darryl Dickson-Carr explains, can also be "a verbal jousting consisting of insults and trickery used to create a clever, often subtly devastating critique of a particular person, idea, or object" (28). For example, in Chapter Four, I explore Robert Alexander's and Ishmael Reed's use of humor as part of

their signifying strategy to challenge Stowe's idea of blackness and heroism. Through the rhetorical strategies of signification, black male artists sometimes use humor as a release valve for frustration with historical social injustices, and for political agitation, resistance, and demand for change. The problem with using humor and satire as means of moral suasion is that they can detract from the seriousness of the matter. Nonetheless, as Darryl Dickson-Carr argues, when the intent is to persuade or to expose defects, as in the case of parody, humor can be an effective tool (14-37). Reed employs the African American tradition of the trickster figure as embodied by Uncle Robin who on the surface appears as the Uncle Tom figure, and thus fools his white master into believing that, like Uncle Tom, he is loyal and faithful, until Uncle Robin tricks his way into inheriting the master's plantation. Thus, Reed balances historical racial imbalances; the property—Uncle Robin—through an act of trickery wills himself the master's land. As Winifred Morgan explains, "implicit in the use of the African-American trickster tradition is the assumption that unfair imbalance continues, particularly in relations between blacks and whites" (218). We might laugh at certain moments of signification, but the subversion in those comic moments exposes the incongruities of racial hierarchy within American society. Alexander's and Reed's characters might make us laugh, but the butt of the joke is realized in the way their texts signify on Stowe's *Uncle Tom's Cabin*. By employing the African American tradition of signifying and humor, these black male authors expose the narrowness of Stowe's narrative, and the legacy of slavery on black and white relations in contemporary American society.

These revisionary texts also employ more militant styles for their intertextual signification, as is the case with Richard Wright's use of the aesthetics of naturalism and

Amiri Baraka's Black Arts Movement aesthetics. We might "weep" at the brutal realities of black life in the South during Jim Crow, or even turn in horror at the depiction and re-telling of black (his)story, but the aim of writers like Wright and Baraka is always to make us re-assess Stowe's black characters, and as such rethink our understanding of black history. Even when, like Stowe, they employ the sentimental genre as their revisionist style, as is the case with Douglass and Chesnutt, they insert a masculine sentimentality to re-envision Stowe's black characters, particularly Uncle Tom.

Beyond the Matter and Meaning of "Uncle Tom"

Over a century and a half in the American cultural imagination, Uncle Tom returns in different guises and is called by many monikers, persisting as the ghostly epicenter of discourses on black masculinity. Despite J.C Furnas' urging in his 1956 sociological treatise of "the Negro problem" that we bid goodbye to Uncle Tom, [6] the allure of Stowe's novel in our culture continues to attract scholars. Always the central figure of debate, Stowe's titular character has been at times repudiated, and at other times recuperated, but most often, the phrase "Uncle Tom" has served as the ultimate racial epithet. Seen over time as synonymous with "race traitor," "Uncle Tom" is invoked even by those without direct knowledge of Stowe's novel. In African American communities, this racial slur still carries weight. When hurled at black men, it can still evoke embarrassment and even psychic trauma.[7]

But my concerns in this project are less with the matter and meaning of "Uncle Tom" in the broader social consciousness than with how African American male artists, per se, engage with Stowe's novel in order to re-envision it and thus challenge its

portrayal of black masculinity. As Richard Yarbrough observes, "*Uncle Tom's Cabin* was an abiding, at times daunting, paradigmatic influence for most Afro-American fiction writers, casting its shadow over their diverse attempts to define realistically the black capacity for heroic action while not alienating the white audience that they felt they absolutely had to hold in order to bring about political change" (72). Although Yarborough makes this statement in reference to the inescapable presence of Stowe's novel for early African American writers, I would argue that over a century later, black writers still feel the incommodious shadow of Stowe's novel. Because of the cultural pervasiveness of *Uncle Tom's Cabin*, they choose to engage its misrepresentations of blacks. No matter the reaction to Stowe's novel—positive or negative— *Uncle Tom's Cabin* continues as the central text in literary discourses on African Americans and black masculinity.

One might ask, why position *Uncle Tom's Cabin* specifically as central to black artistic and intellectual creativity, seemingly side-stepping early African American novels or other early Anglo American texts that dealt with the issue of race? Why not use Mark Twain or even Edgar Allan Poe, as Quickskill, the hero of Reed's *Flight*, suggests? In order to attempt to answer this pertinent question, I begin with Richard Yarborough's seminal essay on *Uncle Tom's Cabin.* Yarborough aptly explains that the magnitude of Stowe's novel lies in its "extraordinary synthesizing power [that] presented Afro-American characters, however derivative and distorted, who leaped with incredible speed to the status of literary paradigms and even cultural archetypes with which subsequent writers—black and white—have had to reckon" (47). I extend Yarbrough's explanation through Toni Morrison's theory in *Playing in the Dark*, [8] where she posits that, though

not always visible, a "dark, abiding Africanist presence" dominates the Anglo-American literary imagination (5). Following Morrison's argument, but flipping its theory, I suggest that there also exists, conversely, an abiding and sometimes vexing Anglo presence in African American literary consciousness. This Anglo presence manifests itself in the literal figures of white characters and, more subtly, in the unspoken but always looming white presence that, on the one hand, defines and informs a black sense of being, and, on the other hand, assumes blackness as knowable and even predictable.[9] Thus, African American characters, as we see through Reed's Quickskill, when they find themselves at a disadvantage are able to manipulate to their advantage Anglo belief in an "understanding" of black psyche and desires.[10] Stowe, I would argue, embodies this salient presence for African American writers. Part of the complexity of her novel's legacy is that, while ardently supporting the black cause, it nonetheless paints blacks, from within the limitations of her own white perspective, not as they are but as she desires them to be. Thus Stowe bequeaths to the culture a black hero more concerned with the reformation of the souls of white and black folks than with the pursuit of his own freedom.

Feminist and Masculinity Studies, the Shaping of the African American Canon, and Stowe Scholarship

Like many students, I arrived at Stowe's Uncle Tom's cabin, as it were, with pre-conceived notions of what I would discover within. Of course, like so many, I discovered that the "real" Uncle Tom is in fact a different character from the race traitor of my cultural imagination. This discovery sparked my curiosity about a text that is so famous

and yet so often misunderstood, and certainly often not read. My second encounter with *Uncle Tom's Cabin* and introduction to nineteenth-century responses to Stowe's novel occurred during a graduate course on nineteenth-century American literature taught by Stephen Railton; this began the journey that ultimately led to this project.

My curiosity with Stowe scholarship began with reading feminist scholars such as Jane Tompkins, Gillian Brown, and Jean Fagan Yellin. Their recuperative efforts broadly challenge the exclusion of female writers from the American literary canon, and more specifically, re-assess the tendency to devalue the feminine sentimental rhetorical strategy of Stowe's magnum opus. I therefore present a literary review of these feminist scholarships as a springboard into my comparative reading of nineteenth and twentieth-century African American male revisions of *Uncle Tom's Cabin*.

Although initially informed by feminist scholarship, the evolution of my project was also informed by masculinity studies, and thus, in order to understand the discourses on masculinity that inform these African American signifying revisions, and with which they are in conversation, it was necessary to investigate the historical discourses on American masculinity. I therefore begin by critiquing nineteenth-century discourses of masculinity—both white and black—to illustrate how African American men often attempted to appropriate the nation's masculinist rhetoric in order to challenge the larger Anglo exclusion of black men from the definitions of manhood. As Michael S. Kimmel explains:

> American manhood has often been built on exclusion of others from equal opportunity to work, to go to school, to vote—to do any of the things that allow people to compete equally. It seemed as though men believed that by keeping the public worlds of work, education, or politics as homosocial preserves of native-born white men, they could more reliably prove their manhood. (31)

Kimmel suggests that that Anglo American masculinity depends on exclusionist politics to maintain white male authority and sense of superiority. White male dominance is therefore threatened when minorities or women demand equal access to education or work—conduits for social advancement. Such social barriers invariably impact African American men as they attempt to establish their own male authority, or at least gain access to the established privileges of patriarchy. The male struggle for power and authority thus creates an anxiety-filled field of contestation for both black and white men that increases when women are added to the equation. Stowe's apparent claim of being an authority on the African American male psyche and the success of her novel clearly produced in black men a state of anxious masculinity. The question then is why African American men are so displeased with Stowe's vision of black heroism; after all, Stowe's characterization of black women also lacked depth.

Despite my focus on African American male signifying revisions, we should acknowledge that Stowe's novel has also engendered some worthy artistic responses by African American females. Like black male revisions, black female responses to Stowe's text begin in the nineteenth century with writers such as Harriet E. Wilson and her 1859 novel *Our Nig*. They extend to more contemporary invocations such as Toni Morrison's 1987 novel *Beloved*. These female-authored texts bring to the forefront the peripheral stories of black females in Stowe's narrative. By portraying the psychic distress and plight of the black woman and girl in bondage, writers such as Wilson and Morrison give voice to, and expand upon, Stowe's vision of anguished black motherhood (Emmeline and Cassy, and Eliza) and the unlovable black female child (Topsy) and abused black child (Harry). Predictably, black female responses to the perceived limitations of Stowe's

vision are far more uncompromising in their rendering of the complexity and psychologically agonizing relationship between black mothers and their children than are works written by black men.

While Stowe's commentary on the dangers of the masculine ethos that governed the nation and sanctioned America's un-Christian commercial enterprise of slavery could be embraced by men and women, her relocation of social authority within the domestic realm and assertion that "real" power could reside with women through their influence on the public socio-political slavery debates from within the home, complicates the black female response. This was a kind of authority that black women, during and immediately after the Civil War, had more difficulty using and appropriating because of their race. Wilson's protagonist, the black female Frado in *Our Nig*, illustrates this particular point; even in the North, the black female remained outside of the definitions of the feminine. Indeed, Frado's trauma occurs within the feminine domestic realm and is inflicted by the white mother. The relationship between black female authors and *Uncle Tom's Cabin* is a rich subject for scholarship, but in the interest of limiting the scope of inquiry to a manageable area, this dissertation will specifically analyze African American male responses to Stowe's representations of race and black masculinity.

Stowe's representation of blackness, fraught with romantic racialism, commanded such authority that it set the paradigm for the characterization of blacks in literature and informed cultural representations of blacks in nineteenth-century America. Predictably, the Uncle Tom revisions began in the nineteenth century with Douglass's and Delany's direct responses to *Uncle Tom's Cabin* and to Stowe's vision of ideal black male heroism. Indeed, much has been written concerning the triangular relationship of Stowe,

Martin Delany, and Frederick Douglass by scholars such as Richard Yarborough and Robert S. Levine. My analysis of the early black male signifying revisionists is also informed by other African Americanists: Eric Sundquist, Robert Stepto, William L. Andrews, and Wilson Moses. As other more contemporary scholars also note, Stowe and her protagonist, Uncle Tom, continue to cast their shadow into gorgeous contemporary African American literary and cultural discourses on race and black masculinities. By the twentieth century, Uncle Tom had become an American cultural icon whose meaning had evolved beyond its authorial intent. Undoubtedly, African American men have labored the most under the burden of the evolution and interpretation of Uncle Tom within broader American culture, as such, they return to Uncle Tom's Cabin so as to confront the novel and the author, re-envisioning *Uncle Tom's Cabin* within specific political, racial, and masculine discourses that speak to the particularities of pivotal moments in American history

Tracing the Shadow of *Uncle Tom's Cabin*: Race Relations and African American Masculinities from Slavery to Post Civil War America

The black male journey from slavery to emancipation was clearly tied to their struggle to define their own masculinity and to construct their own visions of self-reliant manhood, as well as to establish themselves as the economic backbone of their families and communities. Post-Reconstruction implementation of Jim Crow laws in the South heightened black men's sense of manhood as they also now had to challenge Southern institutionalization of blatantly racist policies that marginalized blacks and seized any political gains by black male leaders. To combat Southern promulgation of myths of innate black male degeneracy and masculine lack, educated blacks like Chesnutt

challenged Southern white perception of race as a signifier of ideal masculinity and exposed the myth of Anglo superiority and inherent masculinity. Also determined to become the economic providers, many African American working men strove to acquire and farm lands as they did during slavery. The failure to realize these dreams for many black men in the South was perceived as a failure of their role as men.[11] In spite of these socio-political issues, the growing black middle class continued to promote racial uplift (a philosophy that would also influence black arts through the New Negro movement that began in the 1920s). The increasingly tough socio-economic realities and virulent racism in the South catalyzed the migration of many blacks from the rural South to the urban North, and offered black men the possibility of regaining their sense of manhood through gainful employment and economic advancement. By the 1930s however, black migration from rural South to Northern cities created new racial tensions as blacks often found themselves segregated in poor urban dwellings and working menial jobs that further chipped at black men's sense of masculinity. Wright's *Uncle Tom's Children* and *Native Son* illustrate this shift from rural Southern black life to Northern urban realities and the new forms of social injustice blacks experienced. The racial inequality and racial tensions would spur the beginnings of black demand for civil rights.

Like the post-Reconstruction dichotomy between the agrarian laboring manhood espoused by Booker T. Washington and the educated middle-class ideal advocated by W. E. B. Du Bois, the 1960s Civil Rights era also produced two visions of black masculinity. While Martin Luther King Jr. preached a non-violent Christian vision of a black man's purpose, Malcom X insisted upon a more militant and violent one. King believed in a coalition between blacks and whites (and indeed all races within America) to achieve the

dream of equality for all. Indeed, white alliance with blacks was crucial to the success of the Civil Rights movement. However, as sociologist Gary T. Marx explains, even as blacks and whites cooperated, tensions between blacks and whites inevitably arose, especially "in the mid-1960s with the rise of the Black Power movement, [when] the unique ethnic aspects of black subordination were stressed" (Marx). The consequence of black distrust of whites was the espousal of more militant, often misogynistic, black masculinity by the Black Power movement of the 60s and 70s. The black artists of this movement, such as Amiri Baraka, not only challenged non-violent forms of black masculinity, but deemed them the epitome of subservient Uncle Tom emasculation.

The beginnings of the gay liberation movement in the 70s and 80s produced a further shift in the nation's discourse on masculinity and race. Black masculinity thus expanded beyond heteronormative identity to include a homosexual black male identity that, unlike the militant masculinity of the Black Aestheticians, did not reject the feminine. Ironically, this huge change would also produce black male re-assessment of Stowe's feminization of her protagonist, and questioning of whether his Christian stoicism and consequent death were indeed ineffective, or should be interpreted as effective non-violent resistance. Indeed, the final revisionary artists in Chapter Four, dance choreographer Bill T. Jones and agitprop playwright Robert Alexander, reflect these changes in black male revisionist responses to Uncle Tom. By beginning with Douglass's and Delany's revisionary texts and ending with Alexander's and Jones's play and narrative dance, my project not only maps black male responses to *Uncle Tom's Cabin*, but also illustrates the differences in their visions of black heroism and definitions of black manhood.

Through their non-fiction writings, Douglass and Delany contributed black male perspectives to the ongoing national conversation on abolition and to discourses on race and gender. Their fiction is no different. Writing to Stowe's predominantly white abolitionist audience, Douglass and Delany retain Stowe's sentimental rhetorical style in their texts, but replace her valorization of the feminine with a privileging of the masculine. They employ a rhetorical strategy for demonstrating a fraternal bond between men that I would call sentimental masculinity. Douglass imagines an integrationist interracial bond, with Delany proposing a separatist bond between black men. They comment on the masculine ethos that governed the nation and appropriate the ideology of Anglo Saxon masculinity to define black masculinity while insisting on the humanity of blacks.

My comparative reading of the triangular relationship between Stowe's, Douglass's, and Delany's works is greatly influenced by Robert S. Levine's reassessment of the tendency to view the two men in terms of binary opposition—assimilationist/integrationist versus nationalist (Levine *Politics of Representative Identity* 5). As he explains:

> I share Stuckey's view of the instabilities and overlappings in such key terms as "integration" and "nationalist" and thus of the inevitable distortions that arise from an overreliance on binary oppositions to make sense of the ideological commitments of such complex figures as Delany and Douglass. (Levine *Politics of Representative Identity* 5)

However, I argue that by the time of the publication of *Uncle Tom's Cabin* in 1852, the two men occupied opposite ends of the ideological spectrum of discourses on race and abolitionism, particularly when it came to Stowe. Levine does acknowledge that "while it is possible in a large historical frame to demonstrate similarities between Delany and Douglass, by the 1850s they regarded themselves as in conflict with each other over

issues of absolutely crucial importance" (Levine *Politics of Representative Identity* 5). Certainly, judging from their debate about Stowe and her novel, Uncle Tom provided one of those issues of importance. While Douglass publicly praised Stowe and her novel in their support of the black cause, Delany publicly chided her because he did not believe that her sentimental theological ideology of passive resistance was one that would benefit blacks. Unlike Douglass, he believed in black self-reliance that eschewed white philanthropy in the struggle for black emancipation. Thus Stowe's text crystallized ideological disruptions within the burgeoning black political power base. Stowe might not have been the sole catalyst for the ruptured ties between Douglass and Delany, but their very public debate over the usefulness of *Uncle Tom's Cabin* and Stowe's role in antislavery efforts emphasized ideological differences that created combative dialogue and an unbridgeable chasm between the two black leaders. Nonetheless, *Uncle Tom's Cabin* provided these two thinkers with a language familiar to the wider American audience, especially the abolitionists, through which they could articulate their own versions of the black male struggle for freedom and self-reliant manhood. Thus, in Chapter One, I read the *Heroic Slave* and *Blake* through this prism of opposition, as each man re-envisions Stowe's Uncle Tom to offer his own assimilationist and nationalist visions of black male heroes.

Charles Chesnutt's post-Reconstruction novel, *The Marrow of Tradition,* appears to pick up where Douglass and Delany left off. In Chapter Two, I further trace black male repudiation of Uncle Tom to Chesnutt's central character, Dr. Miller. Indeed, my thesis enters into conversations begun by literary scholars such as Eric Sundquist and William L. Andrews and continued by scholars such as Riche Richardson and Matthew Wilson. I

agree that discourses of race and masculinity in *Uncle Tom's Cabin* inform Chesnutt's discussions of American definitions of masculinity and, by extension, also inform Chesnutt's examination of the interplay between race and gender in the Post-Reconstruction South.

Writing from the vantage point of history, Chesnutt signifies on both *Uncle Tom's Cabin* and the 1898 Wilmington, North Carolina race riots. In comments on the novel, Chesnutt described his hope that *Marrow* would recreate the success of Stowe's novel and influence the contentious discourses on race and gender in the post-Reconstruction South. His revisionist methodology therefore retains the sentimental rhetoric of *Uncle Tom's Cabin,* even as it imagines a more self-reliant black manhood. I concur with Riche Richardson that *Marrow* "demonstrates [Chesnutt's] interest in in exploring the impact of race and class in shaping a range of models of black masculinity in the late nineteenth-century, an aspect of his work that needs more critical recognition" (28). In Chapter Two I examine the interstices of race and class in Chesnutt's *Marrow.* My intertextual reading of the mulatto protagonist Dr. Miller and his darker opposite Josh Green compares Chesnutt's two visions of black masculinity to Stowe's Uncle Tom and the mulatto George Harris, thus examining how Chesnutt inserts class as integral for discourses on race. By paralleling the uneducated, darker Josh Green and the educated mulatto Dr. Miller, Chesnutt argues that these two categories together provide a more appropriate critique of race than the American use of race alone as a signifier of intellect and gentility.

By the turn of the twentieth century, many African Americans began migrating to cities such as New York and Chicago in order escape the violence and oppressive

economic conditions of life in the South, and to seek prosperity in the booming industrial North. This period also ushered in a new era in African American artistic productions through the New Negro Movement and its call for racial uplift. Led by W.E.B. Du Bois and Alain Locke, the New Negro Movement championed black writers such as Langston Hughes and Zora Neale Hurston. My project does not directly address any texts within this era, but rather marks it as part of a historical trajectory for understanding what I believe to be the next significant moment in the Uncle Tom wars. This is not to say that Uncle Tom had faded into the background of the African American cultural imagination. In fact, as Stephen Railton explains:

> As far as I've been able to learn, Marcus Garvey was the first public figure to use "Uncle Tom" as a pejorative term, and his speeches and other Universal Negro Improvement Association publications and public events gave wide circulation to the term as a way to stigmatize blacks who betrayed the cause of their race. "Uncle Tom's dead and buried," proclaimed protest signs at the parade that opened the UNIA's first convention in 1920 in New York, and according to New York *World* report (7 August 1920) in an address to the convention Rev. George Alexander McGuire declared that "the Uncle Tom nigger has got to go and his place must be taken by the new leader of the Negro race…not a black man with a white heart, but a black man with a black heart. (Railton)

Clearly, at this moment Uncle Tom was still very much alive, and relevant, for black men in defining their identity as men and as leaders of their community. If indeed Garvey was the first to hurl the Uncle Tom insult or popularize its usage to mean a traitor to the black race, then we could argue that this era set the foundations for the black male historical ritual of resurrecting Uncle Tom in order to banish him.

Harlem Renaissance writers were certainly aware of *Uncle Tom's Cabin.* In fact, Langston Hughes wrote an introduction to a 1952 edition of *Uncle Tom's Cabin* where he claims that Stowe's novel is "a good story, exciting in incident, sharp in characterization, and threaded with humor" and a "moral battle cry for freedom" (Railton *Uncle Tom and*

American Culture). Notably, Hughes adroitly sidesteps any discussions of the book's discourse on race. But before Hughes's introduction, another Harlem Renaissance black male writer, James Weldon Johnson, references *Uncle Tom's Cabin* in his 1912 novel, *Autobiography of an Ex-Colored Man*. Here, the un-named male protagonist arrives at a critical moment of racial self-awakening by reading Stowe's famous novel:

> I do not think it is claiming too much to say that *Uncle Tom's Cabin* was a fair and truthful panorama of slavery; however that may be, it opened my eyes as to who and what I was and what my country considered me; in fact, it gave me my bearing. But there was no shock; I took the whole revelation in a kind of stoical way. One of the greatest benefits I derived from reading the book was that I could afterwards talk frankly with my mother on all the questions which had been vaguely troubling my mind. (Johnson 29)

Now that he fully comprehends his racial identity, our protagonist takes another step towards growth—discovering his black masculine identity by exploring Frederick Douglass' slave narrative. As he reads Douglass's account of his personal journey from slavery to freedom and his corresponding journey from boyhood to manhood, he begins to construct his own African American male identity *vis-a-vis* Douglass. In this critical moment of racial and masculine coming of age, Johnson captures a profound psychological response to *Uncle Tom's Cabin*. The discovery of *Uncle Tom's Cabin* not only facilitates the protagonist's recognition of the black self, but also opens up his relationship to his mother. This connection to his masculinity ignites a racial consciousness so that he begins freely discussing matters of race with a mother whose life had previously been an unknown to him.[12] This moment in *Autobiography* I believe illustrates the relevancy of *Uncle Tom's Cabin* during this era, both culturally in general, and within African American literature.

Although no longer as popular as it was at the turn of the twentieth century, by the 1950s, *Uncle Tom's Cabin* remained part of American pop culture through

(mis)appropriations and reinventions by Hollywood.[13] These cinematic references and allusions to the novel or to its famous characters often bore no resemblance to Stowe's characters and were clearly influenced by the old Tom shows and stage adaptations. As Railton explains, although protest from the N.AA.C.P stopped the production of Uncle Tom films, "[n]ontheless, images and characters from Stowe's novel made cameo appearances in many other Hollywood movies and cartoons from the era of sound" (Railton, *Uncle Tom's Cabin & American Culture*).

Arguably, the beginning of the Civil Rights movement in the late 1940s stimulated renewed interest in *Uncle Tom's Cabin* that generated discussions about black freedom and rights to full citizenship in America. For African American writers such as Richard Wright and James Baldwin Stowe's infamous text remained a point of contention because they clearly felt its creation of forceful black stereotypes outweighed its moral gains with the larger American public. With the huge success of *Native Son* in 1940, Richard Wright came to be the era's most celebrated black writer. Before his groundbreaking novel, he first attempted an exposition of the grittiness of black realities in his collection of short stories *Uncle Tom's Children*—the most overt signification on *Uncle Tom's Cabin.* The short stories imagine the lives of those peripheral "wooly-headed" children in the dark, insignificant corners of Uncle Tom's cabin. With this novel, Wright pioneered a different epoch of African American letters, moving away from the tradition of sentimental realism to writing in the "tougher" terms of socialist realism. The fact that he launches this shift in African American literature with an attack on Stowe and her novel's tradition of religious passivity underscores the continuing importance of *Uncle Tom's Cabin* in African-American literary history and in the discourse on race and

black masculinity. But Wright would later find himself in ideological conflict with another African American writer, namely James Baldwin.

In Chapter Three, I compare Wright's and Baldwin's responses to *Uncle Tom's Cabin*, viewing the debate between the two as a continuation of the dispute between Delany and Douglass over Stowe's text. I discuss Baldwin's 1949 critical essay, "Everybody's Protest Novel," side by side with Wright's *Native Son*, his self-described attempt to rewrite his first collection of short stories *Uncle Tom's Children*. As scholars such as Michael Fabre and Hazel Rowley and Wright's own writings have shown, Wright was dismayed by the reception of his collection of short stories as a tear jerker. The depiction of thwarted black dreams and of psychological, social, political, and economic frustrations of black lives, particularly of black men, pulled at the heartstrings of readers to produce an outpouring of sympathy and tears from white audiences, just as Stowe's novel had done. In response, and to shock back those tears, Wright wrote *Native Son* with an unflinching critique of the effects of racism and lack of economic opportunity on the black male psyche.

Baldwin, however, remained skeptical about the effectiveness of the protest novel. He declared Wright the literary heir to Stowe, arguing that *Native Son*, while appearing antithetical to *Uncle Tom's Cabin*, is simply the other side of the same coin: Stowe's book is sentimental and Wright's book angry, but both fail to truly present the broad range of the humanity of their black heroes. Baldwin thus claims *Native Son*'s protagonist "Bigger is Uncle Tom's descendant, flesh of his flesh […] (22). In fact, according to Baldwin both novels fail because Bigger Thomas and Uncle Tom must die for us to realize their humanity. Bigger's psychological freedom like Uncle Tom's

physical freedom is achieved through his interaction with a white male. The underlying battle between Wright and Baldwin, as I explain in Chapter Three is also informed by the tension between Baldwin's inclusion of black homosexual identity in the spectrum of black masculinity and Wright's definition of effective black masculinity as hypermasculinity. In addition to Wright's narrow vision of black masculinity, Bigger's freedom—in this case, psychological—like Uncle Tom's—is achieved through his interaction with a white male. In critiquing Baldwin's essay and Wright's two novels, I argue that, like their literary forefathers Douglass and Delany, they challenge Stowe's novel and offer their own take on ideal black masculinity. Stowe's novel functions as a medium for literary debate between the two black authors. Ironically, just as he had challenged his erstwhile mentor Wright, Baldwin would find himself vilified, and Wright glorified, by the next generation of African American writers, including Amiri Baraka.

In the 1960s and 1970s Black Arts Movement, artists proclaimed, as had Wright before them, "Uncle Tom is dead." About the Movement, Phillip Brian Harper notes, "[I]nsofar as that Blackness is conceived in anxiously masculine terms, then the pronominal construct through which it is registered suggests, "*I* am a man but *you*…?" (53). The "you" here implies "the Uncle Tom" who becomes the embodiment of how *not* to be a man as far as the Black Arts movement writers are concerned. Black Arts artists such as Baraka conflated blackness and manliness, creating a binary opposition between heterosexual and homosexual—one considered masculine and the other feminine. Since the movement had a decidedly masculinist voice, it is not surprising that Wright's Bigger Thomas was perceived as the model for radical black masculinity and the antidote to Stowe's Uncle Tom.

Chapter Four enters the horrors of Amiri Baraka's *Slave Ship*, where, in the final scene, the decapitated head of Uncle Tom is thrown onstage, symbolizing the death, finally, of Stowe's protagonist. I argue that, even as writers in the Black Arts Movement proclaimed his death, Uncle Tom remained very much alive in our literary and cultural imagination during the1960s and 70s. Indeed, cultural longevity is confirmed by the beheading and Uncle Tom insult hurled at the black male protagonist of Baraka's *The Dutchman*. Although there were other Black Aestheticians whose plays reference Uncle Tom to signal the militancy of their black male characters,[14] I focus on Baraka's plays because not only are they still in print and production, but they also remain significant texts within the African American literary canon. This Chapter reads *Dutchman* through its placement within a critical moment in Bill T. Jones's *Last Supper*. I explore how Jones both signifies on Stowe's novel and inserts the pivotal murder scene from Baraka's play (in which the white female kills the black male with whom she has been flirting) to expand his visions of black masculinity. Notably, Jones, like Baldwin, challenges the heteronormative identity politics of black male definitions of black masculinity.

Chapter Four also examines the works of Bill T. Jones, Robert Alexander, and Ishmael Reed, exploring how all three artists respond to Stowe's text in different media with varying rhetorical strategies and how these works also reflect the burgeoning Gay Rights movement and race tensions of the 1980s and 1990s. For example, both Alexander and Reed employ humor to expose what they believe to be the absurdity of Stowe's myopic view of blacks. I argue that Reed's synchronic neo-slave narrative *Flight to Canada* not only revises Stowe's text by giving black male slaves control of their own narratives, but does so through subversive humor and comic militancy that laughs at the

absurdity of white assumptions about black desire. Similarly, Alexander's biting but humorous agitprop play makes use of synchronicity, overlapping nineteenth-century realities and the present.

Alexander signifies on Stowe's text through George L. Aiken's 1858 stage adaptation of *Uncle Tom's Cabin*, which was the most popular of the many stage adaptations of Stowe's novel. Alexander subverts both Stowe's fiction and the minstrel tradition of the Uncle-Tom plays that it engendered. According to John Frick, the huge success of Aiken's Uncle Tom play spurred other stage adaptations not only in major America cities such as Chicago, Cincinnati, Philadelphia, San Francisco, and New York, but also in major European capitals such as London, Paris, and Berlin ("*Uncle Tom's Cabin* on the Antebellum Stage": *Uncle Tom's Cabin and American Culture)*. Aiken's however remained the most famous version rivaled only by the more racially offensive minstrel-like version by H.C. Conway.[15] In revising the Aiken version, Alexander also retains the sentiment of that version, but, as Aiken had done, retains the core of Stowe's novel. In Chapter Four, I demonstrate how Alexander rewrites Stowe's black characters, namely, Topsy, Eliza, George Harris, and, of course, Uncle Tom, contemporizing them so that Stowe's nineteenth-century characters express 1990s racial frustrations. Like Reed, Alexander follows in the tradition of African American drama that uses humor to address racial injustices and voice black anger. In fact, Alexander's play includes the character of Stowe, who stands accused of creating black stereotypes by her own black characters. As they, especially Uncle Tom, have had to suffer under the label of stereotypes, this signifying text allows Stowe's African American characters to rewrite themselves. However, even as all characters alter their narratives, in the end, Uncle Tom

decides to retain his final scene with Legree. Alexander thus challenges our notions of black heroism. In my reading, he implies that Uncle Tom's martyrdom is, in fact, meaningful because resistance need not always involve taking up arms.

Bill T. Jones too re-assesses Uncle Tom and concludes that perhaps Uncle Tom is indeed a redemptive figure. Jones' vision of masculinity reflects Martin Summers' argument that the gender identification of black men need not always be reduced to an act of resistance (13). His narrative dance, more than the works of the other artists in my study, challenges and questions the black crisis of masculinity, homophobia, and Uncle Tommism. He enacts black masculinity as a state of being, of identity formation built upon race, class, and gender, which can be fluid and not necessarily static. His queer politics resists an always-already assumed hyper-masculine black male identity, includes a black gay masculinity that straddles the feminine and the masculine. This politics of inclusion comes through in the vulnerable nakedness of Jones's troop and the invited community members in the dance finale: *The Promised Land*.

In using dance to re-envision Stowe's text and the cultural and historical meaning of that text for African Americans and, more specifically, for African American men, Jones is able to create a complex engagement with Stowe's novel in relation to black masculinity. Indeed, my analysis of Jones's *Last Supper at Uncle Tom's Cabin: The Promised Land* relies on recent multidisciplinary critical approaches to theorizing dance, where the body in motion presents a narrative that expresses cultural experience. Hence, I read *Last Supper* as a presentation of the body as a "site of meaning making."[16] I am in agreement with Maurice O. Wallace's point that we often do not engage with dance

academically; the strength of dance is that it narrates and signifies much more than we see on the surface. Wallace states:

> It is like speech and writing, a valuable sign of system nevertheless, a kinetic metalanguage impervious to the signifying limitations of words. Critically regarded, dance is the visible dramatization of the invisible pursuit of "being what I am". . . . Because dance communicates without words, it is capable of transcending them, of telling us something more about the black masculine that the meagerness of words cannot. (149)

Dance facilitates gender performativity; Jones deconstructs definitions of gender by performing femininity and masculinity, and thus challenges our binary construction of gender and assumptions about black masculinity as monolithic. *Last Supper* can therefore be read as text and a field of meaning that critiques and historicizes Stowe's *Uncle Tom's Cabin*. It employs Stowe's historical text as a vehicle for discussing and investigating both Stowe's cultural historical meaning, past and present, of the phrase Uncle Tom and its impact on black men, in order to understand the history of violence and religious yearnings of African Americans.

This study reads all the signifying revisions of *Uncle Tom's Cabin* as a collective continuation of black male insistence on writing the self into the larger American narrative; together they say *I am a man*. This struggle over the meaning of masculinity has repeatedly raised two difficult issues that recur in the chapters that follow: power over women and the use of violence. That is, the ideology of masculine possession often included a sense of ownership of black women that complicates black male relationships with black women, who are often the catalyst for the black male assertion of their manhood. For example, in Delany's *Blake*, the black male hero's transformation from an obedient slave into a revolutionary is catalyzed by the sale of his wife. In Wright's "Long Black Song," the black male protagonist's discovery of his wife's infidelity with a white

man culminates in a violent act of murder. For Bill T. Jones, his uncle's attempt to assert his manhood is catalyzed by his desire to rescue his sister (Jones's mother) from the brutality of a white overseer. Indeed, these black male artists grab Legree's whip (the embodiment and representation of white male oppression) as it were, and lash out to defend their manhood.

By beginning my exploration of the black male signifying revisions of Uncle Tom I foreground the Delany-Douglass debate, which can be said to establish the relationship of Stowe, Uncle Tom, and African American men. I illustrate how, on the one hand, black male intellectuals such as Delany, Wright, and Baraka insist that, if Tom dies at the hands of his white master, he must go down fighting. But not all the signifying revisionists imagine constructing black masculinity merely as an act of violent resistance; Douglass and Chesnutt create a vision of black masculinity that embraces a fraternal masculine bond between black and white men. Reed, creates multiple visions of black male self-reliance to re-write (his)story. In the final analysis, even as Jones and Alexander question Uncle Tom's masculinity, they also reconsider definitions of black manhood.

Whether they interpret Uncle Tom as a race traitor, humiliating victim, or anti-hero, these African American male revisionists agree that Stowe's protagonist needs to be redefined through the spectrum of the black male experiences. They therefore create visions of black heroism, not as Stowe presents it, and by extension how American culture imagines it, but as they want to be perceived. They reconstruct Uncle Tom, make a *real* man of him, kill him and then resurrect him, and finally follow him to his utopian promised land of salvation for all.

Notes

[1] See Gates, Henry Louis Jr. *Figures in Black: Words Signs, and the "Racial" Self.* New York: Oxford UP, 1987. Print.

[2] According to Donald Bogle, there are five archetypes that became fixed as the cinematic representations of blacks, namely, the Tom, the Coon, the Mulatto, the Mammy, and the Buck. Bogle defines these stereotypes and provides examples from American films explaining the historical representations of blacks—initially by white actors in blackface, and then by black actors playing often offensive stereotypes in films. Most significantly, he explores the difficult and very complex relationship black actors and actresses have had to these narrow and insulting views of blacks. He delineates individual black actors and actresses attempts at self-determination and to take charge/control of the sort of roles they was available for them to play as they struggled within often racist Hollywood studios. See Donald Bogle's *Toms, Coons, Mulattoes, Mammies, and Bucks: An Interpretative History of Blacks in American Film*.

[3] These questions in no way imply that black artistic challenges to *Uncle Tom's Cabin* are somehow ineffective tools for social change. Neither do they assert that different generations of black intellectuals have responded with a resounding unanimous condemnation of Stowe's representation of blackness. On the contrary, even in the nineteenth century, black intellectuals and artists were in disagreement over Stowe's role in the liberation of blacks and over her presentation of black realities.

[4] Launching the New Negro Movement in 1925, Alain Locke calls out Harriet Beecher Stowe's iconic black archetypes to assert that "Uncle Tom and Sambo have passed on" and proclaim a new dawn for African American literary production (5), clearly exemplifying the discursive chain between African American and Anglo American writers. African American texts belong in the body of American literature—one influences the other.

[5] See Harold Bloom, *The Anxiety of Influence: A Theory of Poetry*. New York, NY: Oxford UP. 1973.

[6] In his 1956 seminal sociological text J.C. Furnas analyzes the origins of myths and misconceptions surrounding African Americans and traces its origins in part to Stowe's *Uncle Tom's Cabin.* Furnas's work asks the questions "How well did Mrs. Stowe know her subject matter? What was it really like to be an antebellum slave? How did *Uncle Tom* come to be the permanent blueprint of white America's attitudes toward Negroes" (5). Furnas answers these questions and concludes that "Mrs. Stowe's book had more to do than any other single factor influenced misguided notions of blacks than any other source in America" (10).

[7] To illustrate my point, I offer the experiences of two African American men: the author Ralph Ellison and U.S. Supreme Court Justice Clarence Thomas. Much has been made of Ellison's speech at Grinnell College in the late 60s. Allegedly, an audience member yelled out to Ellison, calling him an "Uncle Tom," and Ellison, so shaken up, so psychologically disturbed by the accusation, never truly regained his composure with his audience and is said to have been haunted by the epithet for most of his career. Similarly, from Justice Thomas' controversial confirmation hearings to his renunciation of affirmative action, his relationship with the African American community has been uneasy. He has struggled to shake off the "Uncle Tom" label foisted on him by many African Americans, who believe him to epitomize the buffoon siding with the white establishment against his own people. In his 2008 memoir, *My Grandfather's Son*, Thomas attempts to reconcile himself with the community that has clearly ostracized him as a brother outsider. The memoir's title, with its connection to black masculinity, and the memoir's message of self-reliance and representation of black heroism ironically evokes Uncle Tom and clearly refutes the "Uncle Tom" label.

[8] In *Playing in the Dark*, Morrison argues that race has become various metaphors/ways of "disguising forces, events, classes and expressions of social decay and economic division far more threatening to the body politic than biological 'race' ever was" (63).

[9] Zora Neal Hurston's *Their Eyes are Watching God* perhaps best exemplifies the non-literal presence of whites in black lives. Although the white community always remains in the margins of Janie's narrative, the black community nonetheless often defines itself in relation to whiteness. When white characters are present, they not only act as judge and jury to vindicate Janie, because legally they can but also make their

judgments with the assumption that they know the raison d'être behind black actions and understand the workings of the black psyche.

[10] This notion was first introduced to me by Professor Stephen Railton and is expanded upon in his essay "White Readers and Black Slaves," in *Approaches to Teaching Stowe's Uncle Tom's* Cabin (New York: Modern Language Association of America, 2000): 104-110. Both Morrison's and Railton's theories facilitate a clearer understanding of the deep intertextual and psychological relationship between black and white writers in America.

[11] Eric Foner explains the result of the failure of African Americans to secure their own lands as the domination of the system of sharecropping. See Foner *Forever Free* pages 164-5, 202-3.

[12] . The discovery of *Uncle Tom's Cabin* is soon followed by another catalytic moment. In listening to a black boy give a school speech about the black historical heroic figure Toussaint L'Ouverture, the narrator further defines the black self, not only in relation to the white other or the black mother but also in relation to masculinity. Frederick Douglass and Alexandre Dumas thus replace King David and Robert the Bruce in his pantheon of rhetorical and heroic models. However, as a man, the narrator labors under the burden of life behind the veil in American society and its artificial imposition of race, deciding to pass and live as a white man. This decision is solidified by witnessing a horrific lynching in the South. Having arrived at racial and masculine consciousness via *Uncle Tom's Cabin*, in the end he rejects black masculinity all together.

[13] According to Stephen Railton, "[A]ltogether between 1903 and 1927, at least nine films titled *Uncle Tom's Cabin* were made in the United States, making it the most-filmed story of the silent era, and probably still the most frequently filmed American novel." He further explains that during the 1930s and 1940s Topsy, Eva, Tom, and Simon Legree were a staple of American cinema. (Railton, *Uncle Tom and American Culture).* As Donald Bogel explains, the "good negro" characters began with the Tom character who was always "chased, harassed, hounded, flogged, enslaved, and insulted, they keep the faith, n'er turn again their white massas, and remain hearty, submissive, stoic, generous, selfless, and oh-so-very kind" (5-6).

[14] Examples are Herbert Stokes plays "The Uncle Toms" (1968) and "The Man Who Trusted the Devil Twice" (1969).

[15] This adaptation as John Frick notes, not only celebrates plantation life removing Stowe's abolitionist message, but also includes an ending where both Tom and Eva live.

[16] Susan Leigh Foster, *Corporealities: Dancing Knowledge, Culture and Power*. London: Routledge, 1996.

Ideal Heroism and Black Masculinity: Reading the Revisionary Interplay Between *Uncle Tom's Cabin, The Heroic Slave, and Blake*

> Now I simply wish to say, that we have always fallen into great errors in efforts of this kind, going to others than the intelligent and experienced among ourselves; and all in all due respect and deference to Mrs. Stowe, I beg leave to say, that she knows nothing about us…neither does any white person—and, consequently, can contrive no successful scheme for our elevation; it must be done by ourselves (Martin Delany in Robert S. Levine's *Martin R. Delany: A Documentary Reader* 224).

> Why, then, should any man object to the efforts of Mrs. Stowe, or any one else, who is moved to do anything on our behalf. The assertion that Mrs. Stowe "knows nothing about us" shows Bro. DELANY knows nothing of Mrs. Stowe; for he certainly would not violate his moral, or common sense if he did. When Bro. DELANY will submit any plan for benefitting the colored people, or will candidly criticise any plan already submitted, he will be heard with pleasure. But we expect no plan from him (Frederick Douglass in Robert S. Levine's *Martin R. Delany: A Documentary Reader* 225)

Discussing the merits, or lack thereof, of Harriet Beecher Stowe's magnum opus, *Uncle Tom's Cabin*, nineteenth-century African American abolitionist and writer Martin R. Delany asserted to his fellow abolitionist and erstwhile colleague Frederick Douglass that whites simply "know nothing about us" (Levine *Delany: A Reader* 224). Ultimately, Delany wanted to make the point that the assiduous work of elevating freed blacks and of emancipating slaves should be left to the black intellectual elite who "know" and understand the sufferings of their people, and should not be assigned to Anglo Americans such as "Mrs. Stowe," even when well-intentioned. Judging from this public conversation, it is clear that the great Mrs. Stowe, and her novel, provided Douglass and Delany a vehicle through which to debate their increasingly divergent abolitionist politics and views on black emancipation, as well as the consequent place of black people in nineteenth-century American society. Prior to this rather public disagreement between the two African American leaders, both men had collaborated as editors on Douglass's

abolitionist newspaper, *The North Star*, which began in 1847; their political differences, however, caused a split that led to Delany stepping down, or being dropped, as co-editor of the newspaper by June 1848.

By the publication of *Uncle Tom's Cabin* in 1852, both Delany and Douglass were firmly entrenched on opposite ends of the abolitionist debates: Douglass espousing assimilationist rhetoric, and Delany adopting a decidedly black nationalist rhetorical stance. While Delany's democratic ideals imagined a black nation outside white control, Douglass insisted upon a politics of accommodation that imagined an optimistic future for blacks through cooperative nation building between blacks and whites. Delany's growing radicalism and emigrationist politics undoubtedly also alienated him from the mainstream of the abolitionist movement, and in parallel, garnered Douglass more support as the de facto representative of the African American community. Both men continued their debate on different platforms of the abolitionist circuit and within their writings. Ultimately, their different reactions to Stowe and *Uncle Tom's Cabin* could be argued to be yet another avenue through which to air ideological and personal grievances. The battle between the two black leaders would eventually be played out through their own literary responses to one another, and of course, to Stowe. More significantly, their respective fictions, *The Heroic Slave*, published in 1852, and *Blake: or the Huts of America*, published in 1859, would allow Douglass and Delany a creative medium through which to define what they perceived to be ideal masculinity and heroism. Of course, revising Stowe's novel was not their only goal. Because the popularity of *Uncle Tom's Cabin* threatened not only to monopolize, but also to steer the direction of the

slavery question, the field of literature necessarily became a site of political grandstanding.

Irrespective of Delany's apparent radicalism, it is not surprising that Douglass fared better than his fellow black abolitionist within the abolitionist movement. Also bolstering his credibility as an abolitionist were his dramatic life experiences as a slave from boyhood who had successfully written the narrative of his slave life and eventual escape to freedom. His well-earned popularity as a speaker on the abolitionist lecture circuit, in turn, had provided him access to eminent leading white abolitionists such as William Lloyd Garrison. In addition, his experiences within the abolition circuit clearly provided Douglass with a realistic understanding of race politics. He knew, instinctively, that, while he may not have fully endorsed Stowe's conservative rhetoric of Christian passivity championed by Uncle Tom in *Uncle Tom's Cabin*, he should, nonetheless, be politic in his public responses to the text and its author by applauding Stowe and her text's abolitionist efforts on behalf of blacks. This was an astute decision as this public support of the white female abolitionist would ensure Douglass maintained support from other white abolitionists, whose paternalistic oversight and firm control of the movement meant black abolitionists depended on their support. As Levine explains, Douglass's optimism would end in disappointment; Mrs. Stowe did not provide the financial support she had promised for establishing an industrial college for African Americans (Levine *The Politics* 89). [1] I would add that clearly Douglass had to maintain his decorum precisely because of an acute self-awareness of his masculine public persona; he remained a gentleman, and could thus berate Delany for his ungentlemanly behavior towards Mrs. Stowe.

Like other documented African American male slaves who had escaped slavery,[2] Douglass grappled with his society's concept of manhood during his transition from ex-slave to abolitionist and black leader. Even as a free black man, he was still denied full access to the privileges of patriarchy. Indeed, the revisions of his autobiography reflect the evolution of his masculine identity and its relation to Anglo definitions of manhood.[3] As Eric Sundquist points out, just as Douglass's revisions of his autobiography emphasized fraternal bonds and a burgeoning political awareness, so too does his fiction reflect his developing understanding of race and gender, specifically black male identity.[4] I want to take Sundquist's insight a step further and read *The Heroic Slave* as Douglass's unabashed example of black male self-determination; we might even read Douglass's protagonist Madison Washington as a vehicle for the author's views on black masculinity and heroism. We could also conclude that this presentation was prompted by his debates with Delany over Stowe and *Uncle Tom's Cabin*. No matter the exact catalyst, what is certain is that, by focusing his revisionary energies on Uncle Tom, Douglass attempts two things: to broaden the scope of black heroism, and to present potential political gains that can be achieved from a white and black coalition. Neither Madison Washington nor his author is an Uncle Tom; both risk death to attain freedom rather than waiting to be rescued by some generous white master, or even through the influential words of some benevolent white author.

As a free man, Douglass embraced Anglo definitions of masculinity, and fashioned his own masculine identity within nineteenth-centuries constructs of manhood that included the right to liberty and self-reliance. As scholars have noted, along with his biographical narratives, Douglass's novella, *The Heroic Slave* reveals his preoccupation

with black male identity. To grasp the raison d'être behind what I term his signifying revision, we need first to understand Douglass's lifelong obsession with proving his manhood. This need is perhaps best captured by his well-wrought and now famous chiasmus: "you have seen how a man was made a slave; you shall see how a slave was made a man" (Douglass, *The Narrative*, 75). In what is certainly a pivotal moment in the life of the young Frederick Douglass, Douglass refuses to stand down when faced with the looming presence of the angry white overseer, Covey. The "how" of Douglass's transition from slave to man is by means of the swift kick Douglass deals the white male slaver. For Douglass, the kick propels him into manhood, even though he still remains a slave in the immediate aftermath of the physical confrontation. Instead, he attains a psychological freedom that emboldens his journey towards literal freedom. But my interest in this chapter lies less with Douglass's narrative and more with understanding his only work of fiction as an expression of the evolution of the slave becoming a man. That is, I read his striking out against white male oppression, as represented by Covey, not simply as a microcosm of the black male struggle for manhood, but also as preamble to writing his autobiography, through which he could define not just the black self, but more significantly, the black male self. Unlike the physical conflict with the tyrannical overseer, the battle with Stowe was more a psychological one that involved a metaphorical snatching of the pen from the white female author in order to re-write, and represent, a black hero more in line with his own visions of ideal masculinity. Paradoxically, even as he and Delany grew politically further apart, the one thing that they could agree on was black male resistance to white male oppression.

Although free-born, Delany was passionate and committed to the elevation of blacks and the emancipation of enslaved blacks. Like Douglass, Delany was a familiar figure within the abolitionist movement, speaking regularly at anti-slavery meetings. As well, his lived experience informed his politics; having been accepted into Harvard Medical School, Delany was dismissed because his white classmates protested the admission of a colored man. Such personal experiences of racism, and the paternalistic attitude of white abolitionists towards their black counterparts, no doubt affected Delany, and quite possibly generated his separatist race politics. If whites insisted on an American society that excluded blacks, and appeared incapable of exercising true racial equality, then, for Delany, the logical rejoinder would be to create a black nation independent from white America, where African American men could play their rightful roles as community leaders and nation builders. He would spend much of his life pursuing this emigrationist goal and striving to attain full access to the privileges of patriarchy.[5]

Although Delany's black nationalism was decidedly masculine, he defined black masculinity as outside of Anglo masculinity, even as it retained some of its principles. That is, he argued that black men could only truly come into their own outside of the paternalistic overreach of white men, who he believed, would never truly accept black men as equals. As Levine so carefully delineates, Delany's essay *Condition, Elevation, Emigration, and Destiny of the Colored People of the United States*, published in 1852, revealed Delany's growing dissolution with the abolitionist movement, the lack of full citizenship for blacks in America, and with the lack of opportunities for black men in the freed states who were relegated to the serving classes and barely had more rights than the

bondman (Levine, *Politics*, 66). The essay was also a response to the passing of the Fugitive Slave Act.

Coincidently, Delany, like Stowe, was incensed by the passing of the Fugitive Slave Act in 1850. This law enraged Delany's sense of manhood because of its indirect affront to the very principles of masculinity—the right to liberty and the right of a man to protect his family and his property. As Levine expounds:

> Twelve days after the passage of the Fugitive slave Law, Delany declared that he would use violence to keep his wife and children from being taken into slavery. He justified his action in terms of the nation's political ideals: 'whatever ideas of liberty I may have, have been received from reading the lives of your revolutionary fathers. I have therein learned that a man has the right to defend his castle with his life, even unto the taking of life.' (Levine, *Politics* 61)

By invoking the revolutionary Republican ideals of manhood, Delany equates black assertion of independence and demand for freedom to that of the founding fathers that fought for self-governance and freedom from English rule. He thus preempts any white equation of violence to brutality simply because it is a black man asserting his rights. Douglass will also invoke this same American ideal through his protagonist Madison Washington. Indeed our introduction to Madison Washington finds him in the woods deciding that he could no longer accept his bondage:

> Tom escaped; so can I. The North Star will not be less kind to me than to him. I will follow it. I will at least make the trial. I have nothing to lose. If I am shot, I shall only lose a life which is a burden and a curse. If I get clear, (as something tells me I shall,) liberty, the inalienable birth-right of every man, precious, priceless, will be mine. My resolution is fixed. *I shall be free*. (*Heroic Slave* 302)

Douglass not only has Washington speak expressively and masterfully about freedom, he does so by borrowing the words of the founding fathers, and the American Declaration of Independence no less. Here, Douglass rips off the mask of the shrewd politician, and

speaks much more candidly his opinions on race, gender, and abolition than he does in his debate with Delany.

A man obviously unafraid to speak his mind, Delany's ire is obvious in the tone of his letter with Douglass as they discussed Stowe's role within the abolitionist movement. Clearly, Delany's anger, which as Robert Levine notes, seems "disproportionate to what set it off, signaled his [Delany's] increasing awareness of the cultural authority granted to Stowe's *Uncle Tom's Cabin* at the expense of texts written by blacks" (69). While I agree with Levine's conclusion that Delany's anger is racially motivated, I think that selfsame anger is also fueled by gender. In reading the epigraph to this chapter, I contend that implicit in Delany's rejection of Stowe as the heroine of the black cause, is a gender politics that reflects a crisis of masculinity—a consequence of existing under the burden of Anglo American perceptions of black men as lacking self-reliant masculinity. What I am suggesting is that Delany feared that Mrs. Stowe's political influence and social position as the foremost authority on slavery would not only overshadow meaningful texts by African Americans, but might also undermine the leadership roles and social recognition that black men had fought long and hard to achieve. Thus, I read Douglass's novella *The Heroic Slave* and Delany's radical novel *Blake: or the Huts of America* in relation to their public debate, and argue that concealed within Delany's overt race-based resistance to black reliance on whites is a gender-based criticism that also rejects the feminine. That is, couched within Delany's black nationalist rhetoric is a masculine agenda spurred by the fear that an over-dependence on whites would deny black men their "rightful" roles as leaders of their communities. Delany clearly found objectionable the very notion of Harriet Beecher Stowe—an Anglo

woman—as the champion of the black cause. I argue that he resented the bestowal of such massive cultural authority upon an Anglo woman rather than upon educated, freed black men. In order to put the good woman in her place, as it were, and to immediately begin the necessary task of dismantling her characterization of blacks, and the archetypes it spawned, Delany and Douglass created their own versions of a heroic slave.

In the end, neither Delany nor Douglass would win in the battle over Stowe and *Uncle Tom's Cabin*. As Robert Levine perceptively observes, "for Douglass, who endorsed Stowe's moral reformism, Delany's criticism of Stowe and his development of an emigrationist politics were shortsighted and contradictory; for Delany, Douglass's embrace of a novel (and a nation) that ultimately wanted to rid itself of blacks revealed the fatal consequences of a politics of accommodation" (60). Their deliberations over *Uncle Tom's Cabin* only served to widen the already growing political chasm between the two men. This was clearly more than a disagreement about Stowe, or even a simple matter of a difference in interpretation of a literary work, that was at stake. Levine explains the reasons behind the debate thus:

> The year 1852 saw the publication of Delany's *Condition* and Stowe's *Uncle Tom's Cabin.* Douglass ignored *Condition* and over the next several years championed *Uncle Tom's Cabin* in the pages of *Frederick Douglass's Paper.* Angered by the fact that he would choose to advocate an antislavery novel by a white woman over his own book, Delany wrote a series of letters to Douglass that were highly critical of Stowe. Douglass printed the letters in in his newspaper and responded to them with editorial commentary. (Levine *Delany Reader 224*)

I would add that potential political gains would also explain Douglass's decision to publish his correspondence with Delany. This very public debate over *Uncle Tom's Cabin* marked a turning point in the relationship between the two black leaders, resulting in "tit-for-tat" and political one-upmanship. Stowe and her novel thus became a source of their political anxieties and their crisis of masculinity.

Certainly Douglass and Delany found problematic Stowe's muting of her heroes' masculinity to present a feminized black male hero more in line with the familiar mammy figure than a masculine self-reliant hero. I contend that Stowe's own romantic racialist notions of the African as child-like and "not naturally daring and enterprising, but home-loving and affectionate" (Stowe 104) predictably unsettled both Douglass and Delany's notion of masculinity. I am suggesting that they internalize the emasculated Uncle Tom, and therefore revise him within their own fiction with protagonists that in effect reflect their visions of their masculine selves.

Douglass and Delany were not unique in their response to Uncle Tom. With the cultural authority bestowed on Stowe's novel, not to mention her insistence on the verisimilitude of her narrative, Uncle Tom would come to define black masculinity for nineteenth-century America, and beyond. The specter and consequent historical baggage of Uncle Tom weighed heavy on African American men because his Christian stoicism made them appear submissive and weak, and in response, they challenged both the author and her fictional hero. For example, "as early as 1852, the year in which *Uncle Tom's Cabin* appeared, the Reverend J. B. Smith, a black minister, protested against Uncle Tom's conception of Christian virtue because it made him submit to tyranny" (Moses 51). As Richard Yarbrough observes, "*Uncle Tom's Cabin* was an abiding, at times daunting, paradigmatic influence for most Afro-America fiction writers, casting its shadow over their diverse attempts to define realistically the black capacity for heroic action while not alienating the white audience that they felt they absolutely had to hold in order to bring about political change" (72). Douglass and Delany would be the first to attempt to redress Stowe's narrow view of black heroic capabilities.

First, I would like to contextualize this historical debate by discovering how Stowe, a woman who began life as a writer of tracts on religion and domesticity, came to write a best seller that would propel her into national and international fame, not to mention the fact that her novel would became deeply embedded in American discourses of race and gender. Harriet Beecher grew up surrounded by the religious ideology of her Calvinist preacher father, Lyman Beecher, and by the principles of the cult of womanhood advocated by her older sister, Catherine Beecher. Both her sister's and her father's abolitionist and women-centered ideologies reflect the political climate of mid-nineteenth century America. Abolition was at the forefront of American politics and society; and, this moment also marked an increasing involvement of women within the movement and thus introduced a gendered nuance to the slavery/race debates. Naturally, as abolitionist women such as Helen Eliza Brenson[6] and, of course, Catherine Beecher and Isabella Beecher honed their skills in advocating for slaves, they began using experiences garnered within the anti-slavery movement to champion women's rights.[7] Abolitionist women took the next logical step and brought the two causes together, conflating their advocacy for slaves and women's rights and producing a matricentric focus on the slavery debate. They argued that the brutality of slavery lay not only in its blatant inhumanity but also in its refusal to uphold the sanctity of the family, of motherhood, and of children, whose wellbeing depends on familial protection. As Philip Fisher so aptly surmises:

> That slavery destroys the family is a political as well as a psychological fact, depriving a society of its only operating model for the control of the power of the strong over the weak, its only model of institutionalized and even spontaneous compassion. Certainly, the relation of a mother to a helpless infant, the key sentimental image of all, has this political meaning of the family in a concentrated form. (102-103)

Like contemporaries such as Angelina E. Grimke and Lydia Maria Child, Harriet Beecher Stowe believed that it was America's moral imperative to abolish slavery. She embraced the conflation of women's rights and advocacy for the emancipation of blacks. However, she was by no means radical in the same vein as Grimke, Stowe's politics were governed more by Christian ideals than by any deep-seated political ideology. Hence, even as she encouraged women to take on new socio-political responsibilities, she was adamant in her unwillingness to challenge or dismantle nineteenth-century gender hierarchy. Concomitantly, she also opposed the idea of women relinquishing their domestic roles in order to enter the public and masculine world of politics. Rather, Stowe perceived the feminine domestic realm as crucial to maintaining the nation's moral fiber. For her, it was within the domestic space that women held an advantage over men and were, therefore, from within the home, better able to influence civic discourse, employing effective feminine rhetoric that eschewed the cold masculine language of the marketplace.

Clearly, Stowe's sociopolitical ideology was informed by familial influences, and they would be further solidified by her marriage to Calvin Ellis Stowe, a seminary teacher and abolitionist. According to Joan D. Hedrick, Harriet Beecher Stowe initially remained on the sidelines, and was not publically involved in the abolitionists' struggles until the passing of the Fugitive Slave Law in 1850. This event, and the death of her sixth child in 1848 not only sparked Stowe's more fervent engagement with abolitionism, but also her desire to express these views by writing *Uncle Tom's Cabin* (Hedrick, *Stowe: A life*). As Hedrick surmises, "Stowe wrote *Uncle Tom's Cabin* to encourage citizens to disobey what she took to be an unchristian law and to engage white parents, many of

whom, she knew, had lost a child, in a deep question of what a slave parent feels" (Hedrick *Stowe's Life and Uncle Tom's Cabin*). Stowe also believed slavery epitomized America's spiral into barbarity and was convinced that by engaging in the national anti-slavery debates, women could introduce affective connections that would counter, or at least balance, the cold, masculine discourse that had governed the debates. Indeed, the notion of men and women's ability to "feel," or not, is an important message of *Uncle Tom's Cabin*:

> If the mothers of the free states had all *felt* [italics mine] as they should, in times past, the sons of the free states would not have been the holders, and proverbially, the hardest masters of slaves; the sons of the free states would not have connived at the extension of slavery, our national body; the sons of the free states would not, as they do, trade the souls and bodies of men as an equivalent to money, in their mercantile dealings. (*UTC* 442)

Stowe lays the responsibility of altering the hearts of men squarely at the feet of American women. Thus, the work of social reform would begin within the home because "all places where women are excluded tend downward to barbarism; but the moment she is introduced, there come in with her courtesy, cleanliness, sobriety, and order" (Stowe, *Chimney-corner* 32). Accordingly, Stowe wrote a novel with the objective of effecting socio-political change and affecting her readers emotionally that they might be moved both to recognize the moral disease that was slavery and to see the humanity of blacks. Ultimately, though, she believed that slavery corrupted the Christian souls of all Americans, North and South, insisting that all were culpable: "Do you say that the people of the free states have nothing to do with it, and can do nothing? Would to God this were true! But it is not true. The people of the free states have defended, encouraged, and participated; and are more guilty for it, before God, than the South, in that they have *not* the apology of education or custom" (*UTC* 441). Just as American women could abdicate

neither their domestic responsibilities, nor their role as the emotional backbone of the nation to men, neither should the North dare to delegate all responsibility of galvanizing the national battle against slavery to its Southern compatriots. The urgency in her demand for the North to take the lead with the abolitionist cause, and the emotional tenor of Stowe's plea, clearly appealed to many readers on both sides of the Atlantic.

The national acclaim of *Uncle Tom's Cabin* that thrust Stowe into the on-going national debates concerning race, unfortunately also thrust her, to her own peril, as it were onto the American stage. Her novel would come to be appropriated for stage adaptations of *Uncle Tom's Cabin* and many of the minstrel Uncle Tom shows were not only deeply offensive in their distortion of African Americans, but were sometimes pro-slavery in their sentiment. As Eric Lott explains, there were many "Tom plays" in late nineteenth and turn of the twentieth-century America; the two most popular were written by H.J Conway and George L. Aiken.[8] This easy appropriation of Stowe's novel I believe was possibly largely because of her inability to move beyond Anglo perceptions of Africans. As Hedrick so aptly states, "the strength of her analysis came out of her identification as a woman with the lowly and the oppressed…the limits of her novel were a function of class and race ..." (Hedrick). This myopic view is expressed in her romantic racist depiction of her black characters, and, as so many African American men would argue, is particularly evident in her portrayal of her black male hero, Uncle Tom.

Indeed, Uncle Tom's popularity is reflected in the fact that he spawned a plethora of "Uncle Tomitudes"[9] that included figurines, decorative china plates, games, and cookie tins, to name a few. Unfortunately, many of these items of Uncle Tom merchandise did not actually reflect Stowe's characterization of her hero, but rather what

became the more popular grey-haired avuncular version popularized by the minstrel stage adaptations.

The white-haired-old-man image has become so much more the cultural perception of Uncle Tom that the "real" Uncle Tom—as described in Stowe's novel—has been virtually erased from our cultural imagination. It seems to me that this transformation of the strapping black male slave into a stooping old man reflects a certain refusal on the part of whites to acknowledge black male virility. The psychological need to reduce Tom to a genial old man, especially when paired with Eva, the quintessential angelic white-girl child, also stems, I postulate, from a concerted effort not to disturb the delicate balancing act of pairing a brawny, adult, black male with a symbolic paragon of white female purity. What is certain is that the image of a stooping black man was far less threatening a figure for Stowe's white audience, especially for white men. Viewing it in this light, we can conclude that the vision of "old" Uncle Tom fulfilled, for both slave-owning and non-slave owning whites, a fantasy of a doting, nurturing, black male solely committed to white well-being. The erasure of the image of a virile masculine black male thus calms white anxieties about black masculinity, and needless to say, further exacerbated the crisis of masculinity already felt by African American men because of Stowe's feminization of her hero. In light of these apparent psychological burdens, we can understand why Douglass and Delany attempt to re-write Stowe's novel and its titular hero, Uncle Tom. Indeed, for men whose race put them outside of the contemporary writer's definitions of masculinity, it was imperative that they challenge her vision of black heroism and her characterization of black masculinity, and replace it with, what

they believed, reflected acceptable masculinity as defined by the gender norms of their society.

While many scholars have examined the intertextual relationship between Douglass's *Heroic Slave*, Stowe' *Uncle Tom's Cabin*, and Delany's *Blake,* Delany's only work of fiction nonetheless remains at the margins of the American literary canon. As the primary aim of the novel is to present its unabashed and propagandist revolutionary message, *Blake* often lapses into narrative incongruity; the plot of the novel clearly takes back stage to the masculine political rhetoric of black nationalism. Like Delany's novel, this prolific political writer and thinker has himself been virtually erased from American history. When he is discussed, it is often in relation to Douglass's role as the pre-eminent black leader of the nineteenth century. Douglass's contribution to the abolitionist movement is often exaggerated at Delany's expense.[10]

Indeed, much has been written concerning the triangular relationship of Stowe, Delany, and Douglass by scholars such as Richard Yarborough and Robert S. Levine. This chapter thus enters these on-going deliberations about two novels that are now generally accepted as Douglass and Delany's literary responses to the great "Mrs. Stowe's" literary Helen of Troy—that is, the book that launched a thousand debates. I should note that my use of intertextuality references the tradition of African American literary and artistic tradition of "repetition with a difference." More specifically, my concept of intertextuality borrows from Aldon Nielsen's adaptation of the African American tradition of signifying to understand the intertextual relationship between African American literature and the larger field of American

literature—what Nielsen refers to as "repetition, with signal difference." That is, I read Douglass and Delany's African American texts as in conversation with Stowe's text; their novels repeat aspects of Stowe's novel with the aim of signaling a difference in their characterization of the self-reliant masculinity of their respective black male protagonists, Madison Washington and Blake. Like Nielsen, I believe if we are to truly appreciate African American literary works, we should contextualize them within the body of American literature.

My interpretation of the intertextual relationship between Douglass and Delany's texts and Stowe's *Uncle Tom's Cabin* addresses race and gender, in order to examine the historical relationship between black male artists and a white female author and her text, and thus reveal black male textual challenges to the thematic and ideological preoccupations of her text. My intertextual readings of *Uncle Tom's Cabin*, *Blake*, and *Heroic Slave* also find the relationship between the two African American texts and the Anglo American text not just important for our interpretation of the three novels, but, also as integral to our understanding of early nineteenth-century American discourses of race and masculinity. Indeed, as Levine writes, "Some of the key debates of early to mid-1850s on race and nation were spawned by the African American response to *Uncle Tom's Cabin*" (*Representative Identity* 60). Again, I agree with Levine, but with the proviso that we view these mid-nineteenth-century discourses of race as also including discourses of gender that are clearly expressed in the Douglass/Delany Stowe debates, as many feminist scholars have shown.

By focusing on Uncle Tom and African American male signifying revisions, I do not deny the African American female artistic responses that Stowe's novel has also

engendered. While Stowe could relocate authority within the domestic realm to assert that "real" power resides with the Anglo female, because of race, black women could not employ such a strategy as overtly. Black female responses to Stowe also examine black masculinity, but do so while maintaining their focus on narrating black female realities. That is, their interest in Stowe's narrative primarily lies with the black female characters in the margins of *Uncle Tom's Cabin.* My work also considers other scholarly debates on *Uncle Tom's Cabin*, particularly feminist and race-centered readings of the text, not to disprove or argue against them, but to enlist them in my comparative reading of *Uncle Tom's Cabin*, *The Heroic Slave*, and *Blake*.

By performing a feminist-focused literary analysis, I acknowledge feminist scholarship as the springboard and catalyst for my developing interest in the field of masculinity studies. Just as challenges to early feminist criticism gave rise to thinking about how race is necessarily integral to feminist literary theory, so, too, has feminist cultural studies spawned masculinity studies. More significantly, feminist scholars such as Nina Baym and Jane Tompkins [11] can be credited with revising the American literary canon by challenging the early male-centered American canon that clearly ignored the contributions of women writers. In F.O. Matthiessen's canon building *American Renaissance*, Harriet Beecher Stowe was clearly absent and thus denied a place in the literary canon of mid-nineteenth century American literature. Like other nineteenth-century female writers, Stowe was a casualty of this narrow view of American literature. Feminist scholars not only brought her into the American canon, but also challenged the early traditional interpretations of *Uncle Tom's Cabin*, demanding that readers take seriously Stowe's womanist focus. By reassessing the nineteenth-century discourse on

domesticity and sentimentalism, feminist scholars reclaimed the sentimental genre and the "damned mob of scribbling women."[12] Feminists argue that nineteenth-century female authors employed sentimentalism as a tool by which to critique and challenge the socio-political realities for women of their time. These scholars also sought to redress the disparity between the large number of nineteenth-century male-authored novels lauded as iconic American classics and the paltry few authored by women. Hence, the works of nineteenth-century female authors such as Harriet Beecher Stowe, often lambasted by early American scholars as lacking depth, became the focus of early feminist "corrective readings."

Although feminist revisionist readings of *Uncle Tom's Cabin* do not necessarily ignore the novel's central theme of race, they have tended to mute the issue or make it secondary. This is not to imply that feminist scholars were blind to the troubling issues of race in Stowe's novel. Even as they re-evaluated *Uncle Tom's Cabin* through the lens of women's roles, feminist scholars such as Jane Tompkins often wondered about the racial implications of that particular focus. While the works of Ann Douglass, Jane Tompkins, Elizabeth Ammons, Gillian Brown, and Jean Fagan Yellin rightly argue that *Uncle Tom's Cabin* performs matrifocal cultural work for its nineteenth-century audience, they largely regard women's issues as more important than the issues of race. My aim is neither to downplay feminist criticism and its impact in revitalizing scholarly interest in *Uncle Tom's Cabin*, nor to dismiss their reading against the grain to embrace sentimentalism—the dimension of aspect of Stowe's novel that caused many earlier scholars to dismiss it. Rather, I draw on these insightful analyses of women's issues to help us understand telling intersections of race and gender. Just as these analyses shed light on Stowe's

feminist strategies, they also facilitate our understanding of her rhetorical strategies regarding race and masculinity. Because these feminist analyses do touch on racial aspects of *Uncle Tom's Cabin*, they aid further exploration of race and black masculinity.

In the forefront of feminist criticism regarding *Uncle Tom's Cabin* is Jane Tompkins's 1985 seminal work *Sensational Designs*, which describes Stowe's novel as

> [t]he *summa theologica* of nineteenth-century America's religion of domesticity, as brilliant redaction of the culture's favorite story about itself—the story of salvation through motherly love. Out of the ideological materials at their disposal, the sentimental novelists elaborated a myth that gave women the central position of power and authority in the culture; and of these efforts, *Uncle Tom's Cabin* is the most dazzling exemplar. (125)

Whereas earlier scholars perceived Stowe's use of the sentimental as a weakness in both theme and style, Tompkins considers it a reflection of strength. She explains Stowe's sentimental oeuvre as a "political enterprise, halfway between sermon and social theory that both codifies and attempts to mold values of its time" (126). Tompkins explains that Stowe also subverts the accepted binaries of private and public, feminine and masculine, strong and weak, in order to reveal the strength of Stowe's rhetorical strategy, which relocates power within the private domestic realm—governed by the Christian sanctity of motherhood—away from the public, patriarchal realm of politics and commerce. Even as *Uncle Tom's Cabin* operates within the conventions of the sentimental novel, such as making "continual and obvious appeals to the reader's emotions" (Tompkins 125), it was effective and powerful. Although Tompkins' feminist reading is incisive, if we accept her notion that Stowe shifts social authority and power to the feminine realm, we must also ask how this feminine range of influence pervades and affects both the novel's treatment of race and its titular protagonist.

What Tompkins reads as the sentimental power of Stowe's woman-centered novel, Douglass and Delany would view as emasculation of black men. Whether within the private or public realm, blacks lacked social authority and as such were rendered voiceless and powerless. And while Delany and Douglass could not always access the privileges of patriarchy because of their race, they nevertheless felt compelled to reject any theoretical relocation of power from the masculine to the feminine realm, to shift the feminist message of Stowe's novel in order to highlight the impact of slavery on black men. Stowe's womanist perspective, embraced by contemporary feminist scholars such as Tompkins, connects the novel's Christian ideas with its feminist ideology. Feminist scholars interpret *Uncle Tom's Cabin* as recounting "the culture's central religious myth—the story of the crucifixion—in terms of the nation's greatest political conflict—slavery—and its most cherished social beliefs—the sanctity of motherhood and the family" (Tompkins 134). However, black men such as Douglass and Delany seem to have a different perspective and therefore arrive at different conclusions about the ills of slavery. Their responses to Stowe's novel retell the story of slavery and its impact on the black family, whose central figure is the black father suffering from the destroyed sanctity of black fatherhood. Their fiction reveals the exclusion of black men from the nation's beliefs in the ideology of manhood and all in men's rights to social and political authority. Of course, we could counter Douglass and Delany, and rightly argue, as many scholars have, that when Stowe attempts to connect with her white audience by pulling at their heart strings, so that they might feel, and therefore, act "right," she effectively forces them to accept, or at least recognize, the humanity of her black characters, especially Uncle Tom. However, I would argue that a rhetorical strategy so heavily reliant upon

sentiment, is, as a matter of course, racist because it must declaw blackness and black masculinity in order to achieve its aim.

Another feminist scholar, Gillian Brown, not only acknowledges how race complicates any easy valorization of Stowe's text as an expression of the power of sentiment, but she also complicates Stowe's binaries of feminine domestic space and masculine market place. Brown explains that Stowe's womanist agenda advocates exchanging patriarchal market economy with matriarchal domestic economy. Through the prism of marketplace theory, Brown's perceptive feminist reading of *Uncle Tom's Cabin* reveals the complexity of Stowe's sentimental rhetoric and domestic anti-slavery agenda:

> Good motherhood and good housekeeping manifest the proper relation between caretakers and their charges, whether households, children, or slaves. Thus, Stowe's abolitionist protest against the trade in human beings, which separates and destroys families, opposes not so much the proposition that humans are things, but the fact that they are treated as transferable, as commodities. Stowe does not abrogate but domesticates property and possessions; she takes what she perceives as the affective life of property and tries to isolate it from the conditions of property. (41)

Here Brown explains Stowe's rhetorical strategy as sentimental humanization of slaves; she transforms a thing into man. As Brown asserts, sentimentalism simply shifts property relations; things—slaves—become possessions within matriarchal ownership that in Brown's analysis still retains the status of slaves as property, only this time as sentimental possessions.[13] This, I would argue, is an example of Stowe's romantic racism. Stowe's abolitionist enterprise itself ironically embodies a marketplace economy; Uncle Tom "became in his various forms, the most frequently sold slave in American history" (Hirsch 144). The commercialization of the character, Uncle Tom, and the industry it generated—the plethora of nineteenth-century Uncle Tom artifacts such as

dolls, plates, toys, games, songs, and plays—demonstrates that the economic value of the novel ultimately supersedes its abolitionist agenda or value. Feminist critiques however insist that this economic value still reflects the cultural significance of Stowe's abolitionist message; after all, even President Lincoln had heard of Harriet Beecher Stowe and her abolitionist novel.

Brown's reading of Stowe's gendered binaries of the masculine public marketplace and the feminine private domestic space reveals the racialized aspect of Stowe's sentimentalization, and thus feminization, of the market economy. As Brown explains "... race acts as a border that persists despite its rhetorical or actual erasure. Although some racial characteristics may be incorporated into sentimental possession, … color remains as the residue of Stowe's purification of possessive individualism" (60). Following Brown's analysis, we can re-assess the idealized, woman-centered utopia epitomized in the novel by Rachel Halliday's loving Quaker home. When scrutinized, not even the Quaker haven of domestic sobriety with its frugality can escape the sumptuous materialism of market place economy: the crisp white linen covering the beds and tables are a prime commodity of nineteenth-century plantation economy—cotton was the main product of slave labor. Even as Stowe strives to create the feminine ideal of domesticity, she cannot escape the masculine world of commerce; Halliday's domestic economy is therefore constituted within a masculine market economy. More importantly, lingering within the shadows of Halliday's quaint Quaker home is a black presence often minimized in feminist readings in order to highlight Stowe's empowering matrifocal agenda. I would therefore contend that, as we sift through feminist scholarship surrounding *Uncle Tom's Cabin*, race remains the un-filterable particle that rises to the

surface. Whether enhancing our understanding of race within *Uncle Tom's Cabin,* or pursuing a strictly feminist agenda that elides race, the tradition of feminist reading against the grain creates new crises of interpretation that necessitate re-examinations of the text, taking, more comprehensively into account the intersection of race and gender.

In order to address this crisis produced by feminist interpretations of Stowe's novel, African American literature scholar Eric Sundquist rightly insists that "any reformation of the canon of American literature that sets to give *Uncle Tom's Cabin* the central place it deserves cannot afford to take lightly, much less ignore all together, the cultural images it has engendered" (Sundquist 4). Indeed, I would add that we must also address the impact of Stowe's protagonist on African American men's perceptions of their masculine identity within a racist society. To abate this crisis of masculinity, as I argue, African American men have historically taken up their pen to signify upon and thus re-envision Stowe's text and its black male protagonist.

Indeed, my readings of the only fiction either Delany or Douglass wrote also illustrate how these two nineteenth-century black leaders co-opted Anglo ideals of manhood to challenge Anglo American perceptions of black men as outside any definitions of manliness. Their works of fiction suggest that a slave's sense of manhood paralleled nineteenth-century white male ideals of masculinity, including being successful protectors, providers, and workers.[14] Hence, the heroes of Douglass's and Delany's respective novels, Madison Washington and Henry Blake, whose manhood reflects power and moral dignity, epitomize dignified self-control. Madison Washington's relationship with the white male character, Listwell, reflects the relationship between black and white men as one that revolves around a masculine ability

to speak eloquently and passionately, as well as to listen, absorb, and respond appropriately. Similarly, Blake speaks eloquently, even as he espouses more radical politics than Madison Washington. While on the surface Delany may appear to reject the pervasive ideals of masculinity in American society, what he was actually rejecting was American national identity and its exclusion of African Americans from its definitions of true citizenship. Delany, therefore, on the one hand, argued that if African Americans could not be a genuine part of the American nation, then blacks, free and enslaved, old world and new world, would create their own nation through the revolutionary efforts of African American male leaders. Douglass, on the other hand, espoused a more assimilationist politics that sought a fraternal bond between black and white men fighting together for a joint cause. He believed that if African American men could demonstrate principles of masculinity, then Anglo men would recognize them as equals and allow black men to exercise their rightful role not just as men, but also as representatives of African Americans.

Douglass and Delany revise Stowe's text and reverse the gender and racial hierarchy of Stowe's novel; where she privileges the white feminine, they privilege the black masculine, and where her black male slave remains a white man's property, their heroes attain freedom and self-conscious manhood. Hence, even as Douglass and Delany explicitly assert the masculinity of their black heroes, they understood that their primary audience would be white readers. Of course Delany's black nationalist rhetoric would also imply that his target audience included blacks. In fact, *Blake* was published in the *Anglo-African Magazine.*[15] The magazine, which began in 1859, was perhaps the most influential black periodical of its time; its primary aim was racial uplift and many of its

editorials covered topics on slavery and abolition. Judging by what appears to be his other audience, and of course his political writing, Delany's agenda in writing *Blake* undoubtedly extends beyond mere abolitionism; he evidently also sought to politicize and radicalize his black readership.

The fact that Douglass and Delany published in African American newspapers would have provided them with the level of confidence needed to openly point to what they believed to be the failings of *Uncle Tom's Cabin*, particularly Stowe's use of black stereotypes. They therefore, created heroes antithetical to Stowe's nineteenth-century racist stereotypes of black male slaves, such as Sambo, Quimbo, and Adolph. With the exception of the mulatto slave George Harris, Stowe infantilizes these black male characters and presents them as innately religious and self-sacrificing—as in the case of Tom—or as rambunctious mischievous boy-men, as in the cases of Sambo and Quimbo. These literary caricatures reflect nineteenth-century, racist, Anglo perceptions of black men—the "invention of hopeful slave owners who wanted to believe that black men were less capable of exercising freedom than themselves" (Carroll 424). Clearly, even with her compassionate analysis of blacks, Stowe appears unable to perceive blacks beyond the stereotypes of her time. Yet ironically, it is her most sympathetically portrayed character, Uncle Tom who would become the prime object of black male resentment. Exactly what was it about Stowe's characterization of Uncle Tom that particularly troubles African American men?

Given the commercial success and historical value attached to Stowe's novel and its hero, not to mention the perception that she "lifted" the narrative of the black male slave, Josiah Henson,[16] without compensating him, it is not surprising that Douglass and

Delany made challenging *Uncle Tom's Cabin* and its white female author their mission.[17] Stowe begins her novel with market discourse in order to demonstrate the dehumanizing effect and coarseness of trade—something that she returns to time and again throughout the novel. While she repudiates trade because it traffics in the selling of black bodies, she fails to take into account the ways in which the trade denies black men, not only their humanity, but also their masculinity, because they inhabit a social order that measures manhood by a man's acquisition of property. Of course, being property precludes black men from engaging in the kind of shop-talk that opens the novel, centered on buying and selling property. Perhaps the most flagrant example of Stowe's conscious/unconscious decision to strip Tom of his manhood, via a (non)relationship to property, is that she ultimately grants Tom merely nominal ownership of that titular "Cabin," even though the title of the novel would lead readers to think otherwise. One might even go so far as to suggest that Stowe intentionally piques her prospective readers' curiosity with a scandalous title implying a black man's ownership of property only to placate them inside the novel with the truth: the cabin is certainly not Tom's, it essentially plays merely a cameo role, and indeed Tom not only does not own a cabin but also owns nothing at all. The logic is clear: the pride of property ownership and the default masculinity it endows are not Tom's and can never be Tom's, for Uncle Tom's cabin is not his property. It actually belongs to young master George, and the first scene taking place in the cabin establishes as much. Aunt Chloe, Tom's wife, serves George before Tom and before she serves the expectant hungry children. Philip Fisher[18] very insightfully explains Tom's relationship to the cabin:

> ... the startling element of Stowe's title does not lie in the words "Uncle Tom" but in the cabin and the possessive letter "s." The title refers to Tom's ownership or

> possession of a thing. But, of course, it is Tom who is owned and governed by a possessive "s". He is the Tom of Shelby, rather than his own free-standing identity with first and last name, and that is the central fact of his identity. Still the title refers to him as the owner of a cabin. That the cabin is mentioned in the title is odd because the cabin plays very little part in the novel. In fact, the key detail is that, from the first act of the novel on, Tom no longer lives in the cabin and never returns there. It is therefore the place where he isn't, the home that he doesn't occupy, but to which all of his thoughts are directed as the home to which he would return if he could. The title therefore asserts his homelessness, his possession of a home that he has not yet reached. The emotional equation, here, for Stowe's reader, is to his own Christian image of heaven as the home to which he will return after a wandering on earth. (Fisher 130-131)

According to Fisher, Uncle Tom's cabin is actually a castle in the sky; his heavenly home, as opposed to the earthly cabin that Stowe takes pains to describe at the beginning of the novel. But considering that Stowe's initial subtitle was "The Man that was a Thing," it also seems reasonable to conclude that Stowe thought to temper an audacious title, regarding a black man's ownership of earthly property, with a palatable subtitle that squared with the sensibilities of a white readership more familiar with seeing black men as things. When she finally decided on "Life Among the Lowly" as the subtitle, she ultimately retained the audacious tone of the title, however much this new subtitle lessens the significance of cabin-owning by implying that this particular cabin (and perhaps all cabins) constitutes typical housing for the lowly.

Delany appears to agree with Stowe that the lowly are indeed destined to inhabit America's meager dwellings, by alluding to *Uncle Tom's Cabin* in his signifying revision's very title, *Blake: or the Huts of America*. However, by patently changing Stowe's "cabin" to "huts," he erases the idyllic connotation of "cabin," referring to the slave's abode more grimly as "huts." This strategy will be replicated by other African American literary descendants, who, as my later chapters demonstrate, also allude to Stowe's title in the title of their revisions. Douglass, on the other hand, indirectly evokes

Stowe's hero through his novella's title, *The Heroic Slave*. Thus he implies that Uncle Tom is decidedly un-heroic. His hero, Madison Washington, achieves true manhood by escaping slavery and thus leaving behind his status as property, to become a man in the true sense of one with the liberty to earn from the products of one's own labor. As he sails towards freedom, our hero muses that he "felt himself no more a piece of merchandise, but a passenger, and, like any other passenger, going about his business carrying with him what belonged to him, and nothing which rightfully belonged to anybody else" (*Heroic Slave* 322). In this passage, Douglass reflects on the power of freedom and the psychological comfort it produces in one once enslaved. It seems however that slavery complicates the concept of possession for blacks, because, I would argue, even in his "freedom"—achieved through a non-legal means of escape—Madison Washington still theoretically carries with him that which "rightfully" belonged to someone else. The operative word is "rightfully." Does Douglass refer to legal rights and human law, or to laws according to nature? Douglass seems to reject man-made laws, preferring instead to be governed by the laws of nature—which challenge the legal codes of slavery, as well as Stowe's Christian laws, under which all men belong to no earthly master, but to a heavenly father. Therefore Douglass defines the right to self-ownership as abiding by natural laws, and this, by extension, also defines manliness.

Given the context in which she lived, Stowe essentially emasculates Tom by conferring property on him via the title of her novel. She also emasculates him by associating him with domesticity and the domestic space that the cabin represents. In describing the cabin, Stowe writes:

> In front it had a neat garden-patch, where, every summer, strawberries, raspberries, and a variety of fruits and vegetables, flourished under careful

> tending. The whole front of it was covered by a large scarlet begonia and a native multiflora rose, which entwisting and interlacing, left scarce a vestige of the rough logs to be seen. Here, also, in summer, various brilliant annuals, such as marigolds, petunias, four-o'clocks, found an indulgent corner in which to unfold splendors, and were the delight and pride of Aunt Chloe's heart. (*UTC* 19)

Stowe thus lays the ground for the feminization of her hero by employing feminine images of the flourishing flora surrounding Uncle Tom's cabin. This feminine imagery continues inside the cabin, where Tom is surrounded by an idyllic scene of domesticity. The infusion of the feminine in both the exterior and interior of his habitat both undermines and contains black masculinity. Delany and Douglass through their very titles seemingly enter Stowe's *Uncle Tom's Cabin,* and as such, disrupt the feminine framework of the cabin, so that they might reconstruct it with their own masculine building blocks and make it theirs.

The two African American authors will have to address Stowe's feminization of the black male body, because Stowe not only confines Uncle Tom within the domestic space, she also characterizes the broad-chested giant as a mammy figure. In the introduction of her central character, Stowe presents both his physical characteristics and his interiority:

> He was large, broad-chested, powerfully-made man, of a full glossy black, and a face whose truly African features were characterized by an expression of grave and steady good sense, united with much kindliness and benevolence. There was something about his whole air, self-respecting and dignified, yet united with a confiding and humble simplicity. (*UTC* 27)

Here Stowe juxtaposes the masculine—Tom's outward physical manliness—with the feminine—his inner gentleness, thus making her black hero more palatable for her white readers. Although the characterization of the interiorities of Henry Blake and Madison

Washington is drawn in contrast to Uncle Tom, their physical characteristics echo Tom's manliness, and indeed his blackness:

> Madison was of manly form. Tall, symmetrical, round, and strong. In his movements he seemed to combine, with the strength of the lion, a lion's elasticity. His torn sleeves disclosed arms like polished iron. His face was "black, but comely."…His whole appearance betokened Herculean strength; yet there was nothing savage or forbidding in his aspect… A giant's strength, but not a giant's heart was in him. (*Heroic Slave* 303)

> Henry was black—a pure Negro—handsome, manly and intelligent, in size comparing well with his master, but neither so fleshly nor heavy built in person…He was bold, determined and courageous, but always gentle and courteous, though impulsive when an occasion demanded his opposition. (*Blake* 16-17).

Douglass and Delany aestheticize race through the intersection of beauty and blackness that invariably draws the reader's gaze to the manliness of that black male body. In their portrayals of their "black but comely" heroes, the two authors attract the reader's gaze to the corporeal man as a way to grant the reader access to the more important aspect of the inner man, thereby revealing his intelligence and dignity as a black man. Indeed, to examine Stowe's novel by thinking of questions of race and gender in tandem, is to demonstrate that while *Uncle Tom's Cabin* epitomizes the matrifocal power of nineteenth-century women's writing, it also advances another one of America's favorite stories about itself: the attainment of salvation for whites through the redemptive power of the suffering, self-sacrificing black body and, in the particular case of this novel, through the avuncularization of an otherwise virile black male body.

By presenting Uncle Tom as an example of the innate religiosity of the African, Stowe confers on him a Christ-like persona; he is always willing to sacrifice himself for the benefit of others. In fact, the strong, manly Uncle Tom never once uses his strength to his advantage; on the contrary, he is always submissive to his white masters, even the

brutal and evil Simon Legree. Tom never loses his faith even as he is sold away from his family by his first master, Shelby, find himself still caught in the unfulfilled promise of freedom from his second master, Augustine St. Clare, and finally as he is whipped to his death by his final master, Simon Legree. His faith remains throughout his adversities. Uncle Tom's heroism, and eventual death, therefore reflects a Christian notion of martyrdom in which death is not an end but a beginning; if heaven is the ultimate reward, then you need not battle on earth. Uncle Tom exists to save others, and many of his altruistic acts go unrewarded on earth. In him Stowe sets up the archetype of the "black male savior" [19] —a hapless black man through whose self-sacrificing actions whites can attain salvation and redemption. Even when receiving the grave news that he is to be sold away from his family, lest the Shelby plantation and all of the slaves there be sold off hither and yon, Uncle Tom does not dwell on his loss or sorrow at leaving his wife and children; instead, he submits to the role of the sacrificial lamb: "it's better for me alone to go, than break up the place or sell all" (*UTC* 92). This is the first of many of Uncle Tom's self-sacrificing acts.

While Stowe reveals the depth of the black slave's Christian forbearance and generous heart, she demonstrates the paucity of white generosity in how Shelby chooses to reward Tom for his sacrifice: "…and you can have the day to yourself. Go anywhere you like, boy" (*UTC* 53). As Henry Louis Gates notes, "Shelby's seeming generosity in giving Tom a day off is undercut by his use of the demeaning term "boy" for a man who has elsewhere been described as patriarch" (63). But even more telling is that the use of "boy," after the emotional exchange between master and servant, Shelby reasserts the racial power relations between the two men and thus precludes the possibility of a

familial bond between master and loyal slave. The possibility of an affective bond between master and slave—absent with the older Shelby—is realized through Shelby's son, but only after Uncle Tom has made the ultimate sacrifice through death. In witnessing the gruesomeness of Tom's death, George Shelby can sense the true horror of slavery and is thus transformed into a "good" Christian who renounces slavery. In this way, Tom fulfills his destiny as a black savior. Tom will also bring salvation to the carefree and irreligious Augustine St. Clare.

As he does in the case of the Shelbys, Uncle Tom becomes invaluable in the St. Clare household. Indeed, the white master's relationship with his good Christian slave evolves into one of psychological co-dependence, especially after the death of St. Clare's daughter, Eva. Uncle Tom consoles his grieving master and, by proselytizing, reforms the once irresponsible, over-privileged St. Clare into becoming a "good" Christian. With his new-found religiosity, or, at least, a less disdainful attitude, and his desire to fulfill the promise he made to his dying daughter, Augustine St. Clare consents to free Tom:

> "Well Tom," said St. Clare…"I'm going to make a free man of you…"
> The sudden light of joy that shone in Tom's face as he raised his hands to heaven, his emphatic "Bless the Lord!" rather discomposed St. Clare; he did not like that Tom should be so ready to leave him.
> You haven't had such very bad times here, that you need be in such rapture, Tom," he said dryly
> "No, no, Mas'r! tan't that,--it's bein' a free man! That's what I'm joying for"
> Why Tom don't you think for your own part, you've been better off than to be free?"
> *No indeed*, Mas'r St. Clare" said Tom with a flash of energy. "No indeed".
> Why, Tom, you couldn't possibly have earned, by your work, such clothes and such living as I have given you."
> "Knows all that, Mas'r St. Clare: Mas'r 's been too good; but, Mas'r, I'd rather have poor clothes, poor house, poor everything, and have 'em mine, than have the best, and have 'em any man's else,… (*UTC* 304)

Even in this earnest exchange between black slave and white master, Stowe maintains the social and psychological balance of power; Tom is the hopeful and anxious supplicant, and St. Clare the hesitant benefactor who holds the key to Tom's freedom and ultimately to his happiness. Beneath the black male slave's obvious longing for freedom is a deeper longing to attain self-conscious manhood.[20] However, this relatively assertive Uncle Tom predictably reverts back to his characteristic Christian selflessness. Tom's resolve to becoming a free man crumbles in the face of St. Clare's emotional dependence on him; he makes his priority his master's happiness, declaring, "I'll stay with Mas'r as long as he wants me,—so long as I can be of any use" (*UTC* 304).

This moment, in fact, portends a much darker, fatal end for both white master and black slave. After a disappointing exchange between them, St. Clare, still unable to grasp truly his slave's desire to possess the keys to his own meager cabin, grudgingly consents to Tom's supplication for freedom with a verbal promise of emancipation. St. Clare never fulfills this promise, but, dies before drawing up official manumission papers. Ironically, Tom's success in reforming his master, who becomes a stalwart of Christian virtue, indirectly impedes Tom's manumission. St. Clare is accidently stabbed while on a "do-good" mission to end a brawl between two men. Consequently, Uncle Tom is sold to Legree—the personification of brutal tyranny. As he sails towards his destiny, Tom drifts into dreams of Eden and paradise lost. The memories of days on the St. Clare plantation and moments shared with the golden-haired Eva comfort him, and he yearns to join her in heaven, only to be jolted back onto the boat sailing down the Mississippi River to Legree's plantation of terror. Again, attempting to escape his impending doom, his fond memories of Aunt Chloe and his children meld into one blurry, intangible entity. In his

hour of need, visions of the angelic white child prove much more effective for sustaining his spirit than the blurred memories of his wife and children. Stowe clearly encourages a longing for heaven rather than familial, earthly desires; we assume, therefore, that a slave should strive, not for freedom here on earth, but rather for Christian salvation, which does in fact await him at Legree's plantation.

Stowe portrays Legree as the very epitome of the evil of slavery; he is the darkness to Uncle Tom's light. The quintessential example of the horrific effect of slavery on the white psyche, Legree is irreligious and therefore abhors Uncle Tom's Christian faith and ability to forgive even the hardest of masters. Hence, on discovering that his two favorite mulatto slaves, Cassy and Emmeline, have escaped, Legree's fury falls on the defenseless head of Tom (*UTC* 407). In the end, Legree, unable to contain his pure hatred for Tom, beats him and leaves him to die, but not before his old master, the young George Shelby, arrives to buy him back. Shelby, distraught, attempts to comfort Uncle Tom, who has already embraced death and is looking to heaven as his reward for his suffering on earth. Uncle Tom responds to Shelby's tears, telling him: "don't call me poor fellow!" ... I have been poor fellow, but that's all past and gone, now. I'm right in the door going to glory! ... *Heaven has come!* I've got the victory!—the Lord Jesus has given it to me! Glory be to His name!" (*UTC* 417). Although Stowe contends that death is the ultimate reward for Uncle Tom's acceptance of his earthly travails and his steadfast Christian faithfulness, many readers perceive this as an ineffective conclusion that achieves no gains for Uncle Tom.

Not surprisingly, Douglass and Delany's novels indicate their disagreement with what they appear to have interpreted as an unmanly choice. Their abolitionist politics do

not see Christian faithfulness and self-reliance as necessarily mutually exclusive ideals; slaves should not rely solely on heavenly intervention to attain freedom, but must also look within themselves to find a way to freedom. Nowhere is this attitude more evident than in Delany's hero, Henry Blake, who speaks directly to Uncle Tom's Christian stoicism and Stowe's valorization of Christian salvation:

> I'm tired of looking to the other side; I want hope this side of the vale of tears. I want something on this earth as well as a promise of things in another world. I and my wife have been robbed of our liberty, and you want me to be satisfied with a hope of heaven. I won't do any such thing; I have waited long enough on heavenly promises; I'll wait no longer. (*Blake* 16)

By rejecting Stowe's Christian concept of salvation, Delany, and for that matter Douglass, demand that black men must be free to live as *men* and accept nothing less than their democratic rights in their society. Both authors therefore depict heroes, who, rather than suffer the same wretched fate as Stowe's Christian hero, instead remain steadfast in their pursuit of liberty. Madison Washington does not reject religion outright, but rather refuses to accept the white master's interpretation of Christianity, and thus, he actively prays for deliverance from bondage. In challenging Stowe's text with its capitulation to earthly suffering in anticipation of heavenly salvation, Douglass rejects heavenly rewards as the slave's Holy Grail. He portrays his protagonist, Madison Washington, as a man who refuses to remain shackled declaring "*Liberty* I will have, or die in the attempt to gain it. This working that others may live in idleness! This cringing submission to insolence and curses! This living under the constant dread and apprehension of being sold and transferred, like a mere brute, is *too* much for me. I will stand it no longer. What others have done, I will do…" (*Heroic Slave* 302). As our hero declares his humanity, he does so confident of his own masculinity and ability to survive

out in the world as free man. Madison's self-reliance is juxtaposed to the Christian male slave he meets in his hiding place in the woods. The slave has clearly grown old in slavery because of his looking to the heavens for deliverance. As expected, the old man remains trapped in slavery, and Madison escapes from bondage. Even with his disavowal of Stowe's Christian stoicism, Douglass's hero does not display quite the bitter condemnation of Christian passivity characterized by Delany's hero, Blake.

Just as he alludes to *Uncle Tom's Cabin* via the very title of his novel, Delany launches his revisionary effort with Stowe's poem "Caste and Christ" as the epigraph to the first part of his long novel:

> By myself, the Lord of Ages,
> I have sworn to right the wrong,
> I have pledged my word unbroken,
> For the weak against the strong. (*Blake*)

Levine interprets this as Delany's "act of homage" to the venerable Mrs. Stowe. However, I would argue on the contrary, that Delany purposefully evokes Stowe, not as a reverential act, but more to signal to the reader the connections between her novel and his. This arguably accomplishes two things: first, it connects his novel with Stowe's novel with the hope of attracting the same large readership; and secondly, it indirectly challenges Stowe's novel. Read in this light, the second line of the poem can therefore be interpreted as Delany's messianic message. That is, Delany sees himself as playing the role of the avenging angel who is determined to right the wrong Stowe created through her novel. I believe that Delany imagines that by re-writing Stowe's novel, he could present blacks not as weak child-like people requiring the paternalistic authority of whites, but as strong self-reliant people who, while they may embrace religion, are not

fettered by it. It seems to me a stretch to assume Delany had reconciled himself to Stowe, especially in light of the fact that at the time he wrote his novel Delany had grown more dissatisfied with what he believed to be the racial politics of the abolitionist movement, and the treatments of blacks as second class citizens, even in northern states, and was decidedly more inclined towards a separatist policy. Thus, what Levine reads as an act of homage, I believe is the implicit perception of Stowe as the enemy.

Blake holds no true allegiance to any religion, but is willing to exploit the slaves' beliefs whether it is Christian or Africanist, as a means to galvanizing the slaves he encounters on different plantations into rebellion. By the end of the novel however, Blake debates his cousin, Placido, on the merits and burden of Christianity, explaining.

> Ah Placido, I often think of the peaceful hours I once enjoyed at the common altar of the professing Christian. I then believed in what was popularly termed religion, as practiced in all the slave states of America; I was devoted to my church, and loved to hear on a Sabbath the word of God spoken by him whom I believed to be a man of God. But how sadly have I been deceived! I still believe in God, and have faith in his promises; but serving Him in the way that I was, I had only 'the shadow without the substance,' the religion of my oppressors. I thank God that He timely opened my eyes. (*Blake* 197)

Blake decides that blacks can in fact embrace the Christian religion, but that they must "take the scriptures as [their] guide, and Christ as [their] example" (197). This Christianity would eschew the submissive version encouraged by white oppressors. But before our hero arrives at this tempered, manly version of Christianity, Delany first exposes the exploitation of the Christian religion and the ills of religion earlier in the novel.

Via the character Major Armsted, Delany exposes the hypocrisy of Christian morality in slave-owning Southerners and of Christian self-righteousness in Northern abolitionists. Once again the author takes an artful jab: "I am anxious to learn some of the

doctrines of human rights, not knowing how soon I may be called upon to practice them, as I may yet marry some little Yankee girl, full of her Puritan notions. And I'm told an old bachelor 'can't come it up that way, except he has a poke full of rocks and can talk philanthropy like old Wilberforce'" (*Blake* 61). The Major's jab achieves its aim as the Northern slave-owning judge, anxious to show that even a Christian Northerner can become a "good" slaveholder, he explains:

> jest concerning the Yankee girl reminds me—and I hope it may not be amiss in saying so—that my lady is the daughter of a clergyman, brought up amidst the sand of New England, and I think I'll not have to go from present company to prove her a good slave holder. So the major may see that we Northerners are not alike. (*Blake* 61).

Many readers familiar with Stowe's background would certainly not have missed the similarity between her and the Judge's wife, the "daughter of a clergyman" from New England. Here, as he does often in *Blake*, Delany implicates Northerners in profiting both indirectly and directly from slavery. More specifically, Delany's subtle dig at Stowe is to accuse her—as he does in his letter to Douglass cited earlier—of profiting from the narrative of the black male slave Josiah Henson without duly compensating him for "borrowing" his narrative as the foundation of her very profitable novel. Here Delany not only seeks to imply Northern culpability in Southern slavery, but I believe particularly aims his pen at exposing Stowe's profit from the labor of slaves. That is, this passage implies that Stowe indirectly profited from slavery through her novel, which therefore compromises the integrity of her Christian abolitionism.[21]

Delany explicitly draws a comparison between his protagonist and Stowe's in order to "correct" Stowe's representation of black male heroism and her romantic racialist conception of the African as simple, trusting, and innately religious. He warns

that the slave's steadfast adherence to Christian principles is simply a pacifying, self-soothing opiate. Thus Blake is characterized as the antithesis to Uncle Tom: Stowe's hero seeks heavenly salvation, while Blake seeks earthly freedom and vengeance. He declares to his fellow slaves:

> I am not fit, brother, for a spiritual leader; my warfare in not Heavenly, but earthly; I have not to do with angels, but with men; not with righteousness, but with wickedness. Call upon some brother who has more of the Grace of God than I. If I ever were a Christian, slavery has made me a sinner; if I had been an angel, it would have made me a devil! I feel more like cursing than praying—may God forgive me! (103)

Delany directly addresses Stowe's Christian theme and Christ-like hero; Blake rejects Christian righteousness precisely because Uncle Tom epitomizes this ideal. Although Blake is no ministering angel, he never completely rejects religion. He suggests instead a religiously inspired notion of justice—slaves must not passively await heavenly intervention but take up arms against their white oppressors and free themselves from bondage. While Uncle Tom spreads the word of God by encouraging other slaves to maintain their faith even through their suffering, Henry Blake disseminates the seeds of revolution from plantation to plantation. As the community "patriarch in religious matters," Uncle Tom opens up his cabin as a de facto community center where Shelby's slaves and other neighborhood slaves congregate and worship. Although they are delighted by the Christian hymns they sing, they clearly miss the irony of slaves singing battle songs. For example, here is one chorus sung with great energy: 'Die on the field of battle,/Die on the field of battle,/ Glory in my soul'" (28). Intentionally, or not, Stowe creates a certain irony with the slaves' passionate response to battle hymns while they stoically accept their status as chattel. In contrast, Delany's hero abjures submissiveness learned from the master's preaching of Christian faithfulness. Instead, Henry Blake is a

disciple of the Old Testament eye-for-an-eye philosophy of righteous vengeance, and not a disciple of the New Testament or "Stowe-cism."

While Stowe preaches a New Testament religion of forgiveness and evangelical rapture, Delany borrows from the Old Testament philosophy of retributive justice and bloodshed. Uncle Tom's ministry preaches about the hereafter on "Jordan's banks" in the "new Jerusalem" while Blake describes an earthly kingdom for blacks that can be achieved through swift and bloody judgment for the plantation master. Delany's Jeremiad against Stowe's Christian philosophy not only offers an alternative vision of black heroism, but he also challenges Stowe's understanding of black religiosity through his portrayal of religious blacks, such as the characters Uncle Jerry and Uncle Talton. These slaves embrace the Old Testament concept of waiting patiently for a Moses who will lead the children of Israel out of Egypt. That is, their Christian convictions are on a par with their desire for freedom. For these enslaved men, the Christian longing for a messiah and the desire to be led out of bondage are not mutually exclusive. In fact, when told by Blake that the time is not yet ripe for the revolution, one of the old men asks "How long, my son, how long we got wait dis way?" (*Blake* 122). Delany makes a concerted effort to present a black community of Christian slaves for whom "…the introduction of [Blake] was like the application of fire to a drought-seasoned stubble field. The harvest was ripe and ready for the scythe, long before the reaper and time for gathering came" (*Blake* 122). Religion has not dulled the old men's knives, but has sharpened their patience to await the right leader to lead them into battle against the oppressor. Blake instinctively understands that an ember only needs some fanning to burst into flames. He is the Christian soldier marching as to revolution.

Douglass's hero also reflects the ideal revolutionary hero. It is noteworthy that Douglass names his heroic slave after the slave who led the slave revolt on board the slave ship *Creole,*[22] in 1841. More significantly, the name references two pivotal white male figures in the struggle for American freedom—George Washington and James Madison. By signifying on both the rebel slave and two founding fathers, Douglass not only directly challenges Stowe's pacifist Christian stoic hero, but also insists that a black male can embody the very ideals of democratic masculinity despite his enslavement. Many of the novel's plots are designed to emphasize Madison Washington's manliness despite being a little contrived. Our hero literally meets an enemy or a stumbling block at every turn, but always overcomes, or somehow escapes them. First he escapes his master's plantation, and then somehow, after days of walking, ends up back where he began; then a fire burns down his hiding place in the woods; then the tree in which he hides is almost cut down; and finally, just when he meets a fellow slave to help him buy food, a mob follows the slave back to his hideout but he manages to run before the mob arrives. All of these unfortunate events culminate with the hero left hungry without shelter or money. But through his own ingenious devices Madison Washington survives all adversities. He is in every sense the quintessential American hero: a *man* in the truest sense.

By creating a combination of American masculine revolutionary ideals, and a freedom-loving black slave revolutionary, Douglass re-focuses these ideals to challenge the conflation of violence with blackness and brutality. Thus when Madison Washington accused of being a murderer by the captain of the overthrown ship, he responds eloquently and convincingly:

> You call me a *black murderer*. I am not a murderer. God is my witness that LIBERTY, not *malice*, is the motive for this night's work. I have done no more to those dead men yonder, than they would have done to me in like circumstances. We have struck for our freedom, and if a true man's heart be in you, you will honor us for the dead. We have done that which you applaud your fathers for doing, and if we are murderers, so were they. (*Heroic Slave* 345)

Douglass parallels the slave's demand for freedom and the use of violence to achieve liberty with the American demand for freedom from the British and the use of revolutionary war to attain such freedom. While this bold comparison is risky, Douglass clearly believed it would build a more effective bond with his white male audience to illustrate that in the end white and black men are no different—they both yearn for freedom. Certainly, the white male listener, Listwell is convinced of Madison's right to liberty; they connect through the power of sentimental masculinity. The two men reflect ideal masculinity, the black slave is a man of eloquence, and the white male, as his name suggests, has the ability not simply to listen, but also to comprehend.

If Stowe's narrative uses sentiment to produce readers, particularly white female readers, who "feel right," Douglass creates his own revision that effects change through the masculine ability to "think right" and, by extension, to draw the right conclusions. Douglass insists that it is not enough to "feel right." It is also essential that whites think critically, and rationally, in order that they might come to understand both why and how his model of heroism makes more logical sense than Stowe's, precisely because that model is of a courageous man willing to risk death to achieve freedom in the here and now, rather than one of a pious man who accepts freedom in the hereafter.

Delany would certainly agree with Douglass that Mrs. Stowe's demand that her white audience act upon compassion, and thus end slavery, was female sentiment that lacked masculine bite. To be sure, Delany often employs the same convenient

coincidences in the plot to further his narrative as Douglass and Stowe; in contrast, however, Blake relies solely on outwitting others. He adeptly maneuvers through various dangerous situations and always outwits his enemies—black and white. In Delany's narrative there can be no room for sentiment between black and white—the power of sentiment exists only between black men such as Henry Blake and his Cuban cousin Placido.

Even with different approaches in their engagement with sentimentalism, both Delany and Douglass strove to avoid the obvious pitfalls of sentimentalism in their portrayals of assertive black male heroes. In presenting black independent masculine ideals, the two men undoubtedly sought to contest familiar nineteenth-century preconceptions of black manhood that equated African American men with helpless boys and women, whose well-being depended on the paternalistic supervision and authority of white masters. Such views were common even among well-intentioned white abolitionists such as Theodore Tilton, who associated blackness with femininity. Tilton referred to blacks as a "feminine people" with a "strange moral, instinctive insight that belongs more to women than to men"(Leonard 16).[23]

This relationship of mutual understanding between black and white men is integral to *Heroic Slave*. Douglass creates an affective bond between Madison Washington and Listwell that culminates in freedom for both men—actual freedom for the black slave, and spiritual freedom for Listwell—the ideal compassionate white male. I would surmise that Listwell can be seen as representing the ideal white audience. Through the relationship between black male slave and Anglo male, Douglass combines sentiment and masculinity in order to persuade white readers, who might otherwise reject

a black male slave's demand for freedom. Douglass employs the same conventions of the sentimental novel used by Stowe; however, even as the narrative plot is moved forward by one coincidence after the other, Douglass directs his sentimental appeal towards men. Just as Stowe's matrifocal rhetoric reveals her narrative agenda as feminist—with a targeted bourgeois, white female readership—Douglass's use of sentimental masculinity reflects a desire to appeal to a white male readership. Indeed that Anglo male reader is literalized in the narrative through the character Listwell. Thus, what Stowe the white female Christian abolitionist could not comprehend Douglass has a white male explain—through Listwell's response to the anguished outpouring of the wretched slave:

> Here is indeed a *man* [italics mine] ... to him those distant church bells have no grateful music. He shuns the church, the altar, and the great congregation of Christian worshippers, and wanders away to the gloomy forest, to utter in the vacant air complaints and griefs, which religion of his times and his country can neither console nor relieve. Goaded almost to madness by the sense of injustice done him, he resorts hither to give vent to his pent up feelings, and to debate with himself the feasibility of plans, plans of *his own* invention, for his *own deliverance*. (*Heroic Slave* 305; italics mine)

Through Listwell, Douglass reveals that Stowe's belief in a Christian docile acceptance of one's lot in life, and a denial of earthly desires, shows a lack of true comprehension of the slave's reality. More importantly, Douglass uses Listwell to voice self-reliant masculinity lacking in Stowe's Uncle Tom—indeed, the very reason for the consequent crisis of masculinity felt by Douglass.

Our initial introduction to our black hero comes via his words, rather than via a description of the physical man. If Listwell represents the white reader, and Madison Washington every slave, then the literary devices employed are also integral to our understanding of Douglass's overarching message in his characterization of the relationship between the two men. Hence, Listwell, like the reader, hears Washington

before he even sees him; Douglass effectively deflects the reader's initial gaze away from Washington's racialized body, which might immediately prejudice readers against him. Such deflection ultimately helps to focus our attention, instead, on the oratorical strength of his speech. By borrowing from Anglo-Saxon ideals of manhood in Washington's speech, Douglass not only employs rhetoric familiar to his white readers, but he also exploits it to direct his abolitionist discourse specifically to bourgeois, white male readers, who after all, shape their own male identities through these ideals.

As is to be expected, Listwell becomes a self-professed abolitionist, not by his own democratic political awareness of the wrongs of slavery, but, through the persuasive power of Washington's eloquent speech, which so adroitly exposes the injustice of the institution. How fortuitous then that five years after his soliloquy in the woods, a tired and desperate Washington should end up seeking refuge at none other than Listwell's door. Washington, "the noble fugitive," meets with Listwell again. Like two old lovers reunited, "speechless they stood gazing at each other…" (*Heroic Slave* 331). The connection between the two men is one of kindred souls. Just as Stowe portrays a natural connection between women,—Eliza and Mrs. Bird— irrespective of race, Douglass asserts a similar natural bond that can occur between or among enlightened men, a connection that can overcome even race. As many readers have noted, Douglass directly borrows from certain moments in *Uncle Tom's Cabin*. The happy Listwell household evokes that of Senator Bird's household in Stowe's novel. By signifying upon one of the most iconic scene in *Uncle Tom's Cabin*— the mulatto female slave Eliza's flight and escape—Douglass clearly wants the reader to understand the parallels between Stowe's heroine and his hero. However, he contrasts his scene with Stowe's woman-centered

domestic paradise; Eliza, the mulatto female slave, is replaced by a dark, African male slave, and the provider of the safe haven, the white senator and his wife, are replaced by the bourgeois household of the Listwells. Even more significantly, unlike Senator Bird, Listwell does not need his wife to convince him that he should aid the fleeing slave. Douglass's male-centered political ideology imagines there can exist compassion, mutual understanding, and friendship among white and black men; they need not have a female mediator to connect them.

Similarly, Douglass insists whites understand that in the slave's attempt at escape, there can be no dogged adherence to usual morality. As he does with his comparison to the American Revolution, Douglass insists that stealing food, in order to abate hunger, just like killing people in order to remove obstacles that hinder the journey towards freedom, take precedence over normal moral or ethical standards. Listwell needs no moral suasion to accept such a different code of ethics; he has already thought through this dilemma and concluded that, in the context of slavery, morality is necessarily contingent. This notion of moral relativity, I believe, is a direct challenge to Harriet Beecher Stowe. It is not enough simply to make whites feel right. They must also be willing, like Listwell, to break laws (such as the newly enacted Fugitive Slave Law) and to do everything—from helping to harboring fleeing slaves.

Delany takes the argument of ethics a step further; not only does he justify violence as a necessary means for black men to achieve freedom, he rejects the notion that white men—slave owning Southerners, or so called anti-slavery Northerners—could indeed be convinced to work as equals with their black counterparts. Delany appears to argue that while there is fraternal bond between southern and northern white men, such a

bond is unattainable between white and black men. In *Blake*, Delany therefore presents more than just physical brutality; he introduces to his audience the more sinister psychology of slave masters, epitomized in the narrative by the slave- holding Major Armstead. Rather than beat his slaves to submission, he gains their loyalty through more covert strategy—pleasantry. The Major heartily admonishes his fellow slave owners, explaining that, irrespective of race, all men respond positively to "pleasantry":

> One thing judge that I have learned by my intercourse with men, that pleasantry is the life and soul of the social system; and good treatment begets more labor from the slave than bad. A smile from the master is worth a hundred cracks of the whip. Only confide in him, and let him be satisfied that you respect him as a *man* [italics mine], and he'll work himself to death to prove his worthiness." (*Blake* 64)

Unlike the Major, the other Southern slave owners insist on maintaining strict racial hierarchy that precludes slaves from any considerations of civility, or manliness. Unwilling to risk the possibility of slaves believing in their own humanity, even if it might prove beneficial, the slave owners find the very idea of equality between white and black men to be ludicrous. Consequently, Henry Blake prefers the overt racism of white masters, as he explains to his fellow runaway slave, Andy:

> That's the very mischief of it, Andy! 'Tis confounded 'good treatment' and expectation of getting freed by their oppressors, that has been the curse of the slave. All shrewd masters, to keep their slaves in check, promise them their freedom at their master's death, as though they were certain to die first. This contents the slave, and makes him obedient and willing to serve and toil on, looking forward to the promised redemption ... Talk to me of a good master! A 'good master' is the very worst master. Were they all cruel and inhuman, or could the slaves be made to see their treatment aright, they would not endure their oppression for a single hour! (*Blake* 127)

By presenting both the black and the white psyche—the master's shrewdness and the slave's Uncle Tom-like submission and loyalty to the master—Delany signifies upon

Uncle Tom's Cabin to debunk Stowe's Christian hero and his pacifism. Through this argument, Delany insists that "redemption" can be achieved only when the slave becomes a self-reliant man willing to risk death to achieve his earthly freedom. Blacks, Delany argues, must learn to manipulate whites psychologically in order to achieve their freedom, rather than working towards brotherhood. Not surprisingly then, *Blake* is peopled with greedy white men willing to help fugitive slaves to freedom (for a price) and Northern poor white men whom Henry Blake can intellectually outmaneuver and convince into permitting the passage of the slaves, rather than populated with kind Northerners and abolitionist Quakers who facilitate his freedom. If Henry Blake achieves freedom independent of assistance from whites, then it would seem Delany would have us question the power of Douglass's fictional hero's reliance on Listwell.

Of course, scholars have also questioned the self-reliant heroism of Douglass's Madison Washington, who, after all, achieves freedom only by enlisting the help of the white man, Listwell. Responding to such readings, Robert Levine explains what he views as Douglass's "accomodationist" politics. He writes:

> Douglass suggests that the white sympathy and material assistance that help to produce the slaves' revolutionary actions in no way compromise the self-reliance or heroism of such action and are in fact the products of a black's influence on a white; it is Madison Washington's soliloquy, after all, that converts Listwell to the antislavery cause and makes him eager to help slaves. (*Heroic Slave* 85)

I would agree with Levine's conclusion that irrespective of Listwell's assistance, Madison Washington retains self-reliant manhood; however, without Listwell's help, Madison Washington might never have achieved freedom. After all, had Listwell not slipped him iron files, which the slave could then use to escape his shackles, Madison Washington would surely have remained in bondage. Douglass seems to argue that the

relationship between the two men is mutually beneficial; the white male experiences psychological growth that expands an otherwise narrow view of humanity, and the black slave freed from physical enslavement.

The black-white male interaction also echoes Stowe's attempt to build a bridge of empathy between her mulatto slave George Harris and Wilson, the white male he meets in a tavern, as he escapes disguised as a white man. George Harris confesses to Wilson that he is in fact an escaped slave and tells Wilson about watching the sale of his mother and sister and the anguish that his inability to stop it and protect his family eventually produced. The story has the effect of transforming Wilson from a white man who, at one point, called Harris "boy"—that infantilizing, emasculating, derogatory term—to one who uses the word "boy" differently, in order to express fatherly concern. In admonishing George for his loss of Christian faith, Wilson chides George, "Don't my boy," an expression of paternalistic concern for George's soul. Stowe demonstrates Wilson's evolution as a means to producing a similar growth in her white readers.

Like Stowe, Douglass builds an empathetic bridge between his heroic slave and his white audience via Listwell. He also uses the interaction between Listwell and Madison Washington to challenge Stowe's characterization of blackness. My point here is that it is no coincidence that Madison Washington is "pure" black, but nevertheless presented as an intelligent man of action—a contrast to Tom, whose "Africaness," according to Stowe's characterization, equates to a child-like quality. On the other hand Stowe's other protagonist, the mulatto slave George Harris, is presented as intelligent and outspoken—as manifestation of his Anglo-Saxon blood. Thus through Madison Washington—a real black rebel slave—Douglass challenges Stowe's notion of heroic

self-reliance as a trait attributable only to those with Anglo-Saxon blood. Stowe defines manliness through intellectual capabilities and not so much by physicality, as we see in her portrayal of George Harris. She presents no intricate description of his body—as with Uncle Tom—and focuses her description on relating his Anglo pedigree and performing an appraisal of his psychology:

> We remark *en passant*, that George was, by his father's side, of white descent. His mother was some of those unfortunates of her race, marked out by personal beauty to be the slave of the passion of her possessor, and the mother of children who may never know of a father. From one of the proudest families in Kentucky he had inherited a set of fine European features, and a high indomitable spirit. (*UTC* 117-8).

Stowe seems to imply that George Harris' manliness need not be expressed via the physical because his intellectual acumen is so self-evident that, in his presence, his white master has feelings of "an uneasy consciousness of inferiority" (*UTC* 17). Stowe implies that even in his station as a slave, George Harris still manages to produce an indubitable manliness that challenges the white master's authority. This innate Anglo Saxon sensibility, Stowe would have us believe, also produces in the mulatto slave an acute sense of injustice, and an instinctive resistance to his white master's attempts to dominate him. Stowe thus juxtaposes George's "natural" inclination for self-determination and Uncle Tom's passivity. She evokes the masculine rhetoric of the Anglo founding fathers with George Harris' declaration that he, like their founding fathers, "fight for liberty to the last breath" because if resistance was right for them, then, as he shouts "it is right for me!" (*UTC* 121). As aforementioned, Delany and Douglass's black heroes employ the same familiar language of the founding fathers as they reject bondage, and thusly contest Stowe's implicit notion that George's desire to be a free man, with the right to protect his

kin, is derived, not from his African blood—a childlike feminine sensibility—but from his Anglo Saxon blood—an independent masculine sensibility. Through their black protagonists' understanding of the masculine ideology on which the American nation was built, Douglass and Delany insist that liberty is indeed the inalienable birth-right of every man. They are willing to express this right to its fullest; hence their protagonists are willing to kill, and indeed do so, in order to attain liberty.

Predictably, Delany—the "pure" blooded black—creates a hero who not only contrasts Uncle Tom, but also one that both represented his own political fantasies of becoming a messiah for the black community and his personal identity as "African." As Floyd J. Miller astutely observes about *Blake*:

> ... *Blake* serves, as Delany obviously intended it to do, as the vehicle for expression of a racial philosophy as radical today as it was when originally conceived. Central to the novel is a racial consciousness which is expressed in a variety of ways. First, there is Delany's anti-white posture in which 'candlefaces' and 'alabasters' appear to be equivalents of contemporary 'honkies' and in which Blake declares: 'I am for war upon whites." Equally significant is the affirmation of blackness which is expressed through the use of a pure black protagonist and in persistent attack on mulattoes, who, by following the racist practices of whites, degraded and abused pure-blooded blacks. (*Blake* Introduction xxiii)

Following Miller's argument, we could certainly claim that Delany employed the rhetorical stance of being "black and proud" long before the 60s slogan was coined. *Blake* reflects Delany's intra-racial philosophy. As such, in *Blake* he presents "pure blood" blacks as more masculine and politically savvy than their mulatto brothers. Whereas Stowe depicts the mulatto, George Harris, as the heroic man of action, and the "African" Uncle Tom as the feminized Christ figure, Delany's man of action, Henry Blake, is a "pure-blooded" black, and the helpless blacks are more often mulattos. For example, Mendi the African slave is posited as a natural leader; through this character,

Delany builds a bridge between Africans and their brethren in the Americas to unite in their quest for liberty and in the construction of a black nation. Of course, while Mendi epitomizes the African's natural masculinity, Delany implies that the mulatto tends towards femininity. The once-free mulatto Lewis, who has been forcefully captured and sold into slavery, bewails his enslavement and is reduced to tears. In contrast, Henry Blake not only flees slavery, but also recruits revolutionary leaders throughout Southern plantations. Blake, appalled by Lewis' inaction, challenges him with the manly advice not to submit but to "die first if thereby you must take another into eternity with you! Were it my case and he [the white master] ever went to sleep where I was, he'd never waken in this world!" (*Blake* 82). Delany embraces the use of violence as a necessary means to achieving freedom for black men. In fact, he argues that blacks must make preemptive strikes whenever the opportunity arises—attaining freedom is worth risking death.

Stowe, on the other hand, adheres to a Christian ethic, and as such, George Harris never actually kills or necessarily has to compromise his moral standards as he flees to freedom. Although he shoots at the slave catchers sent to return him to his master, he only wounds one of them. He explains to the Quakers that he is glad he did not kill, as "it would be always be a heavy thought to me, if I'd caused his death, even in a just cause" (*UTC* 200). George's experience with slavery and his Anglo Saxon temper often flare, and consequent temporary loss of faith is balanced by his wife Eliza's feminine influence and Christian faith. Eliza and their son Harry provide George the necessary sentimental emotional grounding that domesticates his masculinity.

Likewise, Douglass presents an emotional connection between his hero and the wife he left behind; hence, even in freedom, Madison Washington could not forsake a wife "who had well [his] love by her virtuous fidelity and undying affection for me" (*Heroic Slave* 333). However, this narrative of emotional connection between a black slave and a female slave (also found in Delany's *Blake*) can be problematic in its representation of black women. Madison Washington's wife remains nameless. Known only as his "wife," her identity is woven into his. I would add that the nameless wife is the fly in the ointment—the reason he ended back on American soil after his escape to freedom. Having risked his liberty and life to save his wife from slavery, she is shot dead, and he is once again a slave. What I imply here is that the black female for Douglass and Delany represents a burden, and indeed an obstacle that impedes black male success, while the white male, for Douglass, facilitates black male success. Although Douglass attempts to recreate a relationship of passion between a black man and woman, in the end his focus strays back to the relationship between Madison Washington and Listwell, just as Uncle Tom's mind invariably always strays back to his white master and his family. Frankly, the wife is dispensable. She serves the sole purpose of demonstrating Washington's heroism. Douglass's male-centered narrative has no room for the white or black feminine. The lasting sentimental bond lies, not between Madison Washington and his nameless wife, but between the black male slave and his white male friend. Indeed, the novel itself claims that a "supernatural power, a wakeful providence, or an inexorable fate had linked their destiny together" (*Heroic Slave* 335). The reader must therefore conclude that the advantages and benefits of emotional connections with a white man outweigh those with a black woman. Or perhaps Douglass's narrative is so concerned

with illustrating the innate masculinity of black men that the female narrative, to include the role of the white female, can only be an afterthought or simply to provide a supporting cast to the men. Even Mrs. Listwell, who is not only named but actually present in the scenes, also exists as a marginal character.

Mrs. Listwell's standpoint on the slavery debate of course reflects that of her husband, and she obligingly plays her female role within the patriarchal household. In order not to intrude upon what is clearly a natural coming together of the two male minds, "the kind lady had revived the fire, and was diligently preparing supper…" (*Heroic Slave* 208). Although Mrs. Listwell listens to Madison Washington's tale, the discussion that follows remains between the two men. One might very well ask, what then is her purpose in this scene? While Douglass's agenda in *Heroic Slave* is to recreate Stowe's ideas from a masculine perspective, he is astute enough to know that much of his target audience, like Harriet Beecher Stowe's, was white women. Mrs. Listwell's presence thus serves to connect such women to Madison Washington. Douglass understands the importance of commending the domestic economy of a woman such as Mrs. Listwell, whose capable hands prepare a quick supper for our hero and under whose domestic powers the Listwell household runs like a well-oiled machine (without any reliance on slave hands). Mrs. Listwell's white sheets, like Rachel Halliday's in *Uncle Tom's Cabin*, are a testament to her domestic prowess; the bed linen display of such opulence that Madison Washington is reluctant to actually sleep on it. When Mrs. Listwell does eventually speak, her speech clearly represents more feminine concerns such as asking if "Madison had, at least lived upon cooked food" as "women have such a perfect horror of eating uncooked food" (*Heroic Slave* 300). Douglass juxtaposes trivial

female concerns against more serious male concerns; Mrs. Listwell focuses on Madison Washington's diet, while Mr. Listwell's thoughts have moved on to more pressing issues "of what was best to be done about getting Madison to Canada… (*Heroic Slave* 320)." Even as she remains at the margins, Mrs. Listwell's presence serves to shore up bourgeois masculinity for her husband—and potentially for Washington. The fact that the two men bond within the domestic space projects a gentleness and sentimentality that facilitates the narrative's engagement with female readers.

The women in Delany's novel also exist to move the plot forward. This is perhaps most evident with Blake's wife, Maggie. Although the sale of Maggie is the catalyst for Blake's escape from slavery, when he is finally reunited with her in Cuba, their interaction is brief and she immediately disappears into the background. Indeed, Blake's burgeoning politics and militancy focuses more on his interactions and relationships with other male slaves; ultimately, *Blake* is a text in which fraternal bonds between black men take precedence over the affective bonds between black men and black women. Delany, however, allows his female characters to air concerns that clearly question the assumptions of the black male leader, or in the case of Maggie, question the need to continue a revolution now that they are free in Cuba. Blake's response to Maggie's feminine yearning for a happy home—an earthly cabin—where she can peacefully pass her final years, is one of disdain. Not only is she silenced by black misogyny, but, by the author, literarily removed from the narrative, to ensure that her feminine fancies do not derail her husband's masculine pursuits, especially his grand scheme to create a black nation. Delany appears to argue that if black men are to succeed in a racist society, they must eschew the feminist sentimentalism espoused by women—both black (Maggie) and

white (Stowe). His juxtaposition of the masculine and the feminine reflects traditional nineteenth-century gender ideals. Delany contrasts Maggie's narrow worldview with Blake's far-reaching perception of the world; whereas she lacks the ability to comprehend the rudimentary principles of freedom, he not only understands them, but can also relate them to black aspirations. Exasperated by Maggie's narrow perception of liberty, Blake gives her an education:

> My dear wife, you have much to learn in solving the problem of this great question of the destiny of our race. I'll give you one to work out at your leisure; it is this: Whatever liberty is worth to the whites, it's worth to the blacks; therefore, whatever it costs the whites to obtain it, the blacks would be willing to pay, if they desire it. Work out this question in political arithmetic at your leisure, wife, and by the time you get through and fully understand the rule, then you will be ready to discuss the subject further with me. (*Blake* 192)

Although Maggie accepts her husband's mathematical summation of black struggle against whites, we never discover whether she develops any political consciousness. But, then, Maggie need not aspire to greatness. As Placido, Henry Blake's cousin, explains: "The position of a man carries his wife with him; so when he is degraded, she is also, because she cannot rise above his level; but when he is elevated, so is she also…" (*Blake* 242). The black female's destiny is tied to that of the black male. Maggie Blake, therefore, evolves from a slave dependent on whites, to a freed slave, and a general's wife, dependent on her husband. Like all other "good" women, she must accept the guidance of her husband.

This overt patriarchal ideology is challenged by Madame Cordora, a mulatto female character, who remarks: "…Engaged as we well are in a common cause for liberty and equality, I would not have a difference to be made at the start. The poet in his prayer spoke of Ethiopia's sons; are we not some of us left out in the supplication, as I am sure,

although identified together, we are all Ethiopians" (*Blake* 261). Madame Cordora's statement not only demands that the fledging black "nation" begin to utilize an inclusive rhetoric that recognizes all blacks—irrespective of complexion—but implicit in her statement I believe is also a demand that they also acknowledge Ethiopia's daughters. Interestingly, even if Blake's wife, a slave, lacks rudimentary understanding of politics, it would seem Delany imagines that the Cuban mulatto with lived experience of freedom grasps the concept of community building. However, this surprising eruption of a feminist voice in what is otherwise a blatantly masculinist novel is subsumed by the novel's more urgent concerns. Even as she challenges male leadership, Madame Cordora prefaces her discontent in a deferential feminine disclaimer, politely asserting: "I do not wish to be troublesome" (*Blake* 261). Madame Cordora's challenge is not answered through an engagement with the discourse on gender but rather through discourse on race. Thus Delany's attempt at a feminist perspective is inevitably subsumed into the more "important" intra-racial philosophy. The poet leader, Placido, explains to Madame Cordora why "colored persons, whatever the complexion, can only obtain equality with whites by the descendants of Africa of unmixed blood" (*Blake* 260). Through the discourse on black nationalism—synonymous with black radicalism—Delany engages nineteenth-century values to define women's role in the "Black Nation." Placido thus expands the black female mind by broadening and politicizing Madame Cordora's understanding of race. He avoids Stowe's feminine sentimental reasoning, and relies instead on a political discourse that aims to dismantle the racial politics of slavery even as it maintains nineteenth-century gender politics. Of course, once raised, the feminine

perspective is the immediately sidelined so that Delany can move on to presenting his vision of messianic vision of a black nation led by a heroic black male.

Delany's protagonist, Blake, provides America with a different vision of ideal black heroism that counteracts Uncle Tom's stoicism and Madison Washington's reliance on white male support. I would argue that just as Madison Washington embodies Douglass's perception of self, and of ideal black masculinity, so too is Henry Blake an extension of Delany; *Blake* represents Delany's black male messianic dream of delivering his people from bondage. In Delany's novel, it is not the mulatto (read Frederick Douglass) who is chosen to lead the emancipation campaign, but the "full-blooded" black man (read Martin Delany), the rightful "Leader of the Army of Emancipation and originator of the scheme to redeem them from slavery and an almost helpless degradation" (*Blake* 251). As Robert Levine surmises, Blake reflects Delany's "messianic vision." Levine writes, "in thinking of himself as a kind of Moses ... Delany, like Douglass, tapped into the black nationalist and messianic implications of the Moses analogy, devoting himself, like the eponymous leader of *Blake*, to 'the redemption of his race'" (Levine *Politics* 180). Delany parallels Blake's journey to freedom and adventures within the African diaspora with his political journey to becoming the leader of a potential black nation.

Through fictional challenges to *Uncle Tom's Cabin*, Douglass and Delany address the nineteenth-century Anglo racialized theory of masculinity that perceives the white male as innately imbued with masculine self-reliance and the African male as lacking "real" masculinity and deficient in resourcefulness. Beyond repudiating Stowe's representation of black manhood, *Blake* and *Heroic Slave* also represent Douglass and

Delany's reclamation of manhood through their fictional characters. In many ways Stowe's novel confirmed white Americans' assumptions about blacks, particularly black men. *Uncle Tom's Cabin* accepts the Anglo notion that blacks needed the paternalistic care of whites because of their "innate" childlike nature, and the lack of patriarchal maturity required to take on the social and political responsibilities of "real" men. As I have argued in this chapter, the popularity of Stowe's abolitionist novel created for black men an anxiety surrounding their racial and gender identity, which clearly required that they challenge Stowe's views in order to change popular perceptions of black men and their masculinity. In signifying on and revising *Uncle Tom's Cabin*, Douglass and Delany attempt to quell the anxieties about masculinity Stowe created.

Even as Douglass defends "Mrs. Stowe," admonishes "brother Delany" for his essentialist racial assertions, and chides Delany for ungentlemanly intimidation of a woman, he nonetheless had his own misgivings about her representation of blackness, more specifically of black masculinity. While they continued to disagree bitterly, the two men remained passionate about the black male cause. Indeed, I would argue that *Blake* and *The Heroic Slave*, as expressions of nineteenth-century black men's demands for recognition as self-reliant male subjects, seem to declare: "Ain't I a man?"

Notes

[1] Indeed, Douglass dissolution with white support for the black cause would increase, especially post emancipation; black became the inevitable collateral damage with northern white desire to pacify southern whites and maintain the union.

[2] Examples of other famous African American male slaves who escaped from slavery include Henry Bibb and William Wells Brown, to name two. Like Frederick Douglass's, their escape from slavery is immortalized in their slave narratives, wherein their struggle to attain self-conscious manhood is also evident.

[3] Douglass revised his autobiography three times: the first *The Narrative Life of Frederick Douglass* was published 1845, the second, *My Bondage and my Freedom,* was published 1855 and the last *The Life and Times of Frederick Douglass,* published 1881.

[4] Sundquist, Eric J. "Introduction" in *New Essays on Uncle Tom's Cabin*. New York: Cambridge University Press. 1986.

[5] Levine, Robert S., *Martin R. Delany: A Documentary Reader* (North Carolina: U of North Carolina Press, 2003) 182-223.

[6] In order to create a more unified abolitionist body, the American Anti-Slavery Society was established in 1833.

Although members included freed blacks, the principal custodians of the movement were influential whites such as William Lloyd Garrison and his wife, Helen Eliza Benson. Under Garrison, the society also encouraged women's full participation, not just in the abolitionist cause but also in national politics. The slavery debates thus facilitated women's entry into the fray of American political affairs. Many within the abolitionist movement were opposed to the idea of women's involvement in national politics; and even as many abolitionists—male and female—believed women should play less visible roles in the movement, many women were deeply involved in abolitionist activities. In fact, women spearheaded many of the grassroots anti-slavery activities and organized regional and local Anti-Slavery Society events. Women such as Helen E. Garrison (wife of William Lloyd Garrison) and Maria W. Chapman organized a fundraising event for the Massachusetts Anti-Slavery Society (See Stewart, James Brewer. *Holly Warriors: The Abolitionists and American Slavery*. New York, NY: Hill and Wang, 1996.)

[7] Lydia Maria Childs, like Helen E. Garrison, crusaded for the right of both blacks and women. Her editing of Harriet Jacob's *Incidents in the Life of a Slave Girl* demonstrates her commitment to both causes.

[8] In Chapter Four, I discuss in more detail Aiken's stage adaptation of *Uncle Tom's Cabin* and the importance of this adaptation for, what I argue as African American playwright, Robert Alexander's re-envisioning of Stowe's novel.

[9] See Stephen Railton's Uncle Tom's Cabin and American Culture: A Multimedia Archive

[10] I am in agreement with Robert Levine that scholars often overplay Douglass's role in the abolitionist movement. For example, Levine demonstrates that scholars do not always acknowledge Delany's contributions to Douglass's newspaper.

[11] See Baym, Nina. *Women's Fiction: A Guide to Novels by and About Women in America, 1820-1870,* Ithaca, NY: Cornell UP, 1978. Also see Tompkins, Jane. *Sensational Designs: The Cultural Work of American Fiction, 1790-1860,* New York, Oxford UP, 1986.

[12] This now all too familiar phrase is attributed to Nathaniel Hawthorne, who in a letter to his publisher in the mid- 1850s complained bitterly of the popularity and large sales of female-authored light novels while his own literary master pieces were pushed out of the literary marketplace.

[13] See Brown. Gillian. *Domestic Individualism: Imagining Self in Nineteenth-Century America.* Berkley: University of California Press, 1992 (p. 39-45).

[14] Winter, Thomas. "Slavery," *American Masculinities*: *a Historical Encyclopedia*. New York: Sage Publications, 2003. 423-427. Print

[15] The *Anglo-African Magazine* was begun in New York in 1859 by black journalist Thomas Hamilton. The magazine ceased publication in 1865. http://www.slaveryinamerica.org/history/hs_es_press.htm

[16] In *The Key to Uncle Tom's Cabin*, Stowe duly acknowledged Josiah Henson's narrative as one of the many life experiences of ex-slaves that informed her portrayal of her fictional Christian hero, Uncle Tom. Josiah Henson, like Frederick Douglass was a slave that fled north to escape to freedom; He finally ended up in Canada and narrated his slave narrative to tell of his life within slavery and his escape to freedom. Interestingly, Stowe also wrote the foreword to Henson's 1858 and 1879 editions of his slave narrative.

[17] See Levine, Robert S. *Martin R. Delany: A Documentary Reader*. Chapel Hill, North Carolina: U of North Carolina Press. 2003. Page 230.

[18] See Fisher, Philip. *Hard Fact: Setting and Form in the American Novel.* Cary, NC, USA: Oxford University Press, 1986.

[19] Stowe sets up such an enduring and powerful archetype in Uncle Tom that he has become a familiar American cinematic and literary trope. Examples to name a few, can be seen in Harper Lee's 1960 novel *To Kill a Mocking Bird* and its1962 cinematic adaption where the character aptly named Tom, who like Stowe's Tom is a strong black gentle giant, becomes the pivotal character that transforms the souls and lives of the white characters in a small sleepy American town. Another example is the 1999 film *The Green Mile* (a cinematic adaption of Stephen King's serialized novel *The Green Mile*) where the black male "Uncle Tom" character John Coffey (played by the broad-chested dark skinned African American actor Michael Clark Duncan) heals white characters even as he has been unjustly imprisoned for a crime he did not commit, but who seeks death rather than live in this world with too much pain.

[20] I have borrowed W. E. B. Dubois explanation of black double-consciousness as "the history of the American Negro is the history of this strife, --this longing to attain self-conscious manhood, to merge his double self into a better and truer self.…

[21] I should acknowledge that Levine's more sympathetic and sentimental reading of Delaney's authorial intentions *vis a vis* Stowe is informed by his reading *Blake* not just as a response to *Uncle Tom's Cabin*, but also to her other novel *Dred*. However, I read *Blake* strictly as a revision of *Uncle Tom's Cabin* because it was a novel with far-reaching influence within the abolitionist movement, not to mention that his subtitle "the huts of America," to my mind, clearly signifies on Stowe's "cabin." Moreover, the opening scene of *Blake*, as I have already delineated in this chapter, blatantly alludes to the opening scene of *Uncle Tom's Cabin*.

[22] See Levine, Robert S. *Martin R. Delany: A Documentary Reader*. Chapel Hill, North Carolina: U of North Carolina Press. 2003.

[23] Tilton, Theodore. *The Negro: A Speech at Cooper Institute.* New York, May 12, 1863, At the Anniversary of the American Anti-Slavery Society: 2nd Ed. New York: Anti-Slavery Office, 1863. 11-12

Reconstructing Uncle Tom: Chesnutt's Vision of Post Reconstruction Black Masculinity in *Marrow of Tradition*

> I thank you for the comparison with *Uncle Tom's Cabin*; if I could write a book that would stir the waters in any appreciable degree like that famous book, I would feel that I had vindicated my right to live and the right of a whole race. **(**Charles W. Chesnutt)

As the epigraph illustrates, Charles W. Chesnutt, the man often referred to as America's first great African American novelist, took delight in comparisons of his novel, *The Marrow of Tradition*, published in 1901, to Harriet Beecher Stowe's nineteenth-century popular novel, *Uncle Tom's Cabin*.[1] In fact, the author himself initiated associations between the two novels with the hope that *The Marrow of Tradition* would "become lodged in the popular mind as the legitimate successor of *Uncle Tom's Cabin* and the *Fool's Errand* as depicting an epoch in our national history ..." (Andrews 126). Chesnutt believed so much in the notion of awakening the national conscience through his fiction that he staked the future of his professional career as a novelist on the success of *Marrow of Tradition*. As Matthew Wilson explains:

> Through the continuing power of its historical example in the post-bellum period in which the assumptions of white Americans about African-Americans were largely unchanged from Stowe's time, her novel must have represented for Chesnutt the promise that the injustices of racism could continue to be successfully represented in fiction, an example of how the 'conscience of the nation could be awakened by a fictional appeal through the power of sentiment. (18)

Unfortunately, Chesnutt realized neither the dream of achieving professional and material success as an author, nor that of influencing American race politics through his fiction. Instead, *Marrow of Tradition* carried the unenviable burden, in the racist climate of Post-Reconstruction America, of being labeled an angry race novel. Unfortunately for Chesnutt, while Stowe successfully pulled at the heartstrings of her nineteenth-century

white readers, his novel failed to find a sympathetic audience. In the end, his unflinching exposition of what he believed to be misguided Southern perceptions of race and discriminatory politics resulted in the novel's failure to connect with the very audience it sought to influence. For example, Chesnutt's contemporary and admirer, the influential American author and literary critic, William Dean Howells, concluded that although *Marrow of Tradition* was a powerful novel, it was far too bitter a tale with "more justice than mercy in it."[2] The unabashed confrontation with white racism in *Marrow of Tradition* failed either to cement Chesnutt's career as a writer, or to affect the intended socio-political change in facilitating the construction of the foundations for non-racialized American democracy—a fate, I should note, shared by other African American texts that assertively challenged white racism, such as Harriet Wilson's *Our Nig*. The fact that Chesnutt, an African American writer, was writing about issues of race during a period when the South was intent on dismantling Reconstruction, was undoubtedly a recipe for failure. This era marked a burgeoning bigotry within Southern states, which made life difficult for African Americans. The Post-Reconstruction South became a particularly dangerous place for black men seeking to fully exercise their new found freedom and patriarchal privileges.

In *Marrow of Tradition* Chesnutt addresses the sociopolitical realities of African Americans, centering his narrative particularly on the struggles of African American men against Anglo male dominance. Encouraged by the post-Civil War election of some African American politicians in southern states with large black populations, African Americans began establishing black churches and schools within their communities. With a new growing confidence, black men could construct their masculinity vis-à-vis Anglo

definitions of manhood; African American men appropriated the language of the American founding fathers and the Constitution, and "merged the language of the Declaration of Independence with the Constitution in staking out a claim to equal rights as citizens" (Foner 90). As African American men developed distinct ideas about the meaning of freedom, they were also determined to take advantage of the privileges of patriarchy, so that they could become heads of their households (an experience denied them in slavery), and leaders in their community and within the larger American society. In parallel, Southern white men, whose damaged sense of manhood had not fully recovered from losing the Civil War, could not accept this new South where black men held political offices. For their part, African American men were determined to hang onto their new found authority, even as the South refused to recognize the civil rights of its black citizens.

Post the Civil War, maintaining the Union, reviving Southern society, and ensuring its economic stability were clearly important national goals, and the economic hardship and social plight of African Americans often took back seat to task of cementing the Union[3]. In the battle between Republicans and Democrats for political control of the South, the North could not always be relied upon to defend the legal and political rights of black citizens. As Eric Foner explains:

> Unprecedented challenges confronted these new Reconstruction governments. In addition to the mammoth problems of society devastated by war and bankruptcy state treasuries, the governments had to deal with the consequences of emancipation while consolidating a political party that had not even existed in the region a year or two earlier. They faced opponents who monopolized the South's remaining wealth and political experience, denied the very legitimacy of the new regimes and their black voters, and proved quite willing to resort to violence to reassert their positions of power. Given the daunting problems faced by the Reconstruction government, their accomplishments were indeed remarkable. (161-62)

By the 1890s, the economic, social, and political advancement of African Americans infuriated those white Southerners who viewed the new interracial democracy as an "anathema".[4] Many Southern states began implementing "White Supremacy"[5] campaigns in order to overthrow officially elected Republican politicians—black and white. Predominantly African American communities—led by elected African Americans—were hit hard by this reversion back to old South of outright inequality. Blacks struggled not just for legal and political recourse against the intimidation of elected black officials by white Southerners, but also against blatant discriminatory laws implemented in southern states. As Foner explains, the failure of Reconstruction was the North's inability to facilitate the full integration of its black citizens into Southern society. I would add that the South's implementation of Jim Crow laws heightened the exigency of the color line, and by extension, increased anxieties concerning black masculinity for both blacks and whites. For white Southern men, black men could only be perceived as "boys" and deemed outside Anglo definitions of masculinity. In parallel, black men were determined to prove their manhood and the humanity of their race. Southern white opposition to the freedman's new found independence outside of the authority of white masters would prove dangerous for black men, who became the scapegoat for white Southern male feelings of inadequacy. Decades after slavery, it was clear, as W. E. B. Du Bois stated, that the "problem of the twentieth century is the problem of the color-line"—race not only mattered during Reconstruction in the South, it became central to all sociopolitical discourses. Chesnutt clearly understood its centrality in Southern life and psyche. Through *Marrow of Tradition* he exposes the South's obsession with race, and offers his solution for peaceful cohabitation between blacks and

whites on southern soil. This Chesnutt insists would begin with Anglo recognition of their shared heritage with blacks, and more significantly, acknowledge the arbitrariness of their idea of race and of using race as a means of constructing difference.

While *Marrow of Tradition* certainly centers its storyline on race, it is nonetheless more than just a "race" novel. Indeed, the power of the novel lies in its exposition of the interstices of race, gender, more specifically masculinity, and class. Chesnutt's insertion of class and education as important aspects of the discourses on race allows for a critique of the myopic Southern interpretation of race as a signifier of intellect or gentility. In fact, Chesnutt argues, that if white Southerners would let go of past racial distinctions, then they would recognize commonalities between the educated elite of both races, who, he believed should rightly lead the South and create a more just society for all. In engaging the racialized political discourses of its time, Chesnutt exposes the Southern white male effort to aggrandize Anglo masculinity and claim that the white men are by nature imbued with innate leadership qualities that equates to a right to govern and lead. In *Marrow of Tradition* Chesnutt challenges such white assertions through an analysis of an actual historical incident, the Wilmington, North Carolina, race riots of 1898. He fictionalizes this episode of Southern history in *Marrow of Tradition* and translates Wilmington into the fictional town of Wellington.

In August 1898, Alex Manly, the editor of an African American newspaper, the *Wilmington Daily Record*, published an article in response to an earlier article in the white newspaper, the *Wilmington Messenger*, which pronounced lynching as a necessary and justifiable means of protecting the sanctity of white womanhood. In his editorial piece, Manly challenged the very notion of the purity of white womanhood—particularly

working class white women; he argued that black "experiences among poor white people in the country teaches us that women of that race are not any more particular in the matter of clandestine meetings with colored men than the white men with the colored women."[6] Chesnutt clearly concurred with Manly's portrayal of poor whites and with the article's implication of the lax morality of working class whites, who, as he argues in *Marrow of Tradition*, have more in common with poor blacks than they do middle-class whites. Manly's article, clearly written for an African American audience, was seized as an opportunity for Wilmington whites to curtail black freedoms. Hence, white newspapers reprinted the article and, thus, broadened its readership to Wilmington's white community, which was predictably outraged.

In November 10, 1898, a Democratic politician, Colonel Alfred Moore Waddell, a champion of North Carolina's "White Supremacy" campaign, stirred up a white mob that burned Manly's newspaper office and catalyzed a greater Wilmington insurrection. After the riots, Waddell "assumed mayorship of Wilmington and served in that capacity until 1905" (McCoury). Wilmington's African American community was terrorized and some were killed in the ensuing confrontations between blacks and whites. According to contemporary African American accounts of the riots, "the mob burned the newspaper's office and incited a bloody race riot in the city. By the end of the week, at least fourteen black citizens were dead,[7] and much of the city's black leadership had been banished. This massacre further fueled an ongoing statewide disfranchisement campaign designed to crush black political power" (Larson). In his fictional recounting of this incident in *Marrow of Tradition*, Chesnutt changes Manly's newspaper to the fictional African American newspaper called, "The Afro-American Banner," and the editor, Manly,

becomes the fictional editor, Barber. In using an actual race incident, Chesnutt not only seeks to uncover the "truth" of the matter of that event, but also to use this moment to reveal the heroism of African American men as they attempted to protect their homes and family. Chesnutt appears to argue that the article reflects black male understanding and adherence to the same principles of masculinity that white Southern men assumed were their male prerogative.

The Anglo model of masculinity was also embraced by black leaders, such as Frederick Douglass, who believed once white men recognized that black men shared similar values, whites would eventually recognize black men as equals. However, by the 1890s, he had become disappointed with Reconstruction; his idealistic vision of a democratic bi-racial America, envisioned in *Heroic Slave*, had faded into a distant dream. He recognized that many of the aspirations of freed blacks would remain unfulfilled and "dry up like a raisin in the sun." In writing *Marrow of Tradition,* Chesnutt ostensibly attempts to revive those withering dreams by repeating what Douglass had attempted decades earlier—to emulate the success of Harriet Beecher Stowe's *Uncle Tom's Cabin* to influence, and ultimately steer, American discourses on race and national discussions concerning the future of blacks within American society. Thus, picking up the mantle from his literary forefather, Frederick Douglass,[8] Chesnutt recognized the political accomplishment of Stowe's novel and sought to replicate the nineteenth-century author's socio-political coup.

As delineated in chapter 1, Stowe's characterization of African Americans laid the foundations not only for American representations of blackness, but also for the literary and cultural discourses on African American masculinity. Hence, I enter *Marrow of*

Tradition through the doors of *Uncle Tom's Cabin* as it were. I am particularly interested in Chesnutt's representation of African American male characters in relation to Stowe's two central black male characters, Uncle Tom, and the mulatto, George Harris. I also read a narrative connection between *Marrow of Tradition* and Douglass's *Heroic Slave,* which, I believe, in turn, reflects how Chesnutt's work seemingly builds a bridge between the virulent anger of Delany's novel, *Blake,* and the assimilationist tone and vision of black/white fraternal bond of Douglass's novella. Indeed, as I began in Chapter One, I trace black male repudiation of Stowe's hero, Uncle Tom, to Delany's protagonist, Blake, and Douglass's hero, Madison Washington, and now to Chesnutt's central character, Dr. Miller and his "darker" parallel, Josh Green. In fact, I would argue that, not only do these characters represent two models of black heroism, they also parallel Douglass's and Delany's heroes. Josh Green can be said to mirror Henry Blake's black male anger and separatist ideology, and Dr. Miller the reflection of Madison Washington's tempered black male anger and belief in the possibility of a fraternal bond between white and black men who would labor together to build a stronger America. As I will delineate, Chesnutt's vision of black masculinity complicates the binaries between the black assimilationist and black separatist ideologies.

My argument implies that *Marrow of Tradition* demonstrates what I believe to be the historical battle between African American male writers and Stowe. The result is a triangular relationship between black male writers and the white female author; in this case, Chesnutt's novel challenges Stowe's *Uncle Tom's Cabin*, while also in conversation with Douglass's *The Heroic Slave*. Hence, I read *Marrow of Tradition* as another example of African American male signifying (re)vision of *Uncle Tom's Cabin*;

Chesnutt challenges Stowe's portrayal of black masculinity represented by her titular hero, Uncle Tom, and the mulatto hero, George Harris, to offer his own historicized visions of black masculinity through Josh Green and Dr. Miller. Indeed, my thesis enters into conversations began by literary scholars such as Eric Sundquist and William L. Andrews, and concurs that discourses on race and masculinity in *Uncle Tom's Cabin* inform Chesnutt's discussions of American definitions of masculinity, and by extension, also informs Chesnutt's examination of the interplay between race, gender, and class in post-Reconstruction South.

I also argue that Chesnutt's examination of masculinity necessarily explores the relationship between black masculinity and white masculinity—as one is defined against the other. He employs the Anglo definition of masculinity, which was often constructed in antithesis to black lack, to assert that black men could, and did, adhere to principles of masculinity, just as white men were indeed capable of the savagery they ascribed to black men. In his analysis of masculinity, Chesnutt also defines black and white masculinity in relation to the feminine—as represented by the two female protagonists—the white, Olivia Carteret, and the mulatta, Janet Miller. His characterization of the women however is narrow; clearly their main purpose is to advance the male narratives. The female storyline provides the sentimental drama for Chesnutt's otherwise male-centered narrative. He employs the feminine genre of sentimentalism, but privileges the masculine, even as he depicts the feminine space, and female characters, as the location in which, and vehicles through which, black and white men can achieve reconciliation. However, in order to realize this camaraderie, Chesnutt insists that Anglo men must first acknowledge the real reason behind their violent oppression of African American men, who, like them,

aspired to becoming self-reliant, maintaining family stability, achieving economic success, and participating in local and national politics (Foner 81). Chesnutt also wanted to prove that certain models of masculinity are also expressions of different classes. Hence, his protagonist, Dr. Miller, the educated mulatto, clearly embodies bourgeois masculine gentility similar to that of the white character, Major Carteret—a clear contrast to the darker Josh Green, who personifies working class hypermasculinity similar to the white character Captain McBane.

The black character, Josh Green, clearly represents the oppressed and uneducated poor black male. We are first introduced to Josh Green through the critical eye of the bourgeois, Dr. Miller:

> A huge negro, covered thickly with dust, crawled off one of the rear trucks unobserved ... Miller who had seen the man from the car window, had noticed a very singular thing. As the dusty tramp passed the rear coach, he cast toward it a glance of intense ferocity. ... With awakened curiosity Miller followed the direction of the negro's glance and saw that it rested upon a window where Captain McBane sat looking out (*Marrow* 59).

Green's physical presence matches the menacing ferocity of his glare on the unsuspecting white passenger, Captain McBane. As we learn, Green has reasons to view McBane with murderous "concentrated hatred" (*Marrow* 59). The narrator explains that when Josh Green was a boy, McBane with fellow KKK members had marched onto the Green's property and shot Green's father right outside of his house. Knowing that even a black male boy would not be spared by the white mob, Green's mother instructed the boy to hide in the bushes; from his hiding place the little boy watched helpless as the white supremacists lay siege to the Green's property and McBane shot his father. This traumatic experience therefore motivates Josh Green's desire to avenge his father's murder, but even more paramount, he wants justice for his mother, whose experience

with the KKK's murder of her husband so traumatizes her that she declines into madness.[9] Green's inability to restore his mother's sanity, added to the fact that she wanders the streets with her madness shamefully on display, affects his sense of manliness. In a way he is doubly unmanned—as a boy he was helpless against the KKK attack, and as a man lacks the skills needed to rehabilitate his mother back into the community rather than living on the fringes. He therefore pours his energy into planning ways to avenge his parents, and ways to challenge whites through violent confrontation. The opportunity for Green to take up arms against what he believed to be white wanton attacks on the black community of Wellington does finally present itself during the race riots, as I will later delineate. Green leads the black male community in armed conflict against white men. In contrast to Josh Green, Miller represents the middle-class man who maintains control of his emotions, refusing to allow his passion to override civility.

Having introduced Josh Green as the darker shadow of Dr. Miller, Chesnutt uses the race riot to further define the differences between the two black male characters and to complicate otherwise easy definitions of heroism. The riot presents a moment for both Green and Miller to make ideological decisions about their place as men within their communities; predictably, the two men interpret their roles leading their community differently. Once the white mob decides to march on the black community, Josh Green immediately steps in to lead the black community into armed conflict. He asks that the more educated Dr. Miller join him to lead the fight. Miller considers joining, but in the end, decides instead to help the weakened and care for the wounded. I should note that Chesnutt does not allow for the reader to dismiss Dr. Miller as a coward; he provides us insight into Miller's reasoning to illustrate the difficulty in Miller's decision not to

actually fight in the riot: "It was an agonizing moment. He was no coward, morally or physically. Every manly instinct urged him to go forward and take up the cause of these leaderless people, and, if need be, to defend their lives and their rights with his own—but to what end?" (*Marrow* 282). Indeed, Miller "feels shame" that he does not accompany the other black men, once he senses the escalation of the violent conflict, he tries to evade the rioting mob and return home to protect his wife and child, which for him, takes precedence over the larger confrontation between black and white.

In pairing Josh Green with Dr. Miller, Chesnutt alleges that, in the southern battle between the races, for African-American men to fight is to risk annihilation, thus the choice to find common grounds with whites produces more lasting impact. I find Michelle Taylor's analysis of Chesnutt's short story "The Doll" as insightful and applicable for interpreting Chesnutt's contrasting of Green and Miller. Taylor explains that "Chesnutt trades the negative masculine narrative of violence for the traditional patriarchal narrative of family protection and civic responsibility ..." (211); and in keeping with this argument, I suggest that for Chesnutt, Josh Green's flaw is that he is consumed by hate, and, thus will eventually self-ignite and burn out—his passion simply cannot last. Miller—the personification of genteel masculinity— appears more in control of his emotions and thus able to overcome baser instincts and endure oppression without succumbing to violence. We might ask, which vision of manhood—forbearance versus armed resistance, non-violence versus challenging the status quo by any means necessary, does Chesnutt privilege, if any? Chesnutt appears torn between the two representations of black heroism—as if caught between the legacies of Delany and Douglass. Perhaps, as the narrator explains, Chesnutt believes that ultimately, the middle-

class educated elite should take on the responsibility of uplifting the race, and thus bring up their working poor brothers with them. This, and not violence, would achieve social, political, and economic gains for the freed people. Certainly, Miller believes that the advancement of blacks depended on educated professionals such as himself returning to the South to serve their communities:

> He had been strongly tempted to leave the South, and seek a home for his family and a career for himself in the freer North, where antagonism was less keen, or at least less oppressive. ... But his people had needed him, and he had wished to help then, and had sought by means of this institution to contribute to their uplifting. (*Marrow* 51)

The difference between Miller and Green, Chesnutt argues, is that the actions of one are productive, while the actions of the other prove counterproductive; Green's violence only serves to justify oppressive white policies, while Miller's efforts build a self-sufficient community. Still, what does it mean, at heart, that in his search for an acceptable black heroism, Chesnutt kills off the militant Josh Green, leaving Dr. Miller center stage on the moral high ground? Is Chesnutt's black male heroism, like Stowe's, one that is self-sacrificing? Why sacrifice Josh Green for an assimilationist vision of racial harmony, as if the two visions of black masculinity could not coexist?

In contrasting Josh Green and Dr. Miller, Chesnutt explores the dilemma of black heroism, just as Stowe attempted in her juxtaposition of George Harris and Uncle Tom. I read Josh Green as Chesnutt's signifying (re)vision of Stowe's Christian hero, Uncle Tom. In fact, Josh Green's physical description as a "black giant" (*Marrow* 112) alludes to Uncle Tom's "broad-chested" manliness. Unlike Uncle Tom, however, Green exerts his manly strength to take charge of his destiny (rather than leaving it in the hands of others). He eschews the philosophy of Christian acceptance and forbearance and preaches

instead a secular ideology of equal but separate lives for black and white Wellington communities. Josh Green speaks thoughts which Uncle Tom dared not even contemplate when he rebuffs Dr. Miller's plea for calm and moderation: "ef a nigger wants to get down on his marrow-bones, an' eat dirt, and call 'master,' he's a good nigger, dere's room fer him. But I ain't no w'ite folks' nigger, I ain.' I don call no white man marster (*Marrow* 113). Chesnutt thus replaces Uncle Tom's religiosity with Josh Green's seething anger; if Green has a religion, it is that of the Old Testament eye-for-an-eye philosophy that refuses to accept Dr. Miller's New Testament Christian mantra of "bless them that curse us, and do good to them that despitefully use us" (*Marrow* 113). Angered by Miller's conciliatory tone of loving one's enemy, Green asserts that he finds the act of forgiving all too one-sided, with blacks doing the forgiveness and "De w'ite folks don' forgive nothing de niggers does" (*Marrow* 113). This concept of forgiveness, ascribed to Uncle Tom by Stowe, clearly infuriates Josh Green, whose sense of manhood demands that blacks respond to white violence with forcefulness.

Green's speech is also reminiscent of Tom's final Christian speech to Legree. As Legree unloads his contempt for Tom's Christian faith and whips him to death, the black slave simply looked up to his master saying "Mas'r, if you was sick, or in trouble, or dying, and I could save ye, I'd *give* ye my heart's blood; and if taking every drop of blood in this poor old body would save your precious souls, I'd give 'em freely, as the Lord gave His for me" (*UTC* 410). Incensed by the fact that, even after all the beating, not only does Uncle Tom still insist he knows nothing of the whereabouts of the two escaped female slaves, but that he continues to proselytize to Legree. With what appears to be his last breadth, Uncle Tom again looks upon his master saying "I forgive ye, with

all my soul!" (*UTC* 411). In contrast, Josh Green practices the avenging angel Old Testament eye-for-an-eye philosophy. As he leads the black men into battle, even as he is cognizant of the fact that the white men were better armed, he declares their actions as heroic expressions of their manhood:

> Boys! exclaimed Josh, 'men! – fear nobody but men would do w'at you have done, — the day gone 'g'inst us. We kin see ou' finish; but fer my part, I ain't gwine ter leave dis worl' without takin' a w'ite man 'long wid me, an' I sees my man right out yonder waitin',— I be'n waitin' fer him twenty years, be he won' have ter wait fer me mo' 'n 'bout twenty seconds. Eve'y one er you pick yo man! We'll open do', an' we'll give some w'ite men a chance ter be sorry de ever started this fuss! (*Marrow* 308)

Josh Green's rhetoric of masculinity displays his leadership quality that surely defines him as heroic, even if he dies during battle—or precisely because he dies fighting for a cause. Although, he is no Christian martyr, he is willing to sacrifice himself for his community and for his belief in his right to live freely and without fear of oppression. For Green, to fight the enemy is to be a man, to run from those that challenge your very existence is weakness; he therefore chooses to die a man, rather than live emasculated by white men.

In the tradition of black Messiah, Green is willing to die that others might be free; ironically, even as he eschews the Christian stoicism of Uncle Tom, he too can be viewed as a redemptive figure. We could certainly argue that the two men reflect different visions of black heroism—one of feminized masculinity, and the other, of radical hyper-masculinity. This martyr-like quality becomes even more evident when we compare Green's death scene to that of Uncle Tom's. That is, I find a correlation between Uncle Tom's final scene—the whipping scene—and Josh Green's death scene. Both black male bodies appear larger than life, with death presented not as an end but as a euphoric

transcendent moment: “Josh Green, the tallest and biggest of them all, had not apparently been touched. Some of the crowd paused involuntary admiration of this black giant, famed on the wharves for his strength, sweeping down upon them, a smile upon his face, his eyes lit up with a rapt expression which seemed to take him out of mortal ken” (*Marrow* 309). Compare this scene to Uncle Tom’s death scene: “[he] began to draw his last breath with long, deep inspiration; and his broad chest rose and fell, heavily. The expression of his face was that of a conqueror ... and with a smile he fell asleep” (*UTC* 417). In both narratives, the white gaze is transfixed upon both black male bodies—one in “admiration” and the other in “awe.” Both characters accept the inevitability of death, but Uncle Tom dies helplessly, beaten to death by his white master. In contrast, Josh Green, even while in the throes of death as the “shower of lead” pummels him, continues fighting until he “buried his knife to the hilt in the heart of his enemy” (*Marrow* 309). What is also noteworthy about this moment is the neutral narrative tone as the narrator describes this final confrontation between Josh Green and his enemy, Captain McBane: “one of the two dies as the fool dieth. Which was it, or was it both?” (*Marrow* 309). It neither celebrates nor downplays Green’s “heroic” end. The narrator continues “‘Vengeance is mine’” saith the Lord, and it had not been left to Him. But they that do violence must expect to suffer violence” (*Marrow* 309). In the fact that McBane and Green eliminate another, I therefore surmise through the demise of both characters, Chesnutt creates the space for a bourgeoning black masculinity that acknowledges the past without being consumed by it. Miller’s and not Josh Green’s ideology is left to carry the narrative to its resolution. Ironically, the notion of violence begetting violence

contradicts Stowe's argument; Uncle Tom dies violently even as he had embraced a peaceful coexistence with his fellow man.

I would also argue that not only does the contrast between Uncle Tom and Josh Green reveal the interplay between *Marrow of Tradition* and *Uncle Tom's* Cabin, but that Chesnutt's novel also represent his indirect conversation with Douglass's signifying revision—*The Heroic Slave*. That is, if we take the argument another step further, Dr. Miller, with his eloquence, and Josh Green, with his radicalism, can be viewed as the two halves of Douglass's fictional hero, Madison Washington. For example, Green's declaration: "I'd rather be a dead nigger any day dan a live dog!" (*Marrow* 284) is reminiscent of Madison Washington's pronouncement: "*Liberty* I will have, or die in the attempt to gain it" (*Heroic Slave* 302). Even though, Green lacks the eloquence of Madison Washington—his "liberty" speech is less evocative of the revolutionary founding fathers—his declaration of his inalienable human rights certainly echoes familiar American foundational ideology. Likewise, Chesnutt's vision of the new middle-class Dr. Miller echoes Stowe's mulatto hero George Harris—the literate slave with the ability to rely on his intellect to outwit whites in his escape from slavery. Although George Harris's escape is also achieved through what Stowe considers "Anglo anger"—blacks being innately faithful—she tempers this rage by domesticating and Christianizing this irreligious masculinity. The novel's final vision of George Harris shows him at home—surrounded by mother, wife, sister, and children—as he prepares to begin a Christian mission to Africa. Chesnutt returns to Stowe's domesticated mulatto; his post-emancipation mulatto hero represents restrained civility.

Dr. Miller refuses to disrupt Southern social status quo, preferring instead to exist unobtrusively with whites. For example, he is uncomfortable with Barber's inflammatory newspaper article, believing it will only destabilize the uneasy and fragile co-existence between Wellington's blacks and whites:

> He had felt, as at the time of its publication, that the editorial was ill-advised. It could do no good, and was calculated to arouse the animosity of those whose friendship, whose tolerance, at least, was necessary and almost indispensable to colored people. They were living, at the best, in a sort of armed neutrality with the whites; such a publication, however serviceable elsewhere, could have no other effect in Wellington than to endanger this truce and defeat the hope of a possible future friendship. The right of free speech entitled Barber to publish it; a larger measure of common-sense would have him withhold it. (*Marrow* 277-8).

As he predicted, Barber's article ignites the smoldering embers of racial tension and helps to catapult Wellington into a race riot. Try as he might to remain within the margins, Dr. Miller finds he is unable to extricate himself from the brewing social unrest and from Josh Green's demands that he join the black community in the battle against white supremacy. He is eventually pulled into the very epicenter of the storm.

By fictionalizing Manly's article in the African American newspaper, "The Afro-American Banner," Chesnutt exposes the political machinations of white men unwilling to share political power with people they considered inferior. Speaking through the fictional editor, Barber, Chesnutt continues Manly's "bold discussion of lynching and its causes" (*Marrow* 85) to argue that the white argument for lynching was not really about protecting white femininity, but more about controlling black men. Chesnutt revises the timeline of the article and ensuing riots, so his fictional racial upheaval is not directly attributable to the publication of Barber's article. Instead he places the article in the hands of the Anglo-male leaders of the Wellington white community: General Belmont, Major

Carteret, and Captain McBane. The three self-proclaimed "stewards of the South" exploit the article to exacerbate an unrelated racial incident and claim that the article encouraged black male sexual aggression against white women. Therefore, they maintain, it is their duty to police the black community and curtail such wanton actions. The reality is that many white Southerners longed for a return to pre-Civil War South where Anglo Saxon male authority is incontestable. Hence the very idea of black men writing openly to challenge white assertions, such as with the Barber article, enraged white men such as Major Carteret. Predictably, the major decides to retaliate by penning his righteous indignation in the white newspaper he owns. The tension between white and black escalates and eventually leads into the race riots. Chesnutt however, disputes the veracity of white claims; he clears the miasmic cloud of Southern post-Reconstruction racist discourse to reveal that, behind the smokescreen, is a determination to erase all socio-political gains made by blacks during Reconstruction and return Southern society to pre-Civil War realities, where "everybody knew their place."

Indeed, Carteret continued to live in his very own microcosm of the "glorious" South where white men ruled as masters over their black male loyal servants. Carteret creates a household surrounded by wonderful Uncle Tom-like devoted black servants who are grateful for the privilege of continuing to serve their white masters long after emancipation. Chesnutt's depiction of Carteret's loyal servants, Jerry and Mammy Jane, is reminiscent of Stowe's black archetypes. I would go as far as reading them as Uncle Tom's "children," who, although no longer physically bound by slavery, are nonetheless limited by their own inability to remove the shackles of oppression. These "old-time Negroes" illustrate how, even after emancipation, some African Americans continued to

accept the prevailing hegemonic assumptions concerning the American hierarchy of race. Jerry tacitly accepts white constructions of social and racial hierarchy, even as he is cognizant of its racist implications. For example, during the exuberant celebration of the birth of the Carteret's heir, the Major passes over Jerry's outstretched hand, which, instead of a convivial handshake, receives a cigar. Although disappointed, the black male servant nonetheless accepts the gift with gratitude, "aware that under ordinary circumstances the major would not have shaken hands with the white workingmen, to say nothing of negroes; and he had merely hoped that in the pleasurable distraction of the moment the major might also overlook the distinction of color" (*Marrow* 29). Through Jerry, Chesnutt illustrates the malignant and long lasting effect of slavery on the black psyche. Jerry's acquiescence to the racial status quo reveals an internalization of white perception of blackness that has morphed into self-hatred. He suffers from arrested development and appears more a boy than a man. Jerry's fractured psyche is fully revealed in his desire literally to transform himself from black to white with the aid of skin-lightening products. The grotesque result leaves him looking like a patchwork quilt. Even the racist General Belmont comprehends the horrible implications of Jerry's new look:

> What the h—ll is the matter with you, Jerry? Your black face is splotched with brown and yellow patches, and your hair shines as though you had fallen head-foremost into a firkin of butter. …I can see the signs of decay on your face, and your hair will fall out in a week or two at least,—mark my words! (*Marrow* 243-44)

Jerry's idea of self-improvement is not intellectual growth; instead, he imagines he must erase his blackness in order to gain acceptance in an Anglo dominated society. The implication of this viewpoint is an acceptance of the white supremacist assertion that

if blacks are to live amongst whites, they must do so knowing their place. Hence Major Carteret is proud of his black servant and tells the other white men that Jerry is not "one of your new negroes, who think themselves as good as white men, and want to run the government" (*Marrow* 87). Jerry, as the chapter title put itis the "white man's nigger" because according to Carteret, "he knows his place—he is respectful, humble, obedient, and content with the face and place assigned to him by nature" (*Marrow* 87). Of course, as we have seen, Jerry is not truly content with the "face" assigned to him by nature. His failure to employ more meaningful methods to address white racism supports the middle-class black argument for racial uplift.[10] The narrator weighs in to declare that Jerry confirms white supremacist assumptions of Major Carteret's Anglo superiority: "more pathetic than Jerry's efforts to escape from the universal doom of his race was his ignorance that even if he could, by some strange alchemy, bleach his skin and straighten his hair, there would still remain, underneath it all, only the unbleached darky— the ass in the lion's skin (*Marrow* 244-5).[11] Jerry, as the narrator implies, needs a psychological makeover, rather than a physical one; his very existence supports Anglo belief in the need for the paternalistic oversight of blacks by white men. By illustrating the unhealthy relationship between Major Carteret and his black servant, Chesnutt confronts a reality of Southern society that must be eradicated to create a space for the evolution of a new just and fair society. Hence Chesnutt also kills off Jerry, whose crying out to his white master cannot be heard amidst the roar of the ensuing riot, and the white mob returns his white handkerchief of peace with rounds of bullets. Having incited to white mob to riot, Major Carteret loses control of them and thus loses his faithful servants Mammy Jane and Jerry,

both killed by the white mob who can no more differentiate between a "white man's nigger" and an uppity one.

If Jerry's self-hatred confirms southern white male racial and masculine superiority, then Dr. Miller can be said to unsettle southern racial social hierarchies. Major Carteret personifies the post-Civil War southern male sense of emasculation. His family has lost its material wealth and, further undermining his sense of masculinity, his ancestral home is bought by the black middle-class educated professional, Dr. Miller. Added to his anxiety is the fact Carteret is childless; hence, the eventual birth of a son reenergizes his passion to restore southern racial hierarchy and reawaken Anglo pride. The son is the jewel in the crown of Carteret's southern male pride. The son and heir is however sickly—a metaphor for the dissipating Southern male authority. On one of the occasions that baby Dodie Carteret falls ill (he is unable to breathe), Carteret's family doctor, Dr. Price, calls on his Northern colleague, Dr. Burns, a renowned surgeon, to operate on the baby. On the invitation from Dr. Burns—who is also Miller's mentor—Miller is convinced by his wife to assist with operating on baby Dodie. Perhaps predictably, Dr. Miller never makes it beyond the hallway; Carteret finds it inconceivable for an African American to enter his house as an invited guest, and even worse, to operate on his white son. Lacking understanding of the deep roots of Southern racism, the Northern doctor refuses to operate on the baby unless Miller assists him. In the tense moment, Dr. Price attempts to explain the complexity of the interaction between races in the South: "'Dr. Burns does not quite appreciate Major Carteret's point of view ... This is not with him an unimportant matter or a mere question of prejudice, or even of personal tastes. It is a sacred principle, lying at the very root of our social order, involving the

purity and prestige of our race'" (*Marrow* 72). Here, Chesnutt seems to pose the question, how far will Carteret go to maintain southern social norms, when the future of southern men is on the line? Carteret characteristically defaults to his Anglo male sense of superiority, imagining that the Northern doctor would in fact privilege some essentialist natural connection between "white men" over whatever connections he might have with a black man. He thus implores the northern doctor to forego his assistance from Dr. Miller saying: "I beg your pardon for my heat, and throw myself upon your magnanimity, as between white men" (*Marrow* 73). To this assumption, Dr. Burns retorts "I am a gentleman, sir, before I am a white man" (*Marrow* 73) before he finally capitulates to Carteret's irrational demands. In order to shield his protégé from Carteret's bigotry, the Northern doctor lies to Dr. Miller, claiming he had already successfully operated on Dodie. Unfortunately, as Dr. Miller departs, he discovers the truth from one of Carteret's black servants. As to be expected, Dr. Miller takes the rebuff "with a corresponding shock. He had the heart of a *man*, the sensibilities of a *cultivated gentleman*; the one was sore, the other deeply wounded" (*Marrow* 77 [italics mine]). Here, as repeated throughout the novel, Chesnutt posits class as the marker of the character of a man. By comparing his male characters, Chesnutt re-examines black manhood and white manhood to refute Anglo perceptions of their innate racial superiority. Dr. Miller's masculine sensibilities can therefore be seen as informed by class rather than by race; the *cultivated man* walks out of the Carteret's home seemingly unshaken, but the *man* returns home unable to hide the wound of white racism. For the second time in the novel, Miller must bear the sting of racism, which he believes is but an arbitrary method of categorizing men.

Chesnutt demonstrates the interstices of race and class as he explores "authentic" manhood for both his Anglo and African American male characters. While many scholars address the racial component of Chesnutt's novel, some miss class as an integral aspect of understanding Chesnutt's vision of black masculinity. As Riche Richardson notes, Chesnutt's portrayal of the two black male characters, Josh Green and Dr. Miller, "demonstrates an interest in exploring the impact of race and class in shaping a range of models of black masculinity in the late nineteenth century, an aspect of his work that needs more critical recognition" (28). To illustrate how class informs race, Chesnutt employs the historical trope of the railroad to signify both literal and metaphorical lines of class and racial divide. The train car coaches are divided along Jim Crow lines, where black and white must be separated, which means, unfortunately for the professional, middle-class Dr. Miller, that race supersedes class. Notwithstanding his education and class, Miller must abide by the laws of Jim Crow and acquiesce to the white conductor's insistence that he move to the squalid coaches designated for blacks only. When challenged by the Northern doctor, the conductor asserts his authority:

> "The law gives me the right to remove him by force. I can call on the train crew to assist me, or on the other passengers. If I should choose to put him off the train entirely, in the middle of a swamp, he would have no redress — the law so provides. If I did not wish to use force, I could simply switch this car off at the next siding, transfer the white passengers to another, and leave you and your friend in possession until you were arrested and fined or imprisoned. (*Marrow* 53-4)

Chesnutt proves the ridiculous length that southerners go to in order to maintain a socially constructed hierarchy of race. Dr. Burns decides to leave the whites-only coach and move with Dr. Miller to the blacks-only coach, only for the conductor to insist that "'white passengers are not permitted to ride the colored car'" (*Marrow* 55). Always the

peace keeper unwilling to resort to violence, Dr. Miller appeals to Dr. Burns to remain in the whites-only coach and he moves into the blacks-only one.

The illogical rationale of Jim Crow is further highlighted by the fact that the coarse white male, McBane, not only has rights to the privilege of whiteness, but is also able to enter and sit in the blacks-only coach. No sooner had Dr. Miller settled into his blacks-only coach that McBane enters smoking a cigar and sits in the blacks-only coach. Dr. Miller attempts to have the conductor remove McBane, who refuses saying, "'I'll leave this car when I get good and ready, and that won't be until I've finished this cigar'" (*Marrow* 58). McBane does indeed have his way and is left not only to smoke his cigar, but to show his contempt for blacks, he spits the ends into the coach aisle. In this scene, Chesnutt contrasts the three men—Miller, Burns, and McBane—to illustrate how class and education connect Dr. Burns and Dr. Miller, rather than any "natural" connection between McBane and Burns. Chesnutt contrasts the middle-class professionals with McBane—who clearly represents the uneducated, southern white male with the trappings of new-found wealth. Class, and not race, Chesnutt argues, should be that which divides, or connects men, as evident by Miller's musing as he steps off the train: "surely, if a classification of passengers on the trains was at all desirable, it might be made upon some more logical considerate basis than a mere arbitrary, tactless, and, by the very nature of things, brutal drawing of the color line (*Marrow* 61). Thusly, Chesnutt disrupts the preconceived notions of whiteness and blackness.

Captain McBane illustrates the barely concealed boorishness behind the veneer of the gentleman, and demonstrates how the privilege of whiteness and wealth can facilitate advancement in society. McBane, the son of a white slave overseer, had made his money

as a contractor of black convict labor hiring out black convicts for profit. The narrator explains that McBane "represented the aggressive, offensive element among the white people of the New South, who made it hard for a negro to maintain his self-respect or to enjoy even the rights conceded to colored men by Southern laws" (*Marrow* 57). In order to maintain his own sense of manhood, McBane forms his masculinity in opposition to black men. Because of his particular loathing of blacks, I read McBane as the Legree of *Marrow of Tradition*; indeed, he could be said to be the descendant of Legree. Chesnutt portrays him as unsympathetically as Stowe does Legree and with the same level of disdain for his class. Like Legree he perceives blacks as objects for his exploitation. His background from the poor white working class heightens his desire to prove his manhood and his hold on aggressively to his new station in society. We can therefore imagine that educated blacks such as Dr. Miller exacerbate his feelings of insecurity, which are alleviated by asserting his position as a white man. Indeed, McBane too recognizes that his whiteness does not necessarily provide him with the full privileges of the bourgeois Southern society. He is willing to climb his way into the white privileged class by any means necessary, as we see in his exploitation of the young and errant aristocratic Tom Delamere.

Chesnutt characterizes the next generation of the aristocratic Anglo males, Dodie Carteret and Tom Delamere, who will inherit the social political privileges of their forefathers, as lacking the physical or moral fitness for such positions. Dodie's frailty and Delamere's unmanliness also marks the offspring of the plantation classes as a dying breed, who have no place in the post-Civil War South. In fact, Tom Delamere represents corrupt manhood; Chesnutt's characterization of Delamere implies that a degeneracy of

the psyche as a result of inherited position, rather than merit. Tom Delamere stands to inherit his grandfather's wealth; however, young Delamere has already developed the lifestyle of a man of means and impatiently awaits the Uncle's death to inherit his money. Even his affection for his fiancé, Clara Pemberton, hinges on her handsome dowry. Not surprising, then, Delamere becomes an easy prey for the social aspirations of McBane. The aristocratic Delamere is no match for the ruthless social-climber McBane, who out cheats Delamere cheating in cards, the result of which is that the young Delamere owes him one thousand dollars after the game. McBane thus exploits the young man's vulnerability and "bluntly requested the latter to propose him for membership in the Clarendon Club" (157). The desperation of the young man to wriggle out of the uncomfortable situation leads him further into disgrace.

Chesnutt reverses Southern cultural perception of whiteness as an expression of class and gentility by contrasting the aristocratic Anglo male, Tom Delamere with his Uncle's loyal black male servant, Sandy Campbell. The black male servant is the young, white aristocrat Tom Delamere's doppelganger; in fact, Chesnutt merges Sandy Campbell and Tom Delamere until other characters cannot physically differentiate between the two men. Once in blackface, Delamere so convincingly mimics "blackness" (as I will later delineate) and so resembles Sandy Campbell, that even Sandy is convinced he has seen his own ghost. The similarity between the two men however is only physical; psychologically they inhabit different spectrums of the moral compass. Sandy represents ideals of manly propriety, loyalty, and perspicacity. In contrast, Tom Delamere is effete, self-centered, and lacks sound judgment. In fact, Delamere's physical attributes mirror his psychological corruption:

> Slender of medium height, with a small head of almost perfect contour, a symmetrical face, dark almost to swarthiness, black eyes which moved almost restlessly, curly hair of raven tint, a slight moustache, and small hands and feet…But no discriminating observer would have characterized his beauty as manly. It conveyed no impression of strength, but did possess a certain element, a feline rather than feminine, which subtly negativized the idea of manliness. (Chesnutt 15-16).

Chesnutt feminizes the aristocratic white male; Delamere's effete stature feminizes him and thus diminishes his masculinity. Chesnutt further degrades Delamere by using animal imagery. In effect, his "feline" nature foreshadows his moral descent.

He begins his downward spiral by squandering his allowance from his uncle, and then, in desperate need for more money to support his indolent life style, Tom Delamere convinces his uncle's servant, Sandy Campbell, to loan him his life's savings. When he loses Sandy's savings in a game of cards, he resorts to cheating to try to win back the money. When he is discovered, he is expelled from his social club. Inevitably, as the narrator explains, "when a man of good position, of whom much is expected, takes to evil courses, his progress is apt to resemble that of a well-bred woman who has started on downward path—the pace is all the swifter because of the distance which must be traversed to reach the bottom" (*Marrow* 165). Again Delamere's masculinity is minimized by the analogy of his fall as a woman's fall into dishonor. This fall from grace fails to reform Delamere; on the contrary, it seems to embolden him further into other reprehensible acts. He decides to amuse himself by disguising himself as Sandy and entering a cakewalk competition for African Americans. The connection between the minstrel show stage adaptations of *Uncle Tom's Cabin* and the cakewalk is certainly significant as I detail in chapter 4. The black caricatures of *Uncle Tom's Cabin* had become the stock of minstrel shows, and George Aiken's Uncle Tom play was, by the

1860s, a popular theatrical production that brought Stowe's coons, mammies, and piccaninnies to life for the entertainment of white audiences North and South. Eric Sundquist provides an in depth reading of the symbolism of the cakewalk,[12] but I am particularly interested in understanding Chesnutt's use of the cakewalk to both deconstruct racial signifiers and debunk the myth of Anglo superiority, particularly Anglo sense of masculinity. Tom Delamere's "coon" show with its exaggerated black dialect and buck dance is espied by Mr. Ellis, Tom Delamere's competition for Clara Pemberton's heart. Ellis, like everyone else, believes Sandy Campbell to be the cakewalk dancer and although puzzled by Sandy Campbell's uncharacteristic conduct, Ellis nonetheless assumes this as another example of the underlying weakness of blacks: "he would not have believed that a white man could possess two so widely varying phases of character; but as to negroes, they were yet a crude undeveloped race, and it was not safe to make predictions concerning them. No one could tell at what moment the thin veneer of civilization might peel off and reveal the underlying savage" (*Marrow* 119). The irony that the winner of the cakewalk performance—the supposed "savage"—is none other than a white aristocratic "gentleman" is not lost on the reader. As he repeats throughout the novel, Chesnutt insists that race does not reflect character; and more significantly, Tom Delamere's cakewalk prank, his gambling, and general disposition show an immaturity and need for constant libidinal gratification. He is a boy inhabiting the world of men—unwilling and unable to take on the responsibilities of a grown man.

Tom Delamere's "coon" show, is reminiscent of St. Clare's black slave's white-face minstrelsy as he attempts to imitate his master's manners. The irony here is that Delamere, a white man, is in disguise as a black man trying to imitate the manners of a

sophisticated white man; the apparent blurring between Tom Delamere and Sandy Campbell reflects the murkiness of race. Just as Stowe ridicules the pretentions of the black slave Adolph, Chesnutt ridicules white notions of race through his portrayal of Delamere. Once Delamere's whiteness has been seemingly erased, he becomes credible as a black man, precisely because he plays to the white audience's essentialist notions of blackness. This very same murkiness of race is explored through the female characters—Olivia Carteret and Janet Miller.

Although Chesnutt focuses his narrative on the tension between white and black masculinity, we cannot ignore the subplot centered on his black and white female characters. In *Marrow of Tradition,* Chesnutt observes how Southern men measure their manhood against their ability to protect the purity and sanctity of white womanhood. He questions the Reconstruction- era Southern male insistence that they had the right to protect their women from the moral and sexual degeneracy of black men. I should note that revisionist historians[13] and literary critics, however, now argue that, contrary to the outcry of Reconstruction era Southerners, white "male hysteria was not simply about rape or other affronts to white womanhood committed by black men; As Eric Sundquist has pointed out:[14]

> 'Negro Domination' did, in fact, threaten the manliness of the white southerner, though not in the way it was often represented. Male hysteria was not primarily about rape; it was about votes and the feared loss of white southern virility, which in turn sprang from the region's prolonged economic deterioration which had reached the stage of depression by the end of the century. Rape was the mask behind which disfranchisement was hidden, but it was part of the larger charade of plantation mythology that set out to restore southern pride and revive a paradigm of white manliness that the legacy of the war and the economic and political rise of blacks during Reconstruction had called seriously into question. (425)

Clearly the Wellington race riot is an example of Sundquist's overarching analysis of Southern male hysteria. By grounding his fiction in a historical incident, Chesnutt re-assesses the Wilmington race riot, to expose the underlying racialized political subterfuge behind what was previously explained as the Southern mission to address growing black criminality in Wilmington. He illustrates how under the guise of guarding against black degeneracy, whites could achieve the real goal of maintaining their racialized society. The narrator/Chesnutt explains that, "the negroes were taught that this is white man's country, and that the sooner they made up their minds to that fact, the better for all concerned" (*Marrow* 241). Chesnutt rejects the perception that the South rightly found ways of escaping the tyranny of the North and northern white Republican politicians, in order to wrestle control of Southern politics and stop their society sliding into corruption under African American leaders. He exposes Southern male subterfuge as a political dissimulation in the guise of social crisis—black men were not marauding rapists constantly on the prowl to molest white women.

To disprove deliberate Southern exaggerations about African-American lawlessness—constructed in order to disenfranchise black men—Chesnutt uses as the basis of his fiction an historical event that epitomizes Southern political exploitation of racial tensions for political gains. Chesnutt argues that by claiming the preservation of the purity of the white race, through defending the sanctity of white womanhood, white men could commit violence against black men with little or no consequences. In fact, blacks became the scapegoat for all social ills because, as the narrator explains, "suspicion was at once directed toward the negroes, as it always is when unexplained crime is committed in a Southern community" (*Marrow* 179). For example, in making Sandy Campbell, the

trusted loyal black servant, an exhibit of black male innate brutishness and tendency towards criminality, Captain Carteret confidently convinces the Wellington white community that "it is a murderous and fatal assault upon a woman of our race—upon our race in the person of its womanhood, its crown and flower. If such crimes are not punished with swift and terrible directives, the whole of white womanhood of the South is in danger" (*Marrow* 182). Although Carteret provides no real evidence to confirm Campbell's guilt in supposedly raping and killing Polly Ochiltree, he nevertheless charges him with the crime cognizant of the fact that the white community will find believable the assertion of black male innate criminality. The historical truth behind the speedy accusation and trial of Campbell the narrator explains as such:

> In the South, an obscure jealousy of the negro's progress, an obscure fear of the very equality so contemptuously denied, furnished a rich soil for successful agitation. Statistics of crime, ingeniously manipulated, were made to present a fearful showing against the negro. Vital Statistics were made to prove that he had degenerated from an imaginary standard of physical excellence which had existed under the benign influence of slavery. Constant lynchings emphasized his impotence, and bred everywhere a growing contempt for his rights. (238)

The accepted belief of Southern whites was that, as slaves, African Americans co-existed with whites because, under the paternalistic guidance of white masters, black savagery was suppressed and controlled. Many white Southerners believed the Anglo-Saxons were by nature a superior race. By contrast, Africans were an inferior race who needed policing or outright eradication if their "true nature" erupted and disrupted Southern civil society. Ironically, the women southern men sought to protect were also exploited by the men in order to establish their place in society or their sense of manhood. For example, Major Carteret uses his "wife's patrimony" to finance his newspaper and other businesses and set himself up as a leader within the community. He

also exploits his wife's emotional and physical response to her half-sister, Janet Miller, as a last resort to convince the northern Dr. Burns to operate on his son without the assistance of Dr. Miller. Indeed, Olivia Carteret will become integral to Carteret's desire to ensure the continuation of the Carteret male line, not just be providing him a male heir, but humbling herself to the mulatta half-sister she had hitherto rejected.

Janet Miller and her sister Olivia Carteret act as literal and metaphorical vessels to carry the black and white male narratives forward. Chesnutt's representation of female characters remains within the narrow confines of sentimentality. As Gunning laments:

> By the end of the *Marrow of Tradition*, women never rise above the surface of what is essentially a narrative closely determined by a masculine, interracial struggle over political rights: black and white men, though they squarely oppose each other, employ the same gendered vocabulary to dramatize their cause, a vocabulary that is ultimately based on a denial of black and white female subjectivity. (76)

I would argue that if we locate Chesnutt's novel (and characters) in the context of *Uncle Tom's Cabin*, then we can conclude that Chesnutt borrows Stowe's feminine sentimentality, but only as a rhetorical strategy to reconcile black and white men. That is, through Janet Miller and Olivia Carteret, Chesnutt literalizes the black/white common ancestor via the masculine line—their father, Merkell, whose very name hints at the murky lines between the two sisters, and ultimately, as Chesnutt appears to argue, between the two races. Hence, the uncanny resemblance between the two sisters unsettles both at every chance encounter; but, while one longs for an acknowledgment of a familial bond, the other is repulsed by the mirror image of herself reflected in the figure of a mulatta. In the body of the women, Chesnutt literalizes southern racial fears.

Chesnutt's revelation of the two sisters' parallel lives demonstrates Southern issues of inheritance and disinheritance between legitimate white offspring and the

"illegitimate" black offspring. Himself an African American man of Anglo and Negro blood with two white grandfathers, Chesnutt nonetheless experienced racial discrimination because of Southern one-drop rule. Julie Iromuanya notes how the novel reveals Chesnutt's understanding of *Brown versus Plessy*: "through inheritance ... one acquires property; in antebellum and post bellum America, the property of race is the greatest inheritance of all" (188). Janet Miller is the product of a secret, but nonetheless affectionate relationship and consequent secret marriage between Olivier Carteret's father, Merkell, and his African American servant, Julia Brown. Yet, right after his death, Polly Ochiltree, Merkell's sister in-law, ejects mother and daughter out of the Merkell home, steals Merkell's will and marriage certificate, and deprives the mulatta offspring of her rightful share of his estate. Ironically, in a reversal of fortunes, the disinherited Janet Miller and her husband buy the family home of Major Carteret, who is married to Janet's Anglo half-sister, Olivia. Janet Miller's return to Wellington, not as a member of the servant class, but as part of the middle-class, not only destabilizes the racialized social order, but—more significantly—adds to Major Carteret's already diminishing sense of manhood. The unacknowledged familial connection between Olivia Carteret and Janet Miller, and Carteret's anxieties about masculinity, eventually collide at the end of the novel.

As Sundquist observes, the pivotal moment in *Marrow of Tradition* begins with the death of the Miller's male child and the climatic request from Carteret to Miller to save the Carteret's last hope at continuing the family line. In the end, Chesnutt humbles the southern Anglo male into recognizing Dr. Miller, the southern African American male, not only as a man, but as his social equal. Chesnutt achieves the humility of the

white male via the dramatic emotional confrontation between the two sisters; first Olivia Carteret must acknowledge her kinship with Janet Miller and, confesses to disinheriting her sister, before the possibility of reconciliation. Coincidently, the loss of a child achieves the emotional connection between the Carterets and the Millers. Having lost her son through a stray bullet as she tries to escape the white mob, Janet Miller is distraught. As the Millers are overwrought by the death of their son and grieving, they are interrupted by Carteret who pleads to Dr. Miller to save his dying son, Dodie. Olivia Carteret desperate to save her child's life, pleads with Janet Miller to forgive the past and ask that her husband save her the dying son. Already consumed by grief for the loss of her son, Janet Miller erupts into anger at the white sister's audacity at now claiming kinship with her; she rejects the half-sister's embrace and acknowledgment: "I throw you back your father's name, your father's wealth, your sisterly recognition. I want none of them,— they are bought too dear! …But that you may know that a woman may be foully wronged, and yet may have a heart to feel, even for one who has injured her, you may have your child's life, if my husband can save it" (*Marrow* 329).

By presenting Janet Miller as willing to abstain from inflicting psychological pain on Olivia Carteret, Chesnutt ensures that we view her as the true example of compassion. Janet Miller is not embittered by a childhood of neglect and remains compassionate even as she discovers Olivia Carteret's collusion to disinherit her of half of the Merkell estate, not to mention that Carteret was the master-mind behind the race riots and indirectly responsible for the accidental death of her son. Through this act of mercy amidst personal grief, Chesnutt also implies the Southern white desire to return to the golden age of antebellum South not only affected blacks, but also impacted whites as they lost their

humanity. Hence he presents Anglo refusal to accept the humanity of blacks, deliberate amnesia in regards to kinship ties between blacks and whites, and violent reaction to African American freedom as damaging to Southern civil society. [15]

In a twist of fate, just as the black male line is extinguished, the frail white male line—as represented by *Dodie* Carteret—gasps for life; his survival and the continuity of the Carteret line are dependent upon the word of the black female. Dr. Miller leaves his wife to make the final decision as to whether vengeance or compassion will govern their actions. Janet Miller must decide whether to succumb to, or rise above, base emotions. Although the climax of the novel occurs with the dramatic exchange between the two sisters, certainly what is ultimately at stake is masculinity; the tragedy of the moment is arguably the loss of the African American male heir and the possibility of loss of the Anglo male heir. But what does it mean that the Miller's son is killed by a stray bullet and the healthy, black middle-class male line seemingly extinguished, and yet the weak white male line struggles for life, and his survival dependent upon black male intervention? Is the black male progeny the sacrificial lamb in the war between Anglo and African American men? Should we assume that African Americans must bear the burden of effecting reconciliation between blacks and whites? Or as Gunning surmises, should we conclude that "the feminization of whiteness ... in the body of her [Olivia's] child, and their utter dependence on Miller's skill reinstate black masculinity with a nobility that cannot be captured through violent resistance" (*Marrow* 74)? Miller becomes not just a doctor, but a man, his race becomes irrelevant when it is clear only he can save the Carteret child. Even though his hospital had been burned, his son killed, and the black bodies lay in the streets, Miller epitomizes genteel manliness and without

gloating accepts his wife's decision for him to operate on the dying Carteret child and possible save his life and the Carteret lineage. Racial harmony, or at least the possibility, is achieved. Miller is not so much a black man, as a true man.

Having offered two visions of black masculinity, via Josh Green and Dr. Miller, finally, Chesnutt leans towards the middle-class black masculinity as his vision of ideal heroism. Rather than completely reject Stowe's vision of black heroism, Chesnutt appears accept some of her premise that Christian forgiveness outweighs violence. However, if Uncle Tom's heroism is guided by Christian ideals, Dr. Miller's is informed not simply by such Christian ideals, but also by principles of bourgeois masculinity. Even in his darkest moment after the loss of his only child, Miller resists tumbling into the abyss of violence, and at the end of the novel he hurries to save the life of his enemy's only son. Racial harmony between black men and white men is achieved via the feminine. Chesnutt clearly recognizes the persuasive power of sentiment and the feminine, which Stowe had employed in her novel, and which he sought to emulate in order for his novel to achieve a similar success. Thus as *Uncle Tom's Cabin* contemplated an America without slavery, *Marrow of Tradition* imagines an America that truly lived up to its post-Civil War promises to blacks, as well as to the philosophical and political ideals upon which the American nation was founded. Decades later, Richard Wright's signifying (re)visions, *Uncle Tom's Children* and *Native Son*, will pick up where Douglass, Delany, and Chesnutt left off and offer his own visions of black masculinity vis-à-vis Stowe's vision of black masculinity and heroism.

Notes

[1] "With a clear conception of the difficult problems which confront the South, and yet with decided opinions where justice and wisdom lie, Mr. Chesnutt has constructed a story which sweeps the reader along to an end at once artistic and satisfying. In its dramatic qualities, as well as in theme, it bears a decided likeness to "Uncle Tom's Cabin." New York Press, Unsigned Review 2, November 1901, http://utc.iath.virginia.edu/africam/afrecca2t.html

[2] http://docsouth.unc.edu/southlit/chesnuttcolonel/bio.html.

[3] According to Foner, "when it came to the former slaves' continuing quest for land, however, Reconstruction governments took few concrete actions" (164). As black did not receive any assistance with purchasing land, "the hopes of the mass of the South's freed people for land of their own remained unfulfilled" (164).

[4] See Eric Foner's insightful explanation of the success and failure of Reconstruction in chapter six of *Forever Free*.

[5] Examples of the southern "White Supremacy" campaign by the Democratic Party were the Virginia Constitution Convention of 1901-1902 that reestablished white rule and disenfranchised large numbers of African Americans and working-class whites. Wilmington was another example of the White Supremacy campaign; its aim was to overthrow the legally elected white and black Republican politicians to replace them with more conservative white Democratic politicians.

[6] http://www.blackpast.org/?q=aah/wilmington-race-riot-1898

[7] As there was no official documentation of the riots, there are no exact number of how many black actually died during the riots. The numbers are simply garnered from writings of black eyewitness accounts who later retold the event.

[8] As his biographer, Chesnutt would certainly have been familiar with Douglass's life and writings and undoubtedly cognizant of Douglass's interactions with Stowe.

[9] See George E. Rutledge, "All Green with Epic Potential: Chesnutt goes to the *Marrow of Tradition* to Re-Construct America's Epic Body." *Charles Chesnutt Reappraised: Essays on the First Major African American Fiction Writer*. Eds. David Garrett Izzo and Maria Orban. Jefferson: McFarland& Company Inc. Publishers, 2009

[10] The racial uplift movement began in the late nineteenth century and was led by educated African Americans such as Ida B. Wells. By the early twentieth century, the movement culminated in the Harlem-Renaissance movement led by W. B. Dubois, who believed that the black bourgeoisie was responsible for the education and improvement of African-American lives.

[11] Thirty years later, George Schuyler's satirical race novel *Black no More* figures another assimilationist protagonist who engages in a similar alchemic transformation from black to white, but this time with success. Unlike Chesnutt's Jerry, Schuyler's hero is no buffoon and is far more cunning and intelligent than Chesnutt's inadequate black male character.

[12] Eric Sundquist historicizes the Cakewalk to expalin the origins in African American life to the complexity of thisart form, which became part of white minstrel show. He then analyzes the use of the Cakewalk in Chesnutt's novels, to include *The Marrow of Tradtion.*

[13] Until historians such as Eric Foner and, more recently, Heather Richardson, southern historians convinced many of the inaccurate history of Reconstruction and the claim that Southern whites had been excessively stifled by the North as a punishment for losing the Civil War. William A. Dunning's *Reconstruction, Political and Economic (1907)* is deemed the torch bearer for its Southern and race-biased interpretation of the Reconstruction era. The Dunning school, as this school of thought was known, not only influenced generations of historians, but also shaped the larger American public's view of its past. See Heather Cox Richardson's *West from Appomattox*: *The Reconstruction of America after the Civil War.* Yale: Yale University Press, 2008. And *The Death of Reconstruction: Race, Labor, and Politics in the Post-Civil War North, 1865-1901.* Harvard: Harvard University Press, 2004.

[14] In his introduction to *Marrow of Tradition* (Introduction xxv), Sundquist explains that the mirroring images of male and female hysteria that Chesnutt employs in *The Marrow of Tradition* spring in part from the loss of economic and political power suffered by the South in the aftermath of the war and felt keenly by male leaders, and in part from the instability of gender relations that resulted.

[15]William Faulkner would later explore this very same argument in *Absalom Absalom*.

Faulkner uses the Stupen family as a microcosm of the South to argue that to deny the humanity of a group, that is family, on the basis of blackness would inevitably lead to the destruction of the family and by extension the South.

Making a Real Man of Uncle Tom: Discourses of Masculinity in Twentieth-Century African American Male Narratives

> In America, at the turn of the twentieth century, manhood seemed to be a national preoccupation. From individual concerns about one's own masculine character to larger collective anxieties over the nation's manliness, definitions of manhood—ones that were fundamentally racialized and class bound—pervaded everyday discourse. Everything from definition of success and citizenship to national conversations over expansion and empire were shaped, in part, by a gendered set of ideas that also informed the identity formation of white middle-class men. The overarching question of what constituted manhood, in other words, dominated the ways in which most men and women in the United States conceptualized, among other things, economic prosperity, national belonging, and, for many, their position within racial, ethnic, and class hierarchies (Martin Summers 1)

In *Manliness and its Discontents: The Black Middle-class and the Transformation of Masculinty*, Martin Summers well sums up the turn-of-the-twentieth-century American obsession with manhood and the conflation of success with masculinity. The ubiquity of rhetoric on masculinity in American discourses on national identity inevitably informed African Americans' self-perceptions, with black men struggling for recognition as legitimate citizens and as "real" men in a racially segregated society fraught with institutionalized racism. African American men, particularly, felt the burden of this national preoccupation with manliness because they remained outside Anglo definitions of what constituted "real" men. Hence, just as the nation measured its success by the prosperity of its men, so too did African Americans believe that uplifting the race would depend upon the advancement of black men and the growth of the black middle-class. This logic was best articulated in the writings of African American intellectuals who championed the black cause through the New Negro movement.

Writers such as W.E B. Du Bois and Alain Locke set the foundations for African American cultural and literary discourses with their sociological studies of black life and

cultural productions in, respectively, *The Souls of Black Folk* and *The New Negro*. Although female writers such as Jessie Redmond Fauset,[1] Zora Neal Hurston, and Nella Larsen were part of the New Negro Movement, the movement clearly favored and championed male writers, such as Langston Hughes, Claude McKay, and Countee Cullen—to the detriment of female artists who found themselves overshadowed and their contributions often forgotten. Even as the male leaders of the movement, such as W. E. B. Dubois, pushed for uplifting the race and demanded equality for African Americans, their view of gender was nonetheless reflective of the larger American culture, where middle-class women were expected to remain within the home, playing the supporting role to their husbands. Indeed, many of the female writers of the movement would die uncelebrated until scholars such as Alice Walker, Cheryl Wall, and Hazel Carby resuscitated their works and introduced them to a new generation. As Cheryl Wall concludes in her critique of Alain Locke's *New Negro* essay: "Locke does not directly contemplate issues of gender in his essay, but with its imagery drawn from industry, technology, and war, and the extended citations of poems by Langston Hughes, Claude McKay, and James Weldon Johnson, the essay takes on a masculinist cast" (4). Clearly, African American middle-class men, like their Anglo counterparts, were preoccupied with manliness, so much so, that the women were sidelined, perhaps because "the heightened race consciousness of the period made issues of sexism more difficult to raise" (Wall 6). What is certain is that while the New Negro movement provided fertile ground for the black literati to blossom, their dependence on white patronage often stifled the racial and political aspects of their work.[2]

With the Depression came the end of white patronage for black artistic productions, and by the mid-1930s, the New Negro movement was no longer sustainable. In fact, not only did the movement lose its social and cultural relevance, but African-American writers became more overtly politically conscious, which was a reflection of the great black migration from South to North and the growth of the Civil Rights movement. Black intellectuals therefore began focusing political and cultural debates, and on the crisis of the ever-growing marginalized African American poor working class, not just in the rural South, but also those inhabitants of the Northern urban slums. This change in sociopolitical perspective, in turn, marked a decided transformation of African American literature and literary theory, ushering in a new era in African-American letters, one perhaps best exemplified by the writings of Richard Wright.

In 1937, Wright wrote "Blueprint for Negro Writing," reproaching black writers for their bourgeois predilection to depict black middle-class sensibilities to a predictable, uncritical, white audience. According to Wright, the time had come to leave behind "the slavish respect for past standards" and the African American literary tradition of sentiment and realism, and replace it with naturalism (Wright "Blueprint"). He openly professed the influence of naturalism[3] on his writings; he believed it facilitated an unflinching depiction of the socio-economic reality of black life to create literature endowed with social consciousness. Wright further argued that earlier African American writing lacked political substance and, therefore, also lacked the ability to perform the necessary social work of informing African American sociopolitical collective consciousness. More specifically, he proffered Marxist ideology as an effective foundation for African American literary productions, which would in turn inform the

political consciousness of the black masses. Although "Blueprint" discusses the lives of black men and women, arguably the language describing the "negro writer" is clearly masculinist—"but in whatever social voice *he* chooses to speak, whether positive or negative, there should always be heard or overheard *his* faith, *his* necessity ... the problem of judgment for Negro writers is bound up with the problem of their becoming *whole men*, human beings"—as are the examples of politically conscious authors—Joyce, Hemingway, Eliot, and Gorky (Wright "Blueprint"; [italics mine]). Not satisfied with simply calling for change, Wright set out to transform African American literary and cultural discourses on race and masculinity. Thus he launched his literary career by challenging the very novel that constructed the foundations for literary and cultural definitions of African Americans and black masculinity, namely Harriet Beecher Stowe's *Uncle Tom's Cabin*. Like Douglass, Delany, and Chesnutt before him, Wright challenges Stowe's depiction of black heroism and black masculinity through her characterization of Uncle Tom, and offers his own vision of black male heroism. He also rejects Stowe's use of sentimentalism to make her argument for the humanity of blacks and for her depiction of Uncle Tom. Thus, he employs radical Marxist theories and the aesthetics of literary naturalism to create narratives centered on the black working class male, and portraying the impact of grinding poverty, social marginalization, and lack of economic opportunities on the psyche of black men.

To state that Richard Wright's 1938 collection of short stories, *Uncle Tom's Children*, signifies on Harriet Beecher Stowe's *Uncle Tom's Cabin* would by no means astonish those that have read both seminal works. Indeed, many literary scholars agree that Wright's collection of short stories evokes Stowe's famous text not only through its

title, but also through its characterization of African Americans, in particular, the portrayal of black masculinity. Like critics such as Richard Yarborough, I contend that Wright's text does more than simply reject Stowe's myopic understanding of race. *Uncle Tom's Children* also repudiates early African American literary and cultural traditions of presenting black lives and sensibilities by employing sentimentalism, in order to argue for the humanity of blacks. As he argued in "Blueprint," African American literature lacked real social consciousness; indeed, his writings put into practice his blueprint for the black writer by creating fiction centered on the black masses, while speaking for them, and to them. Yarborough aptly explains that, "as the title and epigraph of Wright's collection implies, *Uncle Tom's Children* constitutes a self-conscious rejection of the past, of roles and traditions that impoverished the spirit rather than nurtured it, that indirectly helped to perpetuate…'the age-old repressions formed under slavery and peonage'"(*Uncle Tom's Children* xxix). In launching an attack on Stowe and her hero, Uncle Tom, Wright also enters what I perceive as a historical debate between African American male intellectuals and Stowe, which began in the nineteenth century with Martin Delany and Frederick Douglass. This engagement with Stowe's novel facilitates what I describe as triangular dialogue about black masculinity, between Stowe and African American men who use the author and her novel as a conduit through which to debate ideological and artistic differences of their own. I want to suggest that just as Douglass's and Delany's signifying revisions facilitate a conversation between the two nineteenth-century African American leaders, both positing their visions of black masculinity vis-à-vis Stowe's novel, so, too, does Wright's re-envisioning of Stowe's

novel spark a debate with his fellow twentieth-century African American writer, James Baldwin.

Following the acclaim of Wright's *Native Son* in 1940, Baldwin wrote his essay, "Everybody's Protest Novel" (1947), which questions the artistic value of Wright's critically acclaimed work. I should note that prior to this moment, both men were unified in their mission to transform African American literature and broaden the landscape of American literature. Baldwin's essay highlighted their difference in opinion concerning the role of African American writers within the black community and the larger American society. Baldwin surely understood the irony in declaring his independence from his erstwhile mentor, Wright, by comparing Wright's *Native Son* to Stowe's *Uncle Tom's Cabin*—the very novel Wright references to launch his literary career. In comparing the two novels, Baldwin concludes that both fictional works lack artistic integrity because of the authors' uncompromising propagandist mission and their failure to adequately present black humanity and experience. In denouncing the protest novel as a meaningful literary genre, Baldwin indirectly proposes his own blueprint for African American literature. While Baldwin's trenchant criticism appears unforgiving, Wright himself had been critical of his first novel, *Uncle Tom's Children*. In fact, he wrote his second novel, *Native Son*, if not as a sort of apology, certainly as an attempt to correct what he believed to be the failings of the work that launched his career.

As with other African American male writers, Baldwin felt compelled to denounce Stowe's romantic racialist characterization of her black characters, as well as critique the narrowness of her portrayal of her black male protagonist. With the same

enthusiasm, he also decries *Native Son*, which, he argues, merely adds anger to Stowe's sentimentalism. He explains his criticism as such:

> Ms. Ophelia's exclamation, like Mrs. Stowe's novel, achieves a bright, almost lurid significance, like the light from a fire which consumes a witch. This is the more striking as one considers the novels of Negro of oppression written in our own, more enlightened day, all of which say only: "This is perfectly horrible! You ought to be ashamed of yourselves!" (Let us ignore for a moment, those novels of oppression written by Negroes, which add only a raging, near-paranoic postscript to this statement and actually reinforce…the principles which activate the oppression they decry (Baldwin 13-14).

The statement to which Baldwin refers is that of Ophelia's vehement response to her cousin St. Clare's declaration that, as Baldwin paraphrases "that so far as he is able to tell, the blacks have been turned over to the devil for the benefit of the whites in this world." Ophelia's Northern sensibility, as always, is horrified by her cousin's Southern cold detachment, and declares: "That is perfectly horrible!"… "You ought to be ashamed of yourself" (13). Baldwin's dismissal of sentimentality stems from his belief that it provides emotional response without truly forcing us to confront the reality of black experience. He suggests that the outpouring of tears in response to Stowe's novel serves to confirm white righteousness, rather force her readers (or Stowe herself) to truly grasp the reality of the black experience, or for that matter, actually embrace blackness without having to first purify it.

Baldwin thus concludes that the solipsistic, sentimental brushstrokes with which Stowe paints her black hero are, in the end, little different from the violent brushstrokes with which Wright creates his African-American hero. Though seemingly antithetical to Uncle Tom, in the end, Wright's Bigger Thomas produces similar sentimental responses from white readers, and even more critically, creates no change. Just as Stowe relied upon sentiment to push her abolitionist agenda, so, too, does Wright rely upon naturalism

to force his militant politics. One creates a black male hero who eschews violence and the other a character whose every action is informed by rage and a consequent impulse to commit violence. Indeed Bigger Thomas becomes "the bad nigger." Having lost all dependency on the opiate of religion, he has developed a deep rage that drives him to rape and murder. More disturbing, Baldwin notes, is that the act of murder literally catalyzes his awakening, so that he "dies, having come, through violence…for the first time, to a kind of life, having for the first time redeemed his manhood" (22). In the end, according to Baldwin's argument, Wright's protest novel fails because rather than critique sentimentality, it reinforces its principles. Following Baldwin's argument through to its end, we could conclude that Wright's revision of Stowe's emasculated, submissive, Christian, black male hero creates a hypermasculine angry black male hero incapable of any emotion but rage, which thus leaves him unable to connect with anyone outside of himself—we respond to both characters with the same declaration of "this is perfectly horrible!"

Of course, we might wonder about the real agenda behind Baldwin's criticism of his mentor's acclaimed novel,[4] especially at a time when Wright was perhaps the most celebrated African-American author. We could postulate that Baldwin's salient analysis reveals much more than Baldwin himself recognizes; after all, dethroning the teacher could certainly facilitate the acolyte's ambitious ascent in the literary world. But my thinking is less concerned with any Bloomian anxiety of influence, or with the personal relationship between two African-American authors, than with the irony of Baldwin's insightful conclusion. In challenging the artistic merit of Wright's work, via a critique of Stowe's fiction, Baldwin in essence highlights the relevancy of Stowe's *Uncle Tom's*

Cabin for African-American literary production. Indeed, particularly intriguing is the question Baldwin poses at the beginning of his essay: "…the only question left to ask is why we are bound still within the same constriction. How is it that we are so loath to make a further journey than that made by Mrs. Stowe, to discover and reveal something a little closer to the truth?" (15). For my argument, the significance of this question lies in the fact that even as he critiques Stowe's novel, Baldwin indirectly acknowledges that Mrs. Stowe's abolitionist "treatise" might, in fact, reveal something of the "truth" precisely because of its historical relevancy in discourses of race and black masculinity. As he elaborates, "it is interesting to consider one more aspect of Mrs. Stowe's novel, the method she used to solve the problem of writing about a *black man* at all," which was by robbing him of his humanity, divesting him of his sex, and bathing him in the purity of religion, thus making him worthy of being delivered from sin (Baldwin 16-18). The truth, I would argue, is that *Uncle Tom's Cabin* cast a shadow over black attempts to construct narratives of race and masculinity. In their different ways, both Baldwin and Wright endeavor to cast off the specter of Uncle Tom as they portray their own visions of black heroism.

Certainly, this feminized African American hero presented by Stowe as an ideal produces an anxiety of masculinity, which African American male writers feel bound to address by re-envisioning her novel and protagonist. Thus, they redefine a black masculinity which is informed by their personal experiences and the larger black experience. Hence, Baldwin takes Wright and Stowe to task, not only because Baldwin believed that Wright's failure "lay in the confusion of his social and artistic responsibilities, a distortion of artistic truth into protest and propaganda" (Baldwin 65),

but also to challenge Wright's characterization of black masculinity. I would also contend that Baldwin uses this criticism of Wright to reject the assumption of black masculinity as hyper masculine heterosexuality. Baldwin's dismissal of Stowe's and Wright's portrayals of black masculinity allows him to lay the foundation for what would become his insertion of the gay black male identity within the spectrum of black masculinity. Baldwin went on to present this alternative model of black masculinity in novels such as *Go Tell It on the Mountain* (1952) and *Another Country* (1956).

Baldwin concludes that if Wright's answer to Stowe's feminized black male hero is one whose hypermasculinity simply perpetuates another stereotype of the black male, then Wright has failed. What would Baldwin consider a more successful challenge to Stowe's myopic view of black manhood? Perhaps because of his own identity politics, Baldwin reads an implicit exclusion of the black homosexual male within Bigger's hyper masculine world of the marginalized working-class male. There is arguably an undercurrent of homoeroticism in the scene where Bigger and his male friend, Jack, masturbate together in the dark cinema; however, this homosocial boding moment is framed and normalized, first by Jack and Biggers' wish that their girlfriends were present, as Jack says "I could make old Clara moan now," (33) and then later, after the boys are satiated, via the image of white female bodies sunbathing on the large screen. As Barbara Judson and Andrew Shin explain: "Baldwin resisted an uncritical embrace of black nationalism, developing instead a vision of the homosexual as the chief instrument of cultural renovation" (247). If Baldwin employs personal experience and the reality of African American life to create what he believes to be a more "enlightened," and we would assume, "meaningful" black hero, then Wright, to Baldwin's mind remains stuck

in the past wrestling with Stowe and thus creates a twentieth century version of Uncle Tom, even if an opposite version. As Baldwin charges:

> Below the surface of this novel there lies, as it seems to me, a continuation, a complement, of that monstrous legend it was written to destroy. Bigger is Uncle Tom's descendant, flesh of his flesh, so exactly the opposite a portrait when the books are placed together, it seems the contemporary Negro novelist and the dead New England woman are locked together in a deadly timeless battle; the one uttering merciless exhortations, the other shouting curses (22).

Of course, as for Wright, for Baldwin here the black male remains central to cultural revitalization. Wright's revision of Stowe fails because he assumes that a protagonist at the other end of the spectrum of sentimentalism would produce an antithetical response to the sentimental outpouring Stowe's novel elicited—and thus would provide insight into African American male psychology. In the end, according to Baldwin, Bigger and Uncle Tom turn out to be two sides of the same coin, one born of the narrow imagination of a nineteenth-century white female author and the other born of the frustrations and stifled dreams of a black male author. Baldwin would not be the last to draw comparisons between the novels of Wright and Stowe.

In my view, Wright's signifying revisions of Stowe's *Uncle Tom's Cabin* reflect the psychological response of African Americans to Stowe's feminized vision of black masculinity, a response fraught with black male anxieties based on systemic conceptions and perceptions held by white America. Following in the footsteps of his literary forebears, Wright engages American discourses on race in order to address the racial tensions abounding in his historical moment. His re-envisioning texts thus address African American realities in Jim Crow, rural South and in the ever-growing squalor of African American life in the urban North. *Uncle Tom's Children* and *Native Son* portray the effects of Southern and Northern white racism on black lives, particularly on the

African American male psyche. Indeed, the very titles of the first two stories in *Uncle Tom's Children*, "Big Boy Leaves Home" and "Mann," address what will be a central theme of the collection of short stories: the black male's struggle to remain afloat against the relentless tidal wave of white racist efforts to undermine black manhood. Wright also demonstrates how, even after emancipation, Uncle Tom's "children" (like their "father") remain oppressed and powerless against violence from white men. They accept their role as sacrificial lambs through whose bodies white men assert their authority over the larger African-American community. Although they outwardly appear to have evolved beyond the stoicism of their forefather, Wright regards Uncle Tom's "children" as remaining hampered by their reliance on religion as a cure-all. Wright appears to set up a deliberate contradiction to show the evolving sense of worth in his black male characters. As such, he characterizes Uncle Tom's children as also being in a state of evolution and developing social consciousness, as portrayed by the central black male characters. For example, this is demonstrated in Big Boy's young survival instinct and Mann's impulse to save his family from being drowned in the flood as he struggles against the tide of white hate—as well as Silas' refusal to leave his land and decision to die on his own terms. This progression is revealed through Reverend Taylor's ultimate recognition of the power of black and white working-class unity as well as Johnny Boy's rejection of the racial divide in forming a coalition of black and white working men who will lead their communities against the rich, exploitative white men. Both Johnny and Reverend Taylor also evolve because they reject the black female influence of mother and wife respectively. Wright portrays these women as hampered by their own fears, and therefore

unwilling to confront the oppressor, accepting the racial and class status quo of their society.

Of course, not all the stories are told from the perspective of a male protagonist; in fact, two of the short stories are narrated from the perspective of women. These female characters are not only weak but also illustrate the perception of the black woman as an inescapable burden for black men. Not surprisingly many feminist readers and critics have taken issue with Wright's apparent castigation of black women. As Sherley Anne Williams notes, the black feminine figure is always an abiding presence in Wright's works and often a necessary evil to Wright's construction of black masculinity. These black women are often portrayed as a negative and emasculating force in the lives of black men (63-82). In their attempt to grasp masculine power, African American men often find themselves literally weighed down by the black women in their lives. For example, in "Down by the Riverside," Mann tries to save his family from dying in the flood, but the efforts are made more difficult by the necessity of keeping both his aged mother-in-law and his young, heavily pregnant wife, as well as his child, afloat in a small boat. The burden of ensuring their safety and of struggling against the flooded river overwhelms him so much so that every action carries him further into troubled waters. The two women, although able-bodied, are in effect useless—one is old and the other in labor. Wright's black-female characters appear as if in collusion with white men and nature to deny black men their rightful place in society; they impede black males' progress rather than foster their growth, thus hampering their ability to succeed. Even as some of the stories in *Uncle Tom's Children* center on a female protagonist, they

essentially center on black manhood, as we see in "Long Black Song" and "Bright and Morning Star."

Although narrated by the female protagonist, Sarah, "Long Black Song" essentially reveals the limited life of her husband, Silas, or, as I would argue, a narrative about black masculinity. Through Sarah's musings, we discover that Silas clearly embraces Anglo definitions of manliness: he buys his own land and builds a home to contain and protect his property, his wife, and his child. This ability to lay claim to oneself and one's own labor on one's own land and to house the greatest possession of all—one's family—reflects Silas' attainment of respectable manhood in the rural South. Undoubtedly, Wright sets up this rustic, Eden-like dwelling to invoke Uncle Tom's cabin, while, at the same time, portending the downfall of the residing Adam. In conjuring the specter of Uncle Tom, Wright reconstructs a new vision of Stowe's romanticized conceptualization of the poor but happy existence in Uncle Tom and Aunt Chloe's cabin. In this cabin there are no content wooly-headed children all milling around the equally happy parent. In fact, as we enter Silas' cabin, Wright shatters Stowe's idyllic flora and fauna imagery with the incessant wailing of an agitated baby refusing to be soothed and simply crying "longer and louder" at the mother's comforting attempts (*Uncle Tom's Children* 128). Sarah, clearly overwhelmed by this crying child, is even more overwhelmed by the inescapable loneliness that drives her daytime libidinal fantasies about a childhood sweetheart so strongly that "the sweet ache which had frightened her then was stealing back to her loins now" as "she felt the tips of her teats tingling" (*Uncle Tom's Children* 128). It is not surprising that, at this moment of female weakness, a tempter enters Eden: a white salesman drives up to the house and interrupts

her daydream. Sarah's female weakness is no match for the convincing rhetoric of the white salesman, whose intrusion will ultimately destroy Silas' constructed paradise.

Sarah's naiveté is no match for the guile of the salesman who finally convinces her to purchase a gramophone/clock. The young man accidently brushes up against her, igniting sexual tension that leads the two into playing out their passion on her marital bed, a transgression that sets the stage for the destruction of paradise. Upon his return home, Silas inquires about the gramophone and also notices a straw hat in his room. His suspicions immediately mount, but his male pride and his desire to maintain the purity of his Eden encourage him to deny the evidence of Sarah's fall. Silas smashes the offending gramophone, and his dream of maintaining his manhood dissipates at that very moment. His distraught outburst reflects how important property is for African American men in defining their manhood. More specifically, it illustrates the transition from the Uncle Tom slave figure—a man who became a slave and property—to the freed man—a slave who became a man—with the ability to define black male manhood vis-à-vis the possession of land and property. Wright draws upon African American Southern dialect to heighten the verisimilitude of Silas' violent emotional outpouring in expressing the struggle to attain the American dream and escape the brutality of white men and black female betrayal:

> "Gawddam yo black soul t hell, don yuh try lyin t me! Ef yuh start lyin wid white men Ahll hoss-whip yuh t a incha yo life. Shos theres a Gawd in Heaven Ah will! From sunup t sundown A works muh guts out t pay them white trash bastards whte Ah owe em, n then Ah comes home n find they been in mah house! An cant go into their houses, n yuh know Gawddam well Ah cant! They don have no mercy on black folks; wes just like dirt under their feet! Fer ten years Ah slave lika dog t git mah farm free, givin ever penny Ah kin t em an then Ah come in fins they been in mah house." (*Uncle Tom's Children* 143)

In this outburst, Silas expresses the view that by entering his house, the white man has figuratively raped Silas and robbed him of his manhood. The psychological assault stirs historical feelings of masculine anxiety. Even Uncle Tom has some control of his domestic haven; Aunt Chloe maintains a clean and serene cabin with food ready for the returning male. Instead, Sarah, the twentieth-century African American woman, is idle and lacks the respectable industriousness of her nineteenth-century counterpart. Wright views Sarah's wantonness as a black female weakness that presents an obstacle to the success of the African American man. He does not acknowledge the complex power hierarchy between Sarah and the young white male; instead, Wright views the black woman as complicit in the unmanning of her man.

Exhausted from his journey home, Silas lies down to sleep, only to discover the final evidence of Sarah's crime: the white salesman's handkerchief inside his bed. This undeniable proof sends Silas into a tailspin of rage that leads to a decision to eradicate the final evidence of his unmanning—his wife. Sarah escapes the cabin with the baby, knowing the consequences if he catches her: "he could whip her as she had seen him whip a horse" (*Black Song* 146). The use of animal imagery and the relationship between masculinity and property evokes slavery; the picture of the white master whipping his slave into submission is here replaced by the black male controlling his woman by employing the same brutality. While Wright might challenge the racial hierarchy, he accepts the gender hierarchy. The implication is that black women, consciously or otherwise, fuel black male rage. Indeed, Sarah accepts and understands the consequences of her crime and appreciates Silas' response to her infidelity:

> Silas was good to her as any black man could be to a black woman. Most of the black women worked in the fields as croppers. But Silas had given her her own

> home, and that was more than many others had done for their women. Yes, she knew how Silas felt. Always he had said he was as good as any white man. He had worked hard and saved his money and bought a farm so he could grow his own crops like white men. (*UTC* 147)

Even as they comprehend the tenuous and fragile reality of a black man trying to hold on to his property and dignity in the racist South, these black women like Sarah add to, rather than alleviate, his suffering. Wright implies that the black man's transition from property to a real man depends greatly on his ability to replicate the Anglo dream of acquiring land with enough property and the ability to demonstrate patriarchal control over the family. After all, if Uncle Tom could seemingly preside over his rudimentary cabin, then his twentieth-century descendant should surely have the capacity to improve upon this reality without being hampered by the selfish recklessness of the black woman.

Through his characterization of black female characters such as Sarah, Wright reveals a palpable disdain for the black feminine. Even with looming doom, Sarah falls asleep outside before she can warn the white salesman of Silas' intent to kill him. Silas kills the salesman, whips his friend, and refuses to leave his property. Instead, he chooses to wait for the inevitable avenging white mob. He accepts his fate, understanding all too well that "nothing could make any difference" because "the white folks ain never gimme a chance!" (*UTC* 152). He continues:

> "They ain never give no black man a chance! There ain nothing in yuh whole life yuh kin keep from em! They take yo lan! The take yo freedom! They take yo women! N then they take yo life!...Lawd, Ah don wanna be this way! It don mean nothin! Yeh die ef fight! Yuh die ef you don fight! Either way yeh die n it don mean nothing ..." (*UTC* 152-153)

Silas understands that he lacks any real control over his life so long as the Anglo male refuses to acknowledge his humanity and his manhood; he embraces his fate. Even Sarah understands this fundamental truth as she watches the stream of white men drive toward

the house; she has a moment of profound clarity, recognizing that "killing of white men by black men and killing of black men by white men went on in spite of the hope of white bright days and the desire of dark black night…and when killing started it went on, like a red river flowing ..." (*UTC* 154). She has been the catalyst for bringing to the surface the underlying tension between black men and white men, and, just as she has unintentionally fanned the embers, she cannot halt the inevitable resulting carnage. She can only watch while Silas begins shooting as many of the white men as he can before barricading himself in his house. Sarah's sexual indiscretion with a white man more than betrays marital trust and fidelity; it also emasculates her husband because it validates the Anglo male's notion of his authority over black men via their women.

Perhaps more damaging to the black male psyche, however, as this incident demonstrates, is the persistence of antebellum Anglo rejection of affective coupling between male and female slaves, rendering female slaves as sexual objects for white-male pleasure. Wright is less interested in the plight of African-American women in Southern racist society than in the tribulations of African-American men rendered impotent by the stifling of their dreams. In Wright's view, black men must struggle to navigate not only discriminatory racial minefields but also the disloyal presence of the black female. Predictably, Silas cannot withstand the internal and external psychological onslaught. The white men surround the house and burn it down and eradicate all traces of Silas, his property, and his effrontery in defending his masculinity by murdering a white man. Ironically, the black female, who unwittingly catalyzed the whole incident, also provides the truth of the matter—violence only breeds violence. In this battle between

white and black men, the black female is presented as the inescapable burden of the black man.

Although Wright frames the narrative of "Bright and Morning Star" from the perspective of a black woman, this short story considers ideal black manhood much like "Long Black Song." When read together with the other tales in *Uncle Tom's Children*, "Bright and Morning Star" concludes a thorough representation of African American males navigating the perilous waters of racist American society. However, unlike the other male protagonists in *Uncle Tom's Children*, Johnny Boy has achieved the sort of ideological growth that Wright believes will facilitate America's transition from an exclusive society to a more egalitarian, inclusive one. Johnny Boy has already been radicalized and understands the relevancy of socialist philosophy for empowering the working class. Wright's communist ideology informs both *Uncle Tom's Children* and *Native Son*; he believed strongly that protest literature could indeed galvanize society into revolution. This similarity to Stowe's abolitionist agenda was clearly not lost to Baldwin, who for that very reason concluded that both authors preach an acceptance of the black male fate. As we see with Uncle Tom, Bigger, and to a certain extent here with Johnny Boy, these black male characters die accepting the inevitable fate of black men as death. He represents Wright's ideal black hero: an African American male cognizant not just of the suffering and oppression of the black populace, but also of the struggles of a proletariat that includes working class whites. As he explains to his mother, "Ah cant see white n Ah cant see black" and "Ah sees rich men n Ah sees po men" (*Uncle Tom's Children* 234). However, Johnny Boy's life remains connected to his mother, Aunt Sue, and he must therefore spark a change in her.

Wright portrays Aunt Sue as the typical, religious older black female, who has spent years working for whites and accepts the racialized hierarchy of her society and her role as a black woman within that society. However, under her son's guidance, she seems to have grown shedding her over-reliance on religion and supporting her son's communist ideology even if she does not fully understand it. However, she unwittingly becomes the weak link in the coalition of black and white communist collective. When informed that there is traitor in the midst of the group, Aunt Sue believes it to be a white man, but her son immediately quashes what he reads as a race-bias. When the suspected spy visits her, she misreads the signs and though she senses a traitor in her house, she nonetheless trusts him and provides names of all those involved with the communist party. Once she realizes her lapse of judgment, she leaves to correct her mistake and shoots and kills the traitor Booker before he discloses the names of the communist party members to the sheriff. Her final act is a calculated utilitarian act to give up her life and that of her son in order to save the collective.

By focusing on Aunt Sue's inability to fully comprehend Johnny Boy's perspective, Wright portrays the black female as an inescapable albatross and another obstacle in the black man's struggle to improve his life. Unlike the other black female characters in *Uncle Tom's Children,* Aunt Sue plays a more complicated role in the narrative. According to Michel Fabre, Wright turns Stowe's feminized black male hero into a central female character, Aunt Sue, in order to illustrate "the theme of Christianity evolving into political commitment" (163). Wright clearly feminizes Stowe's already emasculated male protagonist, by portraying the stoic Christian character as a black woman. Aunt Sue's potential for growth from stoic Christian to active socialist can only

be achieved when she fully submits to the authority of the black male—represented by Johnny Boy. Other interpretations generally agree with Fabre's reading of Aunt Sue's final action as a rational act to give up her life and that of her son in order to save the collective. Gregory Meyerson, on the other hand, disagrees with this interpretation of Aunt Sue's culminating act of heroism on behalf of the Communist party, rejecting interpretations of her as a heroic character. He maintains that her willful desire to act alone, rather than believing in the strength and power of the collective, "leads to disaster" (20). She allows herself to be cajoled into providing the names of all the community men involved with the communist party, even as her instincts tell her that the white man, Booker, is indeed the traitor within the party. Therefore Meyerson sees her as antiheroic. However, the traitor does come from within, and her premonition of tragedy is already set in motion. Once she realizes she has placed the whole party in danger, Aunt Sue endeavors to correct this fatal mistake, but to no avail. She embraces the final moment of her life as she falls onto the ground beside her dead son, both killed by the sheriff.

According to Meyerson, many readers fail to note that Aunt Sue's self-sacrificial, final deed does not remedy her earlier mistake. Instead, he argues, "Sue's actions do not guarantee the survival of the party; they all but guarantee its destruction" (251). While Meyerson's reading provides an insightful alternative analysis, my interpretation of Aunt Sue's final act mediates Fabre's and Meyerson's readings. I interpret Aunt Sue's desperate final act as analogous to Uncle Tom's self-sacrificing martyrdom. Just as Uncle Tom refused to tell Legree the whereabouts of the two escaped female slaves and is thus whipped to his death, Aunt Sue is also beaten by the sheriff for refusing to tell the whereabouts of her son—thus catalyzing events that culminate in her death. Hence, I

contend that Aunt Sue's two acts of selflessness, like Uncle Tom's, reflect her religious convictions that compel her desire to protect the weak from the oppressor. Aunt Sue's religiosity, despite her effort to suppress her old-time beliefs, nonetheless remains an essential aspect of her raison d'être. I would argue it informs, though not consciously, her new socialist ideology. In her earlier attempts to suppress her religiosity and obediently replace it with Johnny Boy's socialist ideology, Aunt Sue actually arrives at a moment of true consciousness. As she returns to consciousness, having been beaten by the sheriff for refusing to disclose party member names, she also arrives at an understanding of the inescapability of her religious convictions, which like socialist principles, embraces fostering the well-being of the collective:

> Something tightened in her as she remembered and understood the fit of fear on coming to herself in the dark hallway. A part of her she had thought she had done away with forever had had hold of her then. She had thought the soft, warm past was over, she had thought it did not mean much when she now sang: "*Hes the Lily of the Valley, the Bright n Mawnin Star.*"... The days when she had sung that song were the days when she had not hoped for anything on this earth, the days when the cold mountain had driven her into the arms of Jesus. She had thought Sug and Johnny Boy had taught her to forget Him, to fix her hope upon the fight of black men for freedom. (*Uncle Tom's Children* 252)

I read this as a moment of awakening when Aunt Sue recognizes that her Christian religion is not necessarily incompatible with the communist ideology preached by her son; both philosophies recognize that the individual must sometimes sacrifice the self in order to save the collective. This realization catalyzes Aunt Sue into taking action and embracing her role as the sacrificial lamb. Her self-sacrifice reflects a Christ-like death that makes Aunt Sue heroic in both secular and non-secular sense; her blood is shed so that her comrades might live to continue the fight, just as Tom's blood is shed so that the two female slaves escape bondage. This is not to claim that Wright himself was

consciously portraying Sue as a heroic ideal; on the contrary, Aunt Sue's actions result from an inability to trust her own female gut instincts and faithful acceptance of her son's perception of the world as the only acceptable truth. Wright can only imagine black female usefulness in terms of accepting the black male's perception of the world. Wright implies that Aunt Sue should not question why she must abandon her religious convictions—because the survival and political growth of the African American community depends on black men who must be allowed to exercise their rightful social roles as community leaders. Wright's portrayal of Aunt Sue is so reminiscent of Uncle Tom, that rather than refute Stowe's narrative, it invokes many poignant moments in *Uncle Tom's Cabin*. Aunt Sue dies and achieves her own form of Christian salvation; her Christ-like martyrdom echoes Uncle Tom's final moments:

> A sudden sinking fell upon him; he closed his eyes; and that mysterious and sublime change passed over his face, that told the approach of other worlds. He began to draw his breath with long, deep inspirations; and his broad chest rose and fell, heavily. The expression on his face was that of a conqueror. (*UTC* 417)

> Focused and pointed she was, buried in the depths of her star, swallowed in its peace and strength; and not feeling her flesh growing cold, cold as the rain that fell from the invisible sky upon the doomed living and the dead that never dies. (*Uncle Tom's Children* 263)

In the end both Uncle Tom and Aunt Sue attain peace and salvation through death. Even as Wright criticized the African American inability to abandon anachronistic religiosity that he believed continued to enslave the black mind, he appears to understand the significance of religion within the African American community. In the end, Aunt Sue does not fully relinquish her religious belief, but through it she actually finally understands the power of the collective and the need to sacrifice the few to save the many.

The expectation is that Aunt Sue simply accepts her son's communist ideology, not because she can truly relate it to her lived experience, but simply because she must bow to the authority of black men:

> And day by day her sons had ripped from her startled eyes her old vision, and image by image had given her a new one, different, but great and strong enough to fling her into the light of another grace. The wrongs and suffering of black men had taken the place of Him nailed to the Cross; the meager beginnings of the party had become another Resurrection; and the hate of those who destroy her new faith quickened in her a hunger to feel how deeply her new strength went (*Uncle Tom's Children* 225).

Although her Christian philosophy allows her to make sense of her world, she has relinquished her past and surrendered to Johnny Boy's notions of the future. Christianity has been replaced by a new secular ideology—namely communism. This male-centered sociopolitical model makes it difficult to fully embrace readings of Sue's final act as heroic. Perhaps, Wright's own relationship with his mother[5] caused his frustration with black women and thus his inability to create fully realized, positive, female characters. Black women could only be perceived as obstacles to change because of Wright's contention that they help sustain American social hegemony by accepting white racial hierarchy. In his stories, black mothers literally beat black boys into submission, so that they internalize and accept their place within American society. Trudier Harris explains this phenomenon in her analysis of *Native Son*:

> One consequence of the women's identification with acceptable patterns of black behavior is that they inadvertently perpetuate the negative values of the larger culture, with whose positive potential for upward mobility Bigger prefers to identify. In other words, Bigger's dreaming is positive while the women's stifling of dreams is negative, but their very desire for him to remain a part of the invisible black masses is in keeping with the notion of place whites have defined for black people, who, from the whites' perspective, should not dream their way into the benefits of that larger world. (63-64)

Unlike the women Harris describes, Aunt Sue does not actively stifle Johnny Boy's ambitions. However, she reluctantly accepts her son's ideological perspective and struggles in her efforts to relinquish her Christian beliefs and the accompanying stoic acceptance of a gendered and racialized social system. This proves to be a problem for her and her son. Aunt Sue's death thus symbolizes the death of weak old-time religion—largely perpetuated by women—and paves the path for a militant society led by men. Religion is thus conflated with the feminine and as such weakens masculine determination.

The main character in "Down by the River," whose very name, Mann, plays on his inability to be a man, certainly displays the residual aspects of the African American slave mindset that bespeaks his unmanliness and, therefore, his inevitable doom. Mann is unmanned by his adherence to religious convictions. In a situation that demands the individual be governed by instincts of self-preservation, he insists on doing the Christian thing even as it further contributes to his predicament. Not until the moment of death does Mann choose to act decisively: "His fear subsided into a cold numbness. Yes, now! Yes, through the trees! Right thru them trees. Gawd! They were going to kill him. Yes, now, he would die! He would die before he would let them kill him. Ahll die fo they kill me! Ahll *die*... He ran straight to the right through the trees in the direction of the water" (*Uncle Tom's Children* 123). He is gunned down, thus ending the black man's ordeal. His futile attempts at protecting his life and his family reveal the insignificance of his very existence. Wright argues that as long as African American men abide by their Uncle-Tom-like religious convictions, there can be no social change; the lives of black men will

continue unchanged. Like Uncle Tom, these men's Christian stoicism means that they have surrendered their destiny to Anglo male control.

Like Mann, the name of the black male protagonist in "Big Boy Leaves Home" reflects the intentional emasculation of African American males in the South. Though the black community uses the moniker "Big Boy" as a term of endearment, the events that unfold in the narrative point to a different meaning—one that reflects white perceptions of African-American men. Wright illustrates the perilous existence of black boys whose growth into manhood is destined to be stifled by white men. The title itself deceives the reader into believing that this is a traditional narrative of a boy's journey into manhood, where the young boy leaves his boyhood home and family to begin a new journey as a young man. As we soon discover, this is no narrative of masculine self-discovery and growth; indeed, Wright argues, the coming of age narrative for a black boy is often traumatic. There is no slipping into manhood, but rather a harrowing fall into manhood.

The narrator introduces us to Big Boy and his three friends reveling in the joys of boyhood as they battle verbally and physically to express their manhood and claim the position of the alpha male. The real danger however, is not in the playful conflict between the boys, but in the fact that they decide to trespass and swim in the watering hole belonging to a white man. The literal nakedness of the black boys symbolizes their vulnerability; their innocent childish pleasures end abruptly as a white female happens upon the naked boys who instinctively run to cover their nakedness. The roles played by the white female and the black boys appears already scripted by their society and history; one fully accepts the propagated myths of black male hyper-sexuality and lust for white women, and the other recognizes her terror in his presence and the perception of him as a

brute. Similarly, her white male companion too plays his historically scripted role within Southern society and springs into action to defend the purity of the white damsel and smite the offensive and dangerous brutes. He shoots at the boys, killing two. Big Boy leaps at the man and attempts to disarm him and in the ensuing struggle he accidently shoots the white man. Big Boy and his surviving companion, Bobo, run to their respective homes certain a white mob will galvanize to lynch them.

Once the black community finds out about the incident, they immediately put into motion the boy's escape north; they know the futility of confronting the onslaught of the white mob. Big Boy must resist any desire to be a man and wait to fight the white mob, but instead hone his survival instincts and learn how to become invisible.[6] Of course, the community pays the price of not surrendering the boys; Big Boy's family is dragged out of their home and made to watch as the white mob burn it down. Although he escaped one terror, another horror awaits Big Boy; he listens hidden as the white mob tar and burn his friend Bobo. The smell of burning flesh serves to strengthen Big Boy's primal instinct for survival. Even in his exhausted state, he manages to find strength to wrestle and kill the hound dog about to reveal his hiding place. He is eventually rescued by the truck sent to pick him up to drive up north to what he hopes will be a new beginning as he leaves behind a black community traumatized, the consequence of black boys who that have not truly learned Jim Crow wisdom.

In "Big Boy Leaves Home," Wright illustrates the perilous existence of black boys whose growth into manhood is destined to be stifled. The dire consequence of the teenage boys' delinquent sport of ditching school is that they are thrust out of boyhood and launched into the cold stark reality of African American manhood. This new reality

transforms juvenile frolics into a struggle for survival. Unlike his friends, Big Boy manages to exploit nature to his advantage, concealing himself well out of sight of the white mob so that he escapes from the horror of being tarred and burned. The narrative depicts the traumatic transition of a black boy from weary innocence to anguished manhood. Having not only survived but witnessed the end of three of his friends as their lives were extinguished by white men, Big Boy has learned a lesson about the dangers of the being black and male. This experience becomes embedded in his psyche, so much so, that as he is driven off to safety the jolt of the truck stopping startles him so that "the wild fear he had known in the hole came back" (*Uncle Tom's Children* 61). If Big Boy is indeed one of Uncle Tom's children, as it were, then the promise of freedom, earned through the death of their forebear, seems not fully realized.

If Big Boy and Mann represent the failings of African American men, then "Fire and Cloud" illustrates the possibility of transformative heroism through action rather than passivity. As in other stories, the black community can act as one, but in this story they do not retreat when faced with the wrath of white men. Instead, the community leader encourages his people to take charge of their destiny and stand up against white male authority. The main protagonist, Reverend Taylor, a leader of a black community, finds himself caught in a triangle of his people, the town's white mayor, and the Communist party. Wright creates two choices for Reverend Taylor: continue with the age-old, Uncle-Tom-like religious stoicism or adopt a militant stance of taking up of arms against oppression. He must decide whether to grant the request of the black communist representatives and encourage his people to join the planned march to face the white sheriff mayor and demand relief for their starving families. But before Taylor can decide,

he is abducted by white men who remind him of Anglo male authority over black lives. The mayor and sheriff—the modern versions of Stowe's evil slave master, Simon Legree—whip the reverend into a state of unconsciousness. But Wright alters Stowe's pivotal scene, in which the whipping of a black male body is a preamble to a Christian sermon of salvation. Reverend Taylor's beating is critical, not just for this story, but for *Uncle Tom's Children* as a whole; it provides the impetus for transformation. Reverend Taylor returns to consciousness alone; in his physical weakness, he discovers psychological strength that motivates his body, even as it is wracked by pain, to stumble home. Wright re-envisions Stowe's book in order to take command of the black male narrative; the black male leader is born when Reverend Taylor realizes that he must lead his people, and they must act not as individuals, but as a collective. Emboldened by this new psychological strength, Reverend Taylor decides to defy the white leaders and remove the shackles of fear that had long been an effective tool to oppress the black community and emasculate black men. As the reverend leads the black community on the march, they are joined by poor whites. The final confrontation with the white mayor results in Reverend Taylor's refusal to stop the advancing masses and his declaration that "*Freedom belongs to the strong!"* (*Uncle Tom's Children* 220). Implicit in this slogan is that the weak—such as Uncle Tom—invariably die enslaved by whites and by their own impotence.

Through his portrayal of the reverend's metamorphosis, Wright demonstrates how religious convictions—coupled with surrendering to black female fears and demands that black men not resist but maintain the status quo—obstructs black male potential for greatness. Change therefore occurs only when the reverend pushes aside his wife's

pathetic pleadings and takes charge of his family and his congregation to lead them in the demonstration. As the narrator describes it:

> They sang as they marched. More joined along the way. When they reached the park that separated the white district from the black, the poor whites were waiting. Taylor trembled when he saw them join, swelling the mass that moved toward the town. He looked ahead and saw black and white marching; he looked behind and saw black and white marching. (*Uncle Tom's Children* 219)

Reverend Taylor frees himself from manacles of fear, shedding the Uncle Tom-like Christian stoicism to become a new man whose authority even poor whites could sense and accept, a man capable of leading the poor masses. More significantly, now that he fully grasps the power of the collective, Reverend Taylor outsmarts the white mayor and demands change not on the mayor's terms, but on his terms. Salvation, Wright argues, can be attained on earth. By shedding his old self, the Reverend is born again, as a secular leader, and as a man—a model of African American manhood for his son, and for the larger community.

Read together, the last two stories in *Uncle Tom's Children*—"Fire and Cloud" and "Bright and Morning Star"—represent a transcendent journey of African American male evolution and heroic potential. Read through the lens of Aunt Sue's evolution, "Fire and Cloud" provides an antithetical hero to Uncle Tom. However, Reverend Taylor's moment of epiphany does not necessarily signal a total rejection of religion. The reverend's decision to fulfill his role as an active leader of the working class masses can be seen as informed not by any ideological shift or some true understanding of the Communist party's political agenda but by his new understanding of his religious and secular leadership. Thus Reverend Taylor becomes a Christian soldier leading black and white masses to war against a common enemy and oppressor. He is the born-again Uncle Tom who is willing to fight his battles here on earth.

Even with the revision of Uncle Tom through Reverend Taylor, Wright's stories, like Stowe's, novel produced a similar sentimental response. If *Uncle Tom's Children* failed to enrage, then Wright wanted to ensure that *Native Son* would not only enrage but provide an insight into the black male psyche. He wanted to erase sentimentality from *Native Son* and avoid any expectation that the audience would "feel right." Instead, he wished to comprehend the racist environment that would produce an arrested and dangerous black male psyche. To achieve his goal, Wright roots *Native Son* in African American realities and explains the verisimilitude of his fiction by providing "the sources" that informed his narrative. Just as Stowe had based her titular hero upon various real slaves, Wright also explains that Bigger was informed by multiple archetypes from real-world examples. If Stowe conceived of Uncle Tom as the "every slave," I would argue that Wright perceives Bigger as "every man"—black and white—a representation of the downtrodden proletarian: the "dispossessed and disinherited man" (*Native Son* 522). In his essay "How Bigger was Born," Wright provides the political ideology that informs his fiction and details his own political growth and understanding of international politics vis-à-vis the working class. In his explanation of the politics behind his fiction, Wright explains why it was imperative to write Bigger's story:

> The second event that spurred me to write of Bigger was more personal and subtle. I had written a book of short stories which was published under the title of *Uncle Tom's Children*. When the reviews of that book began to appear, I realized that I had made an awfully naïve mistake. I found that I had written a book which even bankers' daughters could read and weep over and feel good about. I swore to myself that if I ever wrote another book, no one would weep over it; that it would be so hard and deep that they would have to face it without the consolation of tears. It was this that made me go to work in dead earnest (*Native Son* 531).

He explains the importance of writing *Native Son* as an effort to finally banish *Uncle Tom's Children* as the offspring of a more naïve mind. Wright then moves quickly from

the initial mention of his first novel to discussing how he constructed the plot of *Native Son*—leaving us wondering at this rather precipitous change of topic. Indeed, the plot thickens. Wright also needs to banish the specter of *Uncle Tom's Children* and construct a more ideologically and politically charged novel in order to exorcise the specters of Stowe and Uncle Tom.

Wright presents the harsh reality of the twentieth-century African American family surrounded by the white world's preconceptions of racial archetypes, which are particularly negative and burdensome to the black male. A century after slavery, Bigger, like Uncle Tom, lacks real control of his destiny. He is beset by new anxieties produced by the Northern form of institutionalized racism. To maintain an illusion of control over their lives, Uncle Tom relies on heavenly salvation while Bigger relies on sheer brutality and reactionary masculinity. Rudderless, Bigger is afloat on a sea of whiteness that assuredly carries him into the abyss, a fate which seems to await him from the very beginning. Wright wastes no time in foreshadowing Bigger's fate; the reader is introduced to the protagonist via the now-famous scene in which he pursues a rat and discovers the animal's ferocious survival instinct. Once cornered, the rat instinctively turns and bares its teeth, ready to strike its pursuer in an attempt to stand its ground against the much larger creature. No reader can miss the parallel between Bigger and the rat as they inhabit not only the same cramped apartment, but also react to life with the same violence and murderous intent, as the story reveals later.

Bigger's family's rat-infested apartment is in every aspect the very opposite of the idyllic, warm and welcoming cabin of Stowe's hero. The feminine comfort of the nineteenth-century cabin surrounded by flora and fauna, is replaced with the masculine,

cold, and harsh twentieth-century concrete urban dwelling. Even Stowe's portrayal of domestic bliss within the cabin becomes a cold and unsympathetic environment where the black male must fight off rats, hunger, and the ever-nagging, unbearable presence of the black mother. Wright's world rejects Stowe's characterization of the domestic realm as a nurturing space governed by feminine comfort and instead presents Bigger's world as void of masculine governance and the authoritative presence of a father figure. In Wright's twentieth-century hovel, there is no happy Aunt Chloe mother figure preparing a welcoming meal: instead, the men are subsumed under the suffocating authority of the mother. Indeed, Wright characterizes black and white women—represented by Bigger's mother, Mary Dalton, and Mrs. Dalton—as figures determined to define the black masculine within their own notions of acceptable black masculinity.

The events that unfold after he kills the white female help Bigger better understand his marginalized existence within a racist society that denies him avenues for a meaningful life. Following this argument through to its logical end, we can conclude that that nothing prior to this pivotal moment in Bigger's life had stirred him into any meaningful action; he had simply floated through life. Implicit also in this argument is that his interactions with the black feminine could not produce such a profound self-awareness. Of course, this is not to argue that the white feminine is exempt from Wright's ire; certainly both the white and black feminine represent the same stifling presence in Bigger's life, as evidenced by Bigger's musings upon meeting Mrs. Dalton. Bigger "had a feeling toward her that was akin to that which he had toward his mother. The difference in his feelings toward Mrs. Dalton and his mother was that he felt that his mother wanted him to do the things that *she* wanted him to do, and he felt Mrs. Dalton

wanted him to do the things she felt *he* should have wanted to do" (*Native Son* 69-70). Both mother figures demand a docility that facilitates their desire to mold him into their vision of black manhood. Under their authority, Bigger cannot control his own destiny. According to Wright's narrative, the consequent tension with the feminine ultimately damages the black male psyche.

Similarly, Stowe's inescapable historical presence and authority produce the same anxiety about masculinity in African-American-male authors that, nonetheless, inspires them to present black masculinity from their own perspective. Stowe stirs in these African-American authors a sociocultural engagement with American definitions and discourses of blackness and manhood that seeks to challenge entrenched misconceptions of race and black masculinity historically informed by Stowe and her novel. In order to accomplish this herculean task, Wright inevitably not only protests Stowe's characterization of black heroism but also confronts Stowe herself and exposes her narrow view of race and gender. Wright insists that Stowe's view of Negro life not only lacks depth but created or embellished upon unsurmountable black stereotypes that black men have had to labor under for centuries. I interpret Wright's portrayal of Mrs. Dalton and Mary Dalton as twentieth-century versions of the stereotypical white-female author in nineteenth-century; like Stowe, they suffer from the same misguided philanthropic desires to aid black male freedom. I, therefore, view Mary Dalton as Wright's version of the bright white female presence, wherein Mary's naiveté mocks Stowe's vision of black salvation via the innocence and purity of the white-female child, Eva. Mary's drunkenness besmirches the myth of white womanhood. Instead of youthful innocence, Mary is characterized as immature. Her lack of understanding of black realities and her

intent on "uplifting blacks" is not only misguided but also proves dangerous. Her constant repetition of "your people" and her desire to know and see "these people," followed by her declaration, "Never in my life have I been inside of a Negro home. Yet they *must* live like we live. They're *human*…There are twelve million of them…They live in our country…In the same city with us…" (*Native Son* 79), treats blackness as *other* and thus *alien* while normalizing whiteness. Mary's solipsism continues as she ridiculously evokes historical black stereotypes so reminiscent of Stowe's minstrel-like characters: "They have so much *emotion*! What a people! They've got spirit ... And their songs—the spirituals! Aren't they marvelous? ... Say, Bigger, can you sing?" (*Native Son* 88). The ridiculousness of the moment culminates in Mary's singing, "Swing low, sweet chariot, Coming fer to carry me home" (*Native Son* 88). Wright ensures that the reader winces at the utter absurdity of singing by Mary Dalton and her boyfriend, Jan Erlone, with Bigger refusing to join in the sing-along moment. Mary's insensitive intrusion into Bigger's world both unnerves and infantilizes him; he grows more petulant with Mary's every effort to encourage him to join the merriment. This Anglo self-indulgent moment becomes the catalyst for the horrific events that occur later, spiraling Bigger into a dark abyss. He finds himself alone with Mary, and his "dumb, cold, and inarticulate hate" for her melts into a sexual desire aroused when the drunken young white woman kisses him. As he tries to get Mary into her bed, Mrs. Dalton appears to check on her errant daughter. In his attempt to quiet Mary with a pillow, Bigger suffocates her accidentally.

The succession of events grows more gruesome as he attempts to erase the evidence of his crime by shoving Mary's body into the furnace and, then, unable to stuff

all of her inside, by hacking off her head. Wright signals this event as a pivotal moment in Bigger's psychological development:

> He was confident. During the last day and night new fears had come, but new feeling had helped to allay those fears. The moment when he had stood above Mary's bed and found that she was dead the fear of electrocution had entered his flesh and blood. But at home at the breakfast table with his mother and sister and brother, seeing how blind they were, and overhearing Peggy and Mrs. Dalton talking in the kitchen, a new feeling had been born in him, a feeling that all but blotted out the fear of death. As long as he moved carefully and knew what he was about, he could handle things, he thought. As long as he could take his life into his own hands and dispose of it as he pleased, as long as he could decide just when and where he would run to, he need not be afraid.
>
> He felt that he had his destiny in his grasp. He was more alive than he could ever remember having been; his mind and attention were pointed, focused toward a goal. For the first time in his life he moved consciously between two sharply defined poles: he was moving away from the threatening penalty of death, from the death-like times that brought him that tightness and hotness in his chest; and he was moving toward that sense of fullness he had so often but inadequately felt in magazines and movies. (*Native Son* 169-170)

The feeling of powerlessness is replaced by a feeling of power and thrill that he, a poor black boy, had killed a rich white girl. As the horror of his crime dissipates, Bigger's confidence and sense of manhood increases. He feels so masculine that rather than fleeing, he decides to visit his girlfriend, Bessie. For the first time in his life, Bigger believes he has taken meaningful action, and this illusion makes him believe he now controls his own destiny.

Bigger's self-actualization occurs at the price of silencing and destroying the feminine. This new sense of self develops into a feeling of invincibility; Bigger suggests a money-making scheme to Bessie whereby they would extort money from the Daltons by sending a ransom note claiming to have kidnapped their daughter. Bessie, however, is unwilling to participate in Bigger's plan; she is cognizant of historical Anglo perceptions of black men, especially concerning their interaction with white women. Bessie is

frightened when she realizes that Bigger will undoubtedly be accused of having raped Mary Dalton prior to killing her and that Bessie's association with Bigger will make her guilty to the whites. Her unwillingness to simply follow his orders leaves Bigger frustrated. Bessie confirms Bigger's notion that black women were simply a hindrance, observing that "he hated his mother for that way of hers which was like Bessie's. What his mother had was Bessie's whiskey, and Bessie's whiskey was his mother's religion" (*Native Son* 278). Bigger views both women's pathetic attempts to escape the harshness of their reality through different forms of mind-numbing opiates as signs of their weakness. If Bigger is to escape what he believes to be the black female tendency to hinder black male growth, he must practice self-preservation. Wright says, "He couldn't take and he couldn't leave her; so he would have to kill her. It was his life against hers" (*Native Son* 273). Bigger resolves this impasse by raping and killing Bessie. Wright does not spare the reader the brutal details of Bessie's murder; he describes how Bigger rapes her, smashes her skull with a brick, and discards her body down an airshaft into a dumpster. For the second time, Bigger has violently silenced a woman. As if fears the women's possible resuscitation, he decapitates one and dismantles the other's face. Through this expurgation of the black female voice, Wright creates a space for black male self-awareness and ability to speak and define the self. Jerry H. Bryant explains: "The murders of Mary Dalton and Bessie Mears bring him to the truth about himself and his world, and they affirm his identity" (22). Unlike Bessie, Mary has those who speak for her and Bigger is incarcerated for her murder. However, Bessie's existence lingers in the margins; her death is as insignificant as her dead body. In silencing the feminine, Bigger, aided by his Jewish lawyer, Boris Max, discovers his own voice. With Max's

help, Bigger begins to articulate the damning reality of growing up black and male. However, he remains incapable of fighting against his fate and accepts that he will eventually face capital punishment for his crime.

At this pivotal moment in the novel, Wright draws attention to the camaraderie between first between Jan and Bigger, and then between Max and Bigger and to the broader historical connection between African American men and Anglo men—who are also represented by Mr. Dalton and Buckley, the State's Attorney. The question then is why does Bigger connect with Max, or rather, why is Max the one that facilitates Bigger's ability to articulate his life experience. Clearly, while the Jewish lawyer represents the possibility of black and white coalition, the upper-middle-class slum landlord represents exploitative Anglo privilege. Not only does Dalton suffer from an inability to acknowledge the socio-economic consequences of American racial disparity, he truly believes himself to be a champion of African American progress by charging rent to blacks for the privilege of living in cramped, rat-infested tenements, and providing ping-pong balls to the local youth club for black boys. Undoubtedly, Wright's Dalton can be compared to the benevolent blindness of Stowe's slave master, Augustine St. Clare. Like his nineteenth-century cousin, he suffers from a psychological myopia that leaves him unaware of the brutal reality of black life. They both hire black men—Tom and Thomas—to drive them and their women. Wright illustrates the naiveté and pompous mindset of ill-conceived philanthropy through Dalton who proudly declares to Max that even after Bigger murdered his daughter, he continued his social work helping the African American community: "I want you to know that my heart is not bitter...What this boy has done will not influence my relations with the Negro people. Why, only today I

sent a dozen ping-pong tables to the South Side Boy's Club ..." (*Native Son* 340). Max, incensed by the sheer folly of the statement, responds to Dalton's shallow notions of humanitarianism: "My God, man! Will ping-pong keep men from murdering? Can't you see? Even after losing your daughter, you're going to keep going in the same direction? Don't you grant as much life-feeling to other men as you have? Could ping-pong have kept you from making your millions? This boy and millions like him want a meaningful life, not ping-pong ..." (*Native Son* 340). Unlike Dalton, Max understands Bigger's psyche and the African American hunger for freedom, although he can never connect deeply enough with Bigger to dissuade him from accepting death as his only option. As a Jewish man, Max understands oppression. As he explains to Bigger: "'Oh, they'll hate me, yes,' said Max. 'But I can take it. That's the difference. I'm a Jew and they hate me, but I know why and I can fight.' (*Native Son* 416). Max articulates his own Jewish history as the outsider looking in within the Anglo world of men; but unlike, Bigger, he has the advantage of education. There is a homosocial bond between Max and Bigger, and indeed between Bigger and Jan. His bonds with these two white men are clearly stronger than Bigger's bond with black women, and for that matter, with black men.

Bigger's connection with his black male friends is fraught with tension. Their bond reflects the connection between the oppressed, where they all jostle to prove their manhood by threatening one another. As the narrator explains, Bigger strikes out violently in order to hide deep rooted fears: "He hoped the fight he had with Gus covered up what he was trying to hide. At least the fight made him feel the equal of them. And he felt the equal of Doc, too; had he not slashed the table and dared him to use his gun?" (*Native Son* 46). The frustrated suppressed anger that eventually erupts into murder,

finally actualizes Bigger's earlier fantasies of killing. However, with Max's help, Bigger develops self-actualization and can finally articulate the feelings that he had only kept to himself:

> He did not want to sit on a bench and sing, or lie in a corner and sleep. It was when he read newspapers or magazines, went to the movies, or walked along the streets with crowds, that he felt what he wanted; to merge with himself with others and be a part of this world, to lose himself in it so he could find himself, to be allowed a chance to live like others, even though he was black. (*Native Son* 278)

This simple desire to exist as others do is countered by the sheer fact that his life had always been governed by white authority. Bigger realizes that

> not only had he lived where they told him to live, not only had he done what they told him to do, not only had he done those things until he had killed to be quit of them; but even after obeying, after killing, they still ruled him. He was their property, heart and soul, body and blood; what they did claimed every atom of him, sleeping and waking; it colored life and dictated the terms of death. (*Native Son* 383-4)

In Bigger, Wright delineates the tension between what Martin Summers describes as America's obsession with its own masculine character and its refusal to recognize the manhood of some of its male populace. Even as the individual's success defined his manhood, African Americans were relegated to the role of second-class citizens without the full rights of citizenship. Therefore, black men were defined as boys. Max demonstrates to Bigger that not all white men assume racial superiority; he listens to Bigger's life narrative and concludes that Bigger is simply a product of a diseased society that facilitates capitalist profit through exploitation of the working class.

Notably, Wright characterizes Max as an astute listener, even if his Communist ideology does not provide the sociopolitical change required to make any real impact on the final outcome of Bigger's life. As with Frederick Douglass's white male character, Listwell in *Heroic Slave*, Max also bears witness to a black man's life story. Max helps

Bigger develop his self-recognition and is able to see beyond the image of blackness as informed by the white gaze. Bigger slowly recognizes the self: "[he] tried to see himself in relation to other men, a thing he had always feared to do, so deeply stained was his own mind with the hate of others for him" (*Native Son* 418-9). Through his process of self-examination, Bigger is able to recognize his own humanity and his manhood. He understands the double-consciousness of seeing himself not just from his black perception of self, but also through the perception of white eyes. He also recognizes the consequent internalization of that negative perception of blackness. An important part of this realization is Bigger's understanding not only of his humanity, but also of his manhood. Thus Wright posits a different path through which blacks could define themselves rather than Stowe's Christian redemption. Bigger does not arrive at his awakening via religious tract, but via the Marxist tract spoken by Max. As he begins to articulate his masculinity, he constructs a masculine self with an awareness of the limitations set by white authority. Encouraged by Max, Bigger articulates the mechanics of white oppression and its impact on the African American male psyche:

> "A guy gets tired of being told what he can do and can't do. You get a little job here and a little job there. You shine shoes, sweep streets; anything… You don't make enough to live on. You don't know when you going to get fired. Pretty soon you get so you can't hope for nothing. You just keep moving all the time, doing what other folks say. You ain't a man no more. You just work day in and day out so the world can roll on and other people can live. You know, Mr. Max, I always think of white folks ... they own everything. They choke you off the face of the earth." (*Native Son* 408-9)

Wright clearly borrows from the psychoanalytical "talking cure" to present this curative moment between Max and Bigger. This scene is reminiscent of Listwell's all-night conversation with Washington; Max sits with Bigger in the dark cell while they converse as equals. Max presses Bigger to explore the reason for his deep hatred of whites. Bigger

is finally able to explain and understand the origin of his trauma. Bigger says, "I wanted to be an aviator once. But they wouldn't let me go to the school where I was suppose' to learn it. They built a big school and then drew a line around it and said that nobody could go to it but those who lived within the line. That kept all the colored boys out" (*Native Son* 408-9). The result of living within Southern Jim Crow laws, where the white world kills the dreams and aspirations of black boys, is that it guarantees the arrested development of black boys and stifles their growth into manhood so that they never truly feel like real men. In the South, the whites maintained authority over blacks through Jim Crow laws, and in the North, they ghettoized blacks within urban cities, strangling their dreams.

Wright believes that Bigger's trauma, suffered under white oppression, is also experienced by other working-class men. The propagandist aim of his novel is to advocate for a color blind unity of the American proletariat that recognizes Bigger as exemplifying all downtrodden people. Wright clearly believed that if African Americans were to free themselves from oppression, if black boys were to become men, then they must resist and publically decry the apolitical, ineffectual religion of black male preachers that was embraced by black women. Wright also rejects Stowe's Christian notion of salvation; *Native Son* has no sentimental or euphoric Christian ending in which Bigger experiences literal or metaphoric freedom. Wright seems to argue that Bigger's physical imprisonment reflects his earlier psychological state. Even when free, he never truly experienced freedom because he lived incarcerated within the world by circumstances beyond his control. He does however experience growth and self-awareness in prison that he lacked when free. Bigger, therefore, squarely faces the reality

of his world with its racism and refuses to imagine that religion could provide any lasting peace. After all, the very sign of Christian salvation—the cross—had been appropriated by the Klu Klux Klan and burnt as a symbol of white superiority and hatred for blacks right outside of his prison: "It gripped him: that cross was not the cross of Christ, but the cross of the Klan. He had a cross of salvation round this throat and they were burning one to tell him they hate him! No! He did not want that!" (*Native Son* 391). Once his handcuffs are removed, Bigger rips the cross given to him by the black reverend off his neck. Salvation for Bigger arrives not through death, as it does for Uncle Tom, but as Bryant explains, "Bigger finds that *his* meaning does not come from others, but from himself. His existence is the only thing he can rely upon, the one thing he knows for certain. That is the wellspring of his violence, and when learns that, he undergoes a subtle but distinct change ..." (22). Salvation, or indeed self-awareness, in this case, is not that of some religious euphoric experience of longing for an afterlife, but one grounded in human existence and in understanding one's role in the drama of life—even if the actor strives in vain to wrestle control of the script from the white hand that directs it. Likewise, Wright himself grabs the pen from Stowe and, like his literary forefathers, redefines her vision of African American masculinity. In so doing, Wright exposes the dangers of romantic racialism, in which whites embrace a romanticized vision of African Americans that produces an inability to see beyond a perception of how black life is or should be.

This theme of white exploitation of black labor is picked up by another African American's signifying revision decades after Wright's narrative battle with Stowe's *Uncle Tom's Cabin*. As I will argue in Chapter Four, Ishmael Reed's challenge to

Stowe's vision of African American masculinity relies not on Marxist naturalism, but on parody and humor that once again shifts the paradigm of African American literary tradition to define African American masculinity within its historical context.

Notes

[1] Not only was Jessie Redmon Fauset part of the Harlem Renaissance movement, she was also the editor of the literary section of the NAACP's journal *The Crisis*.

[2] Langston Hughes's and Zora Neal Hurston's relationship with their white patron Charlotte Osgood Mason, ended because, according to both writers, Mason was interested in the primitive aspects of blackness. See Zora Neal Hurston: *Mules and Men*: An E-Text Edition.

[3] Wright read the works of Emile Zola and Theodore Dreiser and was influenced by their use of naturalism to depict the human condition. See Hazel Rowley: *Richard Wright: the Life and Times*. Chicago: UP of Chicago, 2001.

[4] When *Native Son* was published in the spring of 1940, it was so well received that the African-American Marxist C.L.R. James saw the novel as "not only a literary but also a political event." James's review was published under the name J.R. Johnson in the May 1940 issue of *New International*, republished in Scott McLemee and Paul Le Blanc's book, *C. L. R. James and Revolutionary Marxism: Selected Writings of C. L. R. James, 1939-1949*, Atlantic Highlands, New Jersey: Humanities Press, 1994, 88-91.

[5] According to Hazel Rowley, Wright's virulent repudiation of the past is informed by his childhood relationship with this mother. Wright's mother beat into him the "wisdom of Jim Crow" and the danger of a black boy believing the world was fair and that he was free to challenge those whites who threatened his very existence. See Hazel Rowley: *Richard Wright: the Life and Times.* Chicago: UP of Chicago, 2001.

[6] The Jim Crow wisdom for black male survival is to learn to exist unseen; a theme that Richard Wright's protégé, Ralph Ellison, will artfully illuminate twenty years later in *Invisible Man.*

The Death and Resurrection of Uncle Tom: Redefining Black Masculinity in Four Post-Civil-Rights African American Male Texts

> The post-Civil-War household word among Negroes—"He's an Uncle Tom!"—which denoted reluctant toleration for the cringing type who knew his place before white folk, has been supplanted by a new word from another generation which says:—"Uncle Tom is dead! (Wright xxxi.)

Three decades before the 1970s Black Aesthetic Movement began, Richard Wright declared "Uncle Tom is dead!" and generated the manifesto that would galvanize the aesthetic side of the black nationalist Black Power Movement. By this time, the "Uncle Tom" slander held great power and epitomized for black aestheticians the antihero character they could oppose in constructing "true" black male heroism. Proponents of the Black Arts Movement, such as Amiri Baraka (LeRoi Jones) and Larry Neal, picked up where Wright left off, insisting that "there are no stereotypes here anymore" (Neal, *Black Arts Movement*). He went on to say, "History has killed Uncle Tom. Because even Uncle Tom has a breaking point beyond which he will not be pushed." The Black Aestheticians viewed Wright as a forefather worthy of respect precisely because his literary production was informed by his politics and grounded in the lived experiences of the African American working class communities. The protagonist of Wright's *Native Son*, Bigger Thomas, was designed as the antidote to Harriet Beecher Stowe's characterization of black heroism in Uncle Tom and the embodiment of the marginalized and oppressed urban black male. Not surprisingly, he represented for Black Aestheticians a model for literary portrayal of black anger:

> The Black Arts Movement of the 1960s saw Richard Wright's Bigger Thomas as a revolutionary character. In its embrace of cultural naturalism, the movement liked Bigger as an iconoclastic character who did away with the old stereotypical view of the black man in mainstream American literature as a childish, lazy, subservient, innocent and sentimental being. Bigger Thomas is the opposite of Uncle Tom ... Bigger is a rebel, a grown-up Tom, who refuses victimization. As perverse as his crimes are, he uses them to create himself and force

> acknowledgement by a society that has denied him true existence. (Twagilimana and Sublette 324)

The violent murder of two women—one symbolic of oppressive, exploitative the white bourgeois class and the other of the emasculation of black men—expressed for the Black Aestheticians Wright's keen understanding of the damaging effect of black and white femininity on the black masculine. The battle with the feminine in the broader sense also included a war with Stowe, the white female author ultimately responsible for originating the Uncle Tom burden from which black men historically struggled to escape.

It is significant to note that just as Wright launched his literary career, and by extension a new epoch in African American literature, through his revision of Stowe's *Uncle Tom's Cabin* in his foundational work *Uncle Tom's Children*, so too, did the Black Aestheticians use Stowe's titular character to launch yet another period in African American literature. Not only does this prove the significance of Stowe and her novel for African American literature, it also illustrates the power and durability of the novel's stereotypes. As I have demonstrated, each era of African American writers reacts to Uncle Tom through the lens of the sociopolitical and racial concerns of the moment. Predictably, the Black Aestheticians created their own ways of dismantling Stowe's Christian hero. The agenda for their literary production not only aligned with Wright's prescriptive notion of literature as propaganda, but it also put them at odds with James Baldwin, who resisted their monolithic and heteronormative definition of black masculinity (Bill T. Jones will also address the very same issue decades later). While Wright and Baldwin maintained some level of respectful disagreement, Baraka would not be as charitable in his public rejection of Baldwin and his contribution to black literature.

In fact, Baraka explicitly rejected the black homosexual male identity, contending it was simply another form of Uncle Tom-ism—the black male acquiescence to the white man's sexual weakness and a black man's loss of manliness.

As I have argued, Stowe's nineteenth-century protagonist produced a crisis of masculinity that African American male writers historically feel obligated to deconstruct, dismantle, and then revise, to produce their own visions of palatable black masculinity, informed by their lived experiences. Insist and proclaim his death as they might, the 1960s and 1970s Black Arts Movement's literary and cultural imaginations kept Uncle Tom very much alive; his existence depended on the evocation of him through their works. In his 1970 play, *Slave Ship,* Baraka might have had the severed head of Uncle Tom tossed on stage; but it remains center stage, demanding the audience's attention and daring them to look away. Baraka himself appears to recognize that the gaze of Uncle Tom holds our attention, providing a familiar figure through which to challenge and historicize definitions of black manhood within America. If, as Neal asserts, and I would add Baraka agrees, history had killed Uncle Tom, then his apparent death signaled a new vision of "authentic" black manhood that would define itself outside of Anglo constructions of masculinity. Indeed, *Slave Ship* can thus be interpreted as a burial and celebration of a sort; the pageant at the end of the play signals the celebration of the death of the oppressive, white master and his loyal slave, Uncle Tom. Of course, there were other Black Aestheticians whose plays, like Baraka's, revolved around the premise of Uncle Tom's death as a symbolic awakening of black manhood. Examples of such plays include Herbert Stokes' agitprop one-act plays, *The Uncle Toms* (1968) and *The Man who Trusted the Devil Twice* (1969) (both out of publication).

I will focus only on *Slave Ship* in order to explore the Black Arts Movement era's African American male response to Stowe's protagonist as it is the most renowned of the plays, and because it addresses Uncle Tom and black masculinity directly, and with more breadth. *Slave Ship* is a complex play that Baraka himself referred to as a "pageant play." Neal summarized it this way:

> *Slave Ship* presents a more immediate confrontation with history. In a series of expressionistic tableaux it depicts the horrors and the madness of the Middle Passage. It then moves through the period of slavery, early attempts at revolt, tendencies towards Uncle Tom-like reconciliation and betrayal, and the final act of liberation. There is no definite plot ... just a continuous rush of sound, groans, screams, and souls wailing for freedom and relief from suffering. (19)

I read *Slave Ship* as a summation that illustrates the trajectory of Wright's first two novels—from *Uncle Tom's Children,* where the central black male characters attempt to shed the Uncle Tom psyche, to Bigger Thomas, who, for the Black Aestheticians, was the *sine qua non* for their radical black male characters. *Slave Ship*, however, also returns to Stowe's original Uncle Tom in order to expose the contemporary versions of the acquiescing black slave. The play has two Toms: Old Tom (a slave) and New Tom (a preacher). It is noteworthy that Baraka's Uncle Tom slave is reminiscent of the archetype of the shuffling Uncle Tom as portrayed in popular nineteenth-century minstrel show dramatizations of Stowe's novel. Uncle Tom the slave follows the white master telling him, "I'se happy as a brand new monkey ass, yassa, boss, yassa, Massa Tim, yassa, Massa Booboo, I's so happy I jus don't know what to do. Yass, mass, boss, you'se so han'some and good and youse hop, too, gass, I's so happy I jus' stan and scratch my ol' nigger haid" (*Slave Ship* 138*)*. The play then flashes forward and we see the same "Tomish slave" telling the white "massa" about a pending slave revolt. The white master,

the very epitome of the "white devil," squashes the slave revolt and kills the slaves as he laughs maniacally. The stage directions then read as follows: "Lights flash on Tom, cringing as if he is hiding from combat, gnawing on a pork chop. Voice of white man laughing in triumph. Another chop comes sailing into the darkness. Tom grabs it and scoffs it down, grinning, and doing the dead ape shuffle, humming while he eats" (*Slave Ship* 144-45). Although this caricature of an elderly, shuffling black slave who always agrees with "ole massa" does not bear a close resemblance to Stowe's hero, it does resemble the iconic image of the submissive slave. Christian stoicism and loyalty to his white master are not only interpreted as weaknesses, but also are distorted to produce a loathsome figure who Baraka hopes will provoke black anger and revolution against the status quo. New Tom is played by the same actor, but is now a "preacher in modern suit" (*Slave Ship* 141). Again he typifies the coon show's uneducated black character attempting to impersonate white speech and instead producing garbled sentences full of malapropisms: "I have an enema…a trauma, on the coaster with your wife bird shit" (*Slave Ship* 142). The "enema," which can also be read as enemy, but can also be read literarily to mean that the preacher is full of shit from digesting the white man's religion and needs to be cleansed out. The "trauma" can be interpreted as the preacher's unacknowledged trauma from centuries of repression. But even as he speaks, the preacher clearly lacks any real understanding of language, and by extension does not comprehend how religion is used as part of his oppression. While Old Tom is literally enslaved, New Tom is figuratively enslaved by his own psyche and self-anesthetization with religion. Baraka also addresses a decided move away from Western dramatic traditions to develop dramatic forms that tell the black (his)story. The form of *Slave Ship*—the non-linear

connections between the slavery past and the present—therefore rejects the linear dramatic tradition. Even as Baraka attempts to distance his art from the influence of Western literary traditional linear narrative and declare the death of Uncle Tom—to create literary works that reflect the black experience—he makes relevant Stowe's hero. The audience understands the reference precisely because the Uncle Tom archetypes in the *Slave Ship* have their origins in Stowe's black stereotypes. Baraka however deliberately uses the Tom figure, and its associations, for his own purposes. By purposefully evoking minstrel stereotypes, he brings them to light and mocks them, but also provides them as historical black types that contemporary African Americans should avoid. More specifically, he returns to Uncle Tom in order to consciously banish him, once and for all, into history.

In the final scene of the play, the slave ship reenters and those suffering, African[1] ancestors from the middle passage join their contemporary African American descendants on stage to perform a pageant of liberation. As the united body of Africans dances toward the Uncle Tom/Preacher, he becomes increasingly nervous, as does the white master, who confident in his authority had previously laughed off the very idea of a black rebellion. Both are killed. According to the stage directions, the audience is encouraged to join the actors/dancers in the dance (we would assume Baraka's imagined audience to be all black) until they achieve a relaxed party atmosphere. At the end of this improvised party, the Uncle Tom/Preacher's severed head is thrown into the center of the floor, a gesture that signals the death of Uncle Tom (*Slave Ship* 144-45). For Baraka and other Black Aestheticians, the emphatic repudiation of this contemptible figure signaled to the larger American society the onset of a black revolution in America. The Black

Aestheticians were going to reclaim their manhood and proclaim their autonomy from mainstream white society while redefining their black male identity on their own terms. Baraka employs synchronicity of time and merges the African middle passage with the African American present to present an autonomous black community led by race-conscious black men. Decades later, another African American male writer, Ishmael Reed, will employ the same use of time to signify upon *Uncle Tom's Cabin* and offer his own visions of black male heroism in his novel *Flight to Canada.* Reed's novel implies that for black men to thrive in a white male-dominated world, they must be capable of working from within the system to master the Anglo discourse and learn to manipulate that discourse for their own ends.

No White (Wo)Man's Fool: Ishmael Reed's Reclaiming of the Black Man's Gris-Gris in *Flight to Canada*

> Old Harriet, Naughty Harriet ... She popularized the American novel and introduced it to Europe. Uncle Tom's Cabin. Writing is strange, though. That story caught up with her. The story she "borrowed" from Josiah Henson. Harriet only wanted enough money to buy a silk dress. The paper mills ground day and night. She'd read Josiah Henson's book. That Harriet was alert. *The Life of Josiah Henson, Formerly a Slave*. Seventy-seven pages long. It was short, but it was his. It was all he had. His story. A man's story is his gris-gris, you know. Taking his story is like taking his gris-gris. The thing that is himself…. Harriet gave Josiah credit in her The Key to Uncle Tom's Cabin. What was the key to her Cabin? Strange Woman, that Harriet. Josiah would never have thought of waging a plot-toting suit against her. Couldn't afford one anyway ...
>
> Harriet paid. Oh yes, Harriet paid. When you take a man's story, a story that doesn't belong to you, that story will get you. Harriet made enough money on someone else's plot to buy thousands of silk dresses and a beautiful home, "One of those spacious frame mansions of bland and hospitable mien which the New England joiners knew so well to build. " A Virginia plantation in New England. (Flight 8-9)

Just as Amiri Baraka had attempted to exorcise the ghostly presence of Harriet Beecher Stowe's Uncle Tom by wielding words of anger, so, too, does Ishmael Reed go to war

with Stowe and her hero armed with his rapier wit. Just as Delany had challenged Stowe, Reed's mockery of Stowe calls into question her authority to fictionalize the narrative of the black male slave, Josiah Henson[2]. Like Frederick Douglass, Henson was born into slavery and escaped north to freedom. Possessed of the signifying wit of his creator, Quickskill, the protagonist of Reed's 1976 novel *Flight to Canada,* insists Stowe is decidedly guilty of artistic theft. Although Stowe duly acknowledged Josiah Henson's narrative in her *Key to Uncle Tom's Cabin*, Quickskill/Reed clearly believes that this "theft" further emasculates Henson, because it denies him, and by historical extension, all black men, the sole right to their/his story. And the story of his life is tantamount to his very being, his talisman—his *gris-gris.*[3] By conflating issues of property and masculinity, the appropriation of Josiah Henson's narrative does not simply expose the feminine wiles and acquisitiveness of the nineteenth-century white female author, but it also symbolizes the larger historical theft of black manhood through slavery. Because slavery denied black men participation in the American patriarchal system and made them property, the stories of black men become even more important—their stories being among the few things they can claim and present from their own masculine perspectives. In employing sentimentalism—a "feminine" style—to present the narrative of her black male hero, Stowe produces, as Hortense Spillers puts it, an "inexorable grimness" (183) that while it might have merely depressed Spillers, moved Stowe's reader to tears. Even as Stowe "borrowed" from Josiah Henson's narrative, she fails to enrich it; instead, she removes the potency of that black male voice, which Quickskill states is tantamount to "*robbing a man of his Etheric double"* and leaving him hollow with (his)story no longer his to retell (*Flight* 8). Quickskill's metaphysical interpretation of Stowe's crime against Henson

heightens the importance of the slave's narrative, which according to Quickskill is equivalent to his consciousness without which he is nothing. *Flight to Canada* can thus be read as Reed's avenging tool, which he employs to make Stowe "pay" for her crimes against Henson—and against African American men as a whole. If Stowe stole Henson's story, then Reed writes in the margins and between the lines of Stowe's text to recreate a new narrative, laughing as he enters the cabin to scatter its contents into meaningful disorder.

Like other African American male revisionists, Reed's signifying (re)vision reflects a desire to correct historical misrepresentations of black masculinity by re-writing the self in literature, and as such, free the black self from both literal and figurative bondage. Reed seemingly rejects the harsh socialist, realist style of African American literary predecessors such as Richard Wright, employing instead satire and syncretism for his neo-slave narrative. As Darryl Dickson-Carr points out, because of the ontological conditions of Africans in America, satiric humor was part of the rhetorical element of the coded language used by the slaves[4]. I view Reed as the quintessential African American satirist. He escapes the narrowness of Stowe's narrative by either direct references or indirect signification, exploding her myopic view of race and masculinity and making our laughter a serious matter. Steven Weisenburger says that Reed's neo-hoodoo non-traditional literary style,[5] "'while overtly historical, is also quite clearly political: to reclaim the power of interpreting one's own racial identity, thus release it from the 'lies' that support oppression'" (165). In writing *Flight,* Reed imagines un-narrated plots of Stowe's work and revises the African American experience from the vantage point of history. *Flight* disrupts Stowe's narrative in order to create change. Thus, it performs the

important work of revising American history, by including and revising the black presence. To achieve this literary and sociopolitical scheme, Reed employs a kind of syncretism and synchronicity in which different time periods –the nineteenth and twentieth centuries—occur at the same moment. Reed's non-linear style writes against the grain of traditional narrative structure that places emphasis on chronology, as well as reacts against African American confessional or social-realist traditions. Christian Moraru explains that narrative rewriting is a post-modernist style that attempts to rewrite past familiar American texts and transform American myths. In this case, Reed rewrites *Uncle Tom's Cabin* and attempts to transform American myths about black masculinity. Thus, rewriting can be seen as "'critical' for they often critique what they rewrite" (3-4). By placing the plantation era on a continuum with contemporary America, Reed uncovers the parallels between the two moments in history—thus illustrating the black experience since the slavery. His black male characters experience the same racist discrimination in antebellum and 1970s America.

Reed further complicates the idea of Stowe's profiting from Uncle Tom as a commercial enterprise by implying that the abolitionist text also displays the author's suppressed sexual desires. This is alluded to in Quickskill's question, "What was the Key to her Cabin?" (*Flight* 9). One of Reed's answers is represented by the escaped slave, Stray Leechfield, who seems to have found the key to the cabin. Leechfield inverts the economy of slavery by embracing the fetishizing and commodification of the black male body selling pornographic pictures of himself to a waiting white audience. Then he uses the proceeds to buy himself from his master, Swille. As he explains to Quickskill, "I sent the money to Swille. I bought myself with the money with which I sell myself. If

anybody is going to buy and sell me, it's going to be me" (*Flight* 73). Reed lays bare the pornographic desires of closeted whites; Leechfield finds a particularly lucrative clientele in the "Beecherites" (followers of Harriet Beecher Stowe). They are stereotypical old maids whose supposedly suppressed desires can be satisfied by the charming, black male slave. Reed's implication of Stowe's apparent old maid's "repressed desires" for the black male body is both irreverent and comical. But perhaps more significant is Leechfield's declaration of profiting from his own property—his body. Leechfield's logic makes the argument that if, as a slave, his body belonged to Swille, then as a free man, that body (his body) belonged to none other than Leechfield himself. In fact, Leechfield hires himself out as a slave for a day to white women wanting the experience of subjugating a black man. He appropriates familiar nineteenth-century discourses on manhood that contend that a man has the right to earn money through his own labor, even as the market economy in which he engages replicates the white master's objectification of the black body in the slave market. Quickskill, on the other hand, is appalled by Leechfield's self-objectification and self-exploitation and perceives his way of making money as a fall from grace. As he explains to the other escaped slave, 40s, "the slaves really used to look up to him [Leechfield]" (*Flight* 80), because Leechfield was the slave that outwitted master Swille and made money by secretly selling eggs and poultry from Swille's farm:

> He was stealing chickens methodically, not like the old days when they'd steal one or two and try to duck the BBs. He had taken so many over a period of time that he was over in other country, big as you please, dressed like a gentleman, smoking a seegar and driving a carriage ... He had set up his own poultry business, was underselling everybody in eggs, gizzards, gristles, livers—and had a reputation far and wide for his succulent drumsticks. (*Flight* 36)

While Quickskill approves of Leechfield's exploitation of the white master's economic model to his advantage, he clearly disapproves of the commoditization of the black male body as sexual, or even worse, as the black slave object available at a price within the Anglo marketplace. From the proceeds of his businesses, Leechfield adorns himself with finery and drives a luxury car. But Quickskill dismisses this model of black male subversion, preferring instead to use writing as his gris-gris and ultimate weapon against those that enslave him and as his path to gaining freedom via the abolitionist circuit. By contrasting Quickskill's and Leechfield's notions of manhood and freedom, Reed settles with Quickskill's assessment of Leechfield's ineffectual strategies as Keith Clark surmises, "it is through the accumulation of goods that Leechfield believes he can achieve freedom, prosperity, and class status. Leechfield ultimately succumbs to the excesses of commodity culture and fails to realize that, in spite of material prosperity, he remains a slave" (80).

Reed presents three main visions of black masculinity: Raven Quickskill, Stray Leechfield, and Uncle Robin. Quickskill is the intellectual who understands Anglo perceptions of black psychology and has mastered the art of manipulating white men to his benefit. Stray Leechfield's recognition of the Anglo obsession with the black male body leads to his enterprise of fetishizing his own naked body as a commodity for sale. Uncle Robin is the black trickster figure whose understanding of the Anglo male psyche facilitates a cunning ability to play to white male expectations of the black male slave, thus allowing him to lead a double life. Uncle Robin adeptly plays the role of the quintessential Uncle Tom figure and amuses the reader with his obsequiousness in the presence of white men. Like Uncle Tom, his apparent absolute devotion earns him his

master's trust, so much so that the white master becomes completely dependent on his slave. Likewise, Shelby, St. Clare, and Legree depend completely on their head male slaves to run their household. Reed highlights this aspect of Stowe's narrative to demonstrate the competence and responsibility necessary for a slave in such privileged position. Stowe could only imagine Uncle Tom as childlike and loyal and, therefore, dependent upon the paternalistic care of the white master. Uncle Tom certainly appears content in his cabin or in the edenic garden of the St. Clare plantation. Reed debunks this romanticized vision through Uncle Robin who adroitly responds to Mr. Swille's questions about whether his slave longs to escape to Canada:

> "Mr. Swille, but I loves it here so much that ... that I would never think of leaving here. These rolling hills. Mammy singing spirituals in the morning before them good old biscuits. Watching "Sleepy Time Down South" on the Late Show. That's my idea of Canada. Most assuredly, Mr. Swille, this is my Canada. You'd better believe it." (*Flight* 19)

Master Swille replies by saying:

> "Uncle Robin, I'm glad to hear you say that. Why, I don't know what I would do without you. I can always count on you not to reveal our little secret. Traveling around the South for me, carrying messages down to the house slaves, polishing my boots and drawing my bath water. All of these luxuries. Robin, you make me feel like… well, like a God." (*Flight* 19)

Uncle Robin answers him: "'Thank you, Massa Swille. I return the compliment. It's such an honor to serve such a mellifluous, stunning and elegant man as yourself, Massa Swille; indeed an honor. '" (*Flight* 19-20). Uncle Robin evokes all the clichés of slave life as part of his depiction of Swille's Virginia plantation; thusly, Reed parodies Stowe's depiction of the Shelby and Augustine St. Clare plantations as gardens of Eden for Tom to escape to with the young Shelby or the pure and angelic Eva. The obsequiousness of Uncle Robin's waxing lyrical about the place in which he is enslaved is not only comical, but also directly contrasts the earnestness of Stowe's language. Thus, Uncle Robin's

manhood is hidden in plain sight; he appears to embody Uncle Tom's Christian stoic acceptance of his destiny even while he plots the greatest theft and escape. Uncle Robin's masculinity differs from the hypermasculinity of Wright's protagonist; his masculinity resides in his intellectual dexterity. In the tradition of slave narratives, Reed also illustrates Uncle Robin's understanding of the slave's survival mechanism; the slave keeps his true nature hidden. Like Quickskill, Robin knows to live up to the Anglo expectations of blacks when it suits his agenda. Thus Robin wears the mask of subversion; he plays the role of the white man's "boy," while maintaining his manhood.

In fact, like Frederick Douglass's and Martin Delany's fictional heroes, Uncle Robin can write, apparently with some eloquence—unlike Cato Graffado, master Swille's mulatto slave overseer. Not only must the male slaves wear the mask of subservience with Swille, they must also be particularly guarded under the watchful eye of Graffado. Sandy haired, with freckles, Graffado "bears remarkable resemblance to [Swille] himself" and could "in fact, be a butterscotched version" of the white master (*Flight* 51). Reed again alludes to this unspoken familial connection between master and servant when Swille, pleased with Cato's work spying on fellow slaves, refers to him as "son," leaving both master and slave to "freeze and stare at each other" (*Flight* 54). The white master too quickly protests that his slipup was only "figuratively" speaking—after all, he explains, he calls "all his sbleezers son" (*Flight* 54). However, this only confirms the master's guilt. Cato's very existence and Swille's gaffes allude to the non-consensual sexual relationships between black female slaves and white masters. Reed's allusion echoes Stowe' portrayal of the insidious aspect of slavery, represented by Legree with Cassy and Emmeline, and that the mulatto offspring, such as Cato and George Harris,

symbolize. In fact, I read Cato as parodying George Harris. An example of George's eloquence and sense of manhood is demonstrated as he challenges the notion of white superiority:

> 'my Master! And how made him my master? That's what I think of—what right has he to me? I'm a man as much as he is. I'm better than he is. I know more about business than does; I am a better manager than he is; I can read better than he can; I can write a better hand,—and I've learned it all myself, and no thanks to him. ...' (*UTC* 15)

Reed reduces George's manly eloquence to Cato's mangling of the English language. For example, as he explains to Swille that he has discovered the whereabouts of the escaped slaves in the cryptic clues in Quickskill's poem "Flight to Canada," he also take the opportunity to show off his education by critiquing the poem: "And if you ask me, it don't have no redeeming qualities, it is bereft of any sort of *piece de resistance*, is cute and unexpurgated…" (*Flight* 52). Reed furthers the parody with the fact that Cato's malapropisms are a result of his education. When Swille chides him for his hyperbole and "cotton stuffing," Cato replies ''you sent me to school for that. To be critical about things. They gibbed me the Ph. D. Don't you remember?'" (53). Like Douglass and Delany, Reed reverses Stowe's characterizations of darker and lighter skinned male slaves. Reed responds to this Anglo solipsism by reversing the types; he depicts the darker slaves as outsmarting fellow slaves and white men alike, while his mulatto slave, Cato, is the resident buffoon, lacking the intelligence and bravery that Stowe believed her mulatto hero possessed innately. In Reed's work, the mulatto epitomizes the Uncle Tom figure, with an obtuse loyalty to the master and devout religiosity, and the darker Uncle Robin—in all appearances the Uncle Tom—the real man who relishes outmaneuvering Cato, and even Swille.

While Stowe's slave Cato is full of ridiculous pretentions and malapropisms, Uncle Robin's mastery of the English language provides opportunities for altering Swille's writings to his own advantage. He manages Swille's plantation and the rest of his life, even acting as Swille's personal scribe to correct Swille's dyslexic writing. This role provides Uncle Robin access to Swille's will; upon Swille's sudden and mysterious death, Robin has the opportunity to rewrite the will—bequeathing Swille's estate to his trusted and loyal slave. As the human type-writer for Swill, Uncle Robin can therefore be interpreted as the tool that turns against its maker. As Christian Moraru explains, Uncle Robin embodies "the 'writing machine' that refuses to be the instrument of his instrumentalization" (100). Uncle Robin edits Swille's manuscript, seemingly "rewriting it against its very grain, and generally doing as a character what his author accomplishes throughout the novel ..." (100).[6] Like Reed, Uncle Robin disrupts the Anglo author's original text and injects his own narrative style and purpose. Robin/Reed literally seizes the master text and the key to that text and makes it his own; in so doing, he mocks the master text with its vanity and assumptions about race. When Uncle Robin is "informed" of his master's *noblesse oblige* in bequeathing the "Swille Virginia estate" to him, he responds with the appropriate flourish of humility and gratefulness: "I deem it a pleasure to be so fortunate that God would ordain a home in Virginia like this one. Why, your Honor, it's like paradise down here. The sun just kinda lazily dropping in the evening sky. The lugubrious, voluptuous tropical afternoons make me swoon, Judge. Make me swoon" (*Flight* 167). The irony of Robin's statement is that the paradise of Swille's plantation is the place of his enslavement; of course, the reader understands Robin's hyperbolic language as his subversive mask. When asked if someone of such low intellect

could handle running a plantation, Uncle Robin quickly answers, ensuring that he in no way destabilizes the social-racial hierarchy. He explains that his intellectual growth is derived not from within, but rather from the privileged position of being apprenticed to a great white male: "I've watched Massa Swille all these many years, your Honor. Watching such a great genius—a one-in-a-million genius like Massa Swille—is like going to Harvard and Yale at the same time and Princeton on weekends. My brain has grown, Judge. My brains has grown watching Massa Swille all these years" (*Flight* 167). Robin exploits black double consciousness to his advantage—he appears on the surface as the disadvantaged, ignorant slave, but he is the superior trickster figure of African American folk tradition. By wearing the mask of Uncle Tom, and by "playing on the gullibility of [his] opponents, he succeeds in outsmarting and outthinking his opponents" (Harris). Through Uncle Robin Reed employs satire to expose white racism and assumptions about blackness. Since Robin has always managed Swille's plantation, the idea that he learned all that he knows from his master begs the question of where genius truly resides, or even who the fool actually is in this scene—Uncle Robin, or the whites who believe in their own intellectual superiority as they are hoodwinked by the slave. Uncle Robin's minstrel shuffling-Negro act ridicules Uncle Tom, and by extension, also ridicules its creator. Like Massa Swille and the white judge, Stowe suffers from an inability to perceive the world beyond the narrow perception of her Anglo sense of superiority. Reed illustrates both the white conceit and the consequent self-deception that facilitates a refusal or inability to recognize the intelligence of slaves. Uncle Robin is not passively awaiting the white master's benevolence to gain his freedom. Likewise, other

black male slaves in *Flight* use various tactics to maintain their manhood, particularly Quickskill.

Reed uses Raven Quickskill as his mouthpiece to expose willful Anglo blindness and a myopic view of the world. Like Uncle Robin, Quickskill also exploits black double consciousness to his advantage; hence, he is always a step ahead of the white slave catchers because he understands their self-delusions and belief in their own omniscience. He exploits the white men's belief that they understand the black psyche, including that blacks will accept the hegemonic order. For example, when two white men suddenly show up at Quickskill's hideout with "orders to repossess" him, he cordially invites them inside as guests, playing the role of the doleful male slave whose instinct is to serve all white men as his "natural" lot in life. . Quickskill lures the white men into a false sense of security created by their self-propagated notion of white supremacy. As they prepare to bundle him up for the journey, Quickskill casually reminds the white men that he had promised to provide vitamin C for the slave catcher who is suffering from a cold. The white men naturally consent to the black male's selfless entreaty to serve them. The two white men discuss none other than Harriet Beecher Stowe's *Uncle Tom's Cabin* as they wait for him to return with the vitamin C, but Quickskill escapes through the bathroom window. The white men's discussion about Stowe's novel aligns their ignorance with her myopic view of the world. I would argue that this moment summarizes what Reed believes to be the fundamental problem with Stowe's *Uncle Tom's Cabin*—it is a flawed representation of blacks because Stowe's inability to comprehend the black psyche leads her to define blackness and black male heroism from the perspective of her own Christian ideals. If Uncle Tom is the quintessential acquiescing slave who always makes his

priority the wellbeing of whites, then Quickskill is the embodiment of self-determined manhood—his primary desire is to achieve freedom. Stowe, like the white characters in *Flight,* is like Captain Delano of Herman Melville's *Benito Cereno*, whose racialized blindness causes him to miss the obvious. As events unfold before him, he is unable to interpret their true meaning.[7] Just as Melville's black slave, Babo, outmaneuvers the white men precisely because he appears to remain within the expected, prescribed narrative of American racial interactions, Quickskill outsmarts the white men.

Quickskill, like Uncle Robin and Reed himself, has mastered the art of rewriting and revising the master text to his advantage, thus disrupting the master's world. Incensed by his slave's audacity to write passes and forge freedom papers for his fellow slaves, Swille is determined to find Quickskill and dole out the ultimate punishment—return to slavery. Reed constructs different possibilities of black masculinity—from the trickster figure of Uncle Robin, to the quick wit of Quickskill, and the self-objectification of Leechfield. However, the universal theme among all these visions of black masculinity is their independence and dogged pursuit of freedom. The sheer variety of black masculinity on display makes the reader question where the ideal lies in the spectrum. However, it is possible that Reed is illustrating how there is no monolithic black male identity because that identity is as multifaceted as America itself. *Flight* itself is a hybrid of different races, including characters black, white, and Native Indian. Moraru points out specifically that Reed's "text and people are aesthetic objectives and social linkages that complicate notions of origin, purity, and absolute difference" (Moraru 98). If Reed rewrites Stowe's original subtitle for *Uncle Tom's Cabin*, "the Man who was a Thing," then *Flight* can be said to be of narrative of the thing who became a man. The intertextual

relationship between the two narratives evokes Douglass's chiasmus; Stowe tells the story of how a *man* was made a *slave*; and Reed tells of how a *slave* was made a *man***.** Reed removes the sentimentalism of Stowe's fiction so that we do not pity the embattled male slave, but applaud the male slave in battle. In rewriting Henson's story through Uncle Robin's story, Stowe's theft of Henson's narrative can be avenged. Reed's post-modernist synchronic narrative re-writes Stowe's novel, and thus attempts to stop the circulation of the sentimental, feminized masculinity popularized by Stowe's Uncle Tom. The battle with Stowe is both psychological and writerly. In the end, he passes the baton and, predictably, there is another African American male ready with pen in hand to do battle with Stowe.

It Ain't Necessarily So, Harriet: Visions of African Masculinity in Robert Alexander's *I Ain't Yo Uncle: The New Jack Revisionist Uncle Tom's Cabin*

Like Ishmael Reed, Robert Alexander also employs satire to signify upon and revise Stowe's *Uncle Tom's Cabin* in his 1991 agitprop play, *I Ain't Yo Uncle: The New Jack Revisionist Uncle Tom's Cabin.* Alexander, bases his revision of Stowe's text, however, on George L. Aiken's 1852 stage adaptation, *Uncle Tom's Cabin: Life Among the Lowly*. As Eric Lott explains, the two most popular stage adaptations of *Uncle Tom's Cabin*, and there were indeed many adaptions in late nineteenth and turn of the twentieth-century America, were written by H. J. Conway and George L. Aiken. Lott writes how these "two competing versions ... each took up one of the minstrel show's contradictory representational strategies in regard to blacks—Conway its hard-edged ridicule, Aiken its sentimentalism" (227). Although both employed the minstrel show's sentimental racism, "Conway left the minstrel show's worst contributions intact, while Aiken brought out the radical uses lurking in it" (227). The popularity and "radicalism" of Aiken's adaptation perhaps explain Alexander's choice of his Aiken's play as the foundation for his revisionist version. The sentimentality of Aiken's version lends itself both to exaggerations for comic effect and to satirical manipulation; Alexander thus channels Aiken's racist comical darkies, creating equally comical, but subversive versions that express black anger. In entering the "Uncle Tom wars" through what Lott describes as the "racial meanness" of Aiken's play, Alexander emphasizes the historical burden of Stowe's novel. That is, her romanticized racist characterization of African Americans, particularly Uncle Tom, provided the fodder for minstrel shows with their embellished black stereotypes. Stowe helped set the foundations for using racist stereotypes as comic relief on the American stage and within American culture. Alexander contextualizes his

vision of radical black masculinity to reflect post-Civil Rights era racial politics. More specifically, his revisionist play addresses 1990s racial tensions and inequalities in order to point to the fact that, even late twentieth-century American discourses on race are still shaped by nineteenth-century and Reconstruction era issues of poverty, lack of educational opportunities, and racism. By grounding his production in the nineteenth-century minstrel play, Alexander not only historicizes American discourses of race and masculinity, but he also educates the audience about the "true" nature of *Uncle Tom's Cabin.* [8]

In line with his literary forefathers, Alexander demands that Stowe answer for her crimes; he directly challenges her by bringing her to life on the stage along with her own black characters: George, Eliza, and Topsy. Following Stowe's and Aiken's format, Alexander holds off on introducing us to the play's main protagonist, Uncle Tom. Instead, he begins by making these three characters central to his play, which not only aligns his play with Aiken's adaptation, but also reflects the now iconic status many of Stowe's characters bear in American society. Although not quite as popular as Uncle Tom, George, Eliza, and Topsy were commercialized through nineteenth-century and turn of the twentieth-century *Uncle Tom's Cabin* paraphernalia—posters, figurines, decorative plates, etc. [9]—and, of course, through Aiken's play and other stage adaptations. Fittingly, they drag Stowe center stage where they conduct a mock trial to charge her for willfully "writing stuff she couldn't possibly know about. A slave's experience. The black experience" (*I Ain't Yo Uncle* 9). Delany would certainly have approved of this moment; Alexander's/George's statement not only echoes Delany's challenge to Stowe, but it can also be interpreted as acting out Delany's concerns with

Stowe's "theft" of Henson's narrative. Even though Stowe did not always have control over the copyright of her novel[10] and the consequent offensive minstrel Tom shows "based" on her novel,[11] Alexander, like many scholars, nonetheless views Stowe as responsible for the propagation of her stereotypes. By challenging Stowe via a revision of the most popular, and perhaps least racially offensive, of the *Uncle Tom's Cabin* stage adaptation, Alexander illustrates how much Stowe's novel became, and still is, part of American popular culture—even if many of the audience might not necessarily know this. At this point in the play, George, not Uncle Tom, is the man of the hour; he is in charge of bringing the great Harriet Beecher Stowe to trial for her white-lensed, myopic representation of blacks.

The play begins by addressing African American concerns about Stowe's central black characters. Not surprisingly, George, Stowe's eloquent mulatto, is the chief judge. His power of oratory and confident masculinity well suits his role as presiding "judge." His first line in the play, "Bring in the accused" (*I Ain't Yo Uncle* 7), sets the tone. Alexander's characterization of the angry, judgmental mulatto slave rejects Stowe's transformation of George from the only angry black voice repudiating the racial hierarchy on the plantation to the more agreeable, Christianized, domesticated free man at the end of the novel. Alexander embraces Stowe's initial characterization of George as the angry runaway slave, rather than his transformation into a more domesticated slave surrounded by sister, wife, and mother. Alexander presents him as a Nat Turner-like, rebel-slave hero. In the synchronous representation of George within contemporary America, he is an "executive" of Clorox. George is now envisioned within the masculine marketplace working for a Clorox bleaching agent, which aids in making whites even whiter. This, I

would argue, indirectly alludes to George's status as not just black, but also white. Therefore, he can access, or at least understand, whiteness. This reflects a comical and also accusatory observation that the mulatto through his whiteness gains access to working for the establishment—the Clorox company—which, in for black community would be a form of betraying the black cause and engaging with white consumerism and exploitative capitalism. George thus finds himself in a dilemma; should he pursue the expected American dream and participate in the capitalist system, and as such gain societal respect and recognition for taking on his manly responsibility, or should he reject all together the larger American society, and risk being labeled as the stereotype of the indolent angry black male? Through this use of synchronous connection between the past and the present, Alexander discusses the topical issues and crisis facing black men in 1980s and early 1990s America and demonstrates how contemporary racial tensions and African American crisis of masculinity are connected to America's historical racial tensions. This crisis of black masculinity clearly serves as a catalyst to Alexander's signifying revision. He appears to argue that the black men, and not white women (read Stowe), and certainly not exploitative white men (read Aiken), should define black heroism and masculinity. He also acknowledges that as they struggle through this crisis, black men may not necessarily agree on solutions for emancipating the black self and the black male from literal and figurative bondage, as we see in the exchange between Tom and George:

> GEORGE. I've come to lead you to freedom. Tomorrow night, I will strike like a panther at the Fulton plantation. Then my posse shall pay your Mr. Legree a visit. Be ready. (*Hands him a gun—TOM has never held one before.*) You hold your freedom in your hand, Tom. (*Tom weighs the gun*.) We shall fall on the oppressors with the fire and sword! We're gonna see these swamps run red with slave owner's blood.

> TOM. Did something happen to Eliza?
> GEORGE. She and Harry are safe in Canada.
> TOM. What she think about his? (*GEORGE dismisses the questions.)* What gonna happen to your son?
> GEORGE. I'm doing this for my son! I can't claim my father—but my son can be proud of me.
> (*I Aint Yo Uncle* 57)

Alexander argues that this should have been Stowe's vision and legacy of black manhood rather than her narrative of the black man's Christian martyrdom that grants salvation not just to him, but to white males. Alexander is unsatisfied with Stowe's apparent need to pour cold water over the flames of black anger; he seems to imply that there is a generative power in black male anger because of its ability to catalyze black resistance to white oppression. The sociopolitical perspective of Alexander's play clearly reflects the racial tensions of 1990s American society—epitomized by the Rodney King race riots in 1991 and the controversial nomination proceedings of Clarence Thomas to the Supreme Court in July 1991.[12] By employing a synchronic coexistence of the past and the present, Alexander not only demonstrates that connections exist between past and present, but also questions American progress when it comes to issues of race—and especially black men.

Although George represents the voice of black male anger, Uncle Tom remains central to Alexander's play. He enters the stage in a characteristically Uncle Tomish fashion—bent over and shuffling. His juxtaposition with the virility of George illustrates the dichotomy between the "old-timey" Negro and the modern, angry, radical black male. Alexander sets the stage for the play's discussions about the role of *Uncle Tom's Cabin* in establishing the tenor for the discourses on race and black masculinity within American culture. Uncle Tom's presence on stage disrupts the black characters' attempt

at revising Stowe's narrative and changing history. Topsy cannot contain her displeasure with this vision of black servitude and shouts, "We thought Uncle Tom was dead and long buried!" (*I Ain't Yo Uncle* 8). By giving the character Topsy the familiar phrase "Uncle Tom is dead," Alexander connects his play historically to pre- and post-Civil Rights era African American male writers such as Richard Wright and Amiri Baraka, who both (decades earlier) had declared the death of Uncle Tom. History, it would seem, has not killed Uncle Tom, but rather provided moments where he could be called upon to act as the vehicle by which black male authors could posit their vision of the new black male identity in opposition to Stowe's celebrated black male hero.

Unlike the black characters, Stowe is not only relieved at Uncle Tom's presence, but also confident that she will find in him an advocate; she urges him to tell how her book helped emancipate his race. However, Uncle Tom's sudden straightening of his stooped back and new manly attitude take everyone by surprise. Looking Stowe straight in the eye, he tells her "Let's get a few things straight, Ms. Stowe. First of all, I ain't yo uncle! ... Your book turned a lot of folks against slavery, but it created a big image problem for me. 'Uncle Tom,' that's what they call that new feller on the Supreme Court—ain't it?" (*I Ain't Yo Uncle* 10). This delights Topsy who is relieved that if Uncle Tom is in fact not dead, he has at least come back an altered manly man. Ironically, this more virile, stronger Uncle Tom more closely resembles the physicality of Stowe's actual hero in *Uncle Tom's Cabin* than the feeble, aged Uncle Tom image made popular during the nineteenth century.[13] However, his attitude is quite different. The allusion to Supreme Court Justice Clarence Thomas is also important to note; Thomas's anti-affirmative action stance and conservative politics left him estranged from much of the

African American community. Many audience members would have understood Alexander's insinuation that Justice Thomas embodied the pejorative meaning of the Uncle Tom label: a traitor to his race. Implicit in passing reference is that Justice Thomas, like Uncle Tom, lacks the manliness to stand up to the white master and instead remains dedicated to serving him. Alexander appears also to question the choice of acceptable black male leadership in Clarence Thomas precisely because Thomas lacks the support of other African American political leaders and the black community as a whole.[14]

Uncle Tom's challenge to Stowe energizes the play and is used by Alexander to directly ask the question that has plagued African American men since the publication of *Uncle Tom's Cabin*:

> TOM. Why did you give me that cross to carry? Why did you paint me like Jesus, instead of painting me like a man…a whole man?
>
> HARRIET. I wrote what you showed me.
>
> TOM. You wrote what you wanted to see! (*I Ain't Yo Uncle* 9)

Through Tom, Alexander exposes Stowe's myopic view of blackness, which is not only informed by nineteenth-century Anglo perceptions of the African, but also by religion. Hence, Stowe's inability to see beyond her Anglo notion of race, and her perception of the ideal Christian, which leads to her construction of a black male hero that, according to Baldwin, lacked the reality of black experience. Alexander argues that Stowe is blind to the real Tom. The question then is, if as she based her hero on Henson, did she also misread his narrative? Could she only applaud the Christian preacher that Henson became, while missing the intelligence and the machinations it took for him to escape with his family to freedom? Is Alexander, like Reed, arguing that Stowe lacks the skill to

see beyond white expectations of blackness, which would also explain her incredulousness that her Christian hero would turn against her? Stowe on stage begins her own protest against black anger and the never-ending African American demand for white guilt. Alexander thus provides a moment for a familiar white counterargument to black demands for equality. He addresses the backlash against affirmative action; he uses Stowe to voice contemporary Anglo discontent with the "advantages" that blacks receive through affirmative action and complaints that this has become a tool to punish whites. Topsy, enraged by Stowe's diatribe, wants to end the play immediately and simply "off this broad, right now!" (*I Ain't Yo Uncle* 9). Tom argues, however, that killing Stowe produces no lasting gains. Instead he maintains that the group must rewrite her narrative and create a different vision of blackness within American cultural imagination. In other words, African Americans must themselves undo centuries of black stereotypes and rewrite stories according to their own lived experiences. More precisely, the African American narrative must be authored by black men and handed down to black sons to pass down to the larger community. Using Tom as a mouthpiece, Alexander arrives at the crux of the matter: "I said we're doing this play! Wid new dialogue ... and scenes YOU left out! Scenes that show me in a new light. A true light. I want to git paid my proper respect ..." (*I Ain't Yo Uncle* 9-10). Stowe asks, "What's the point, Tom? How much could you possibly change? You can't rewrite history" (*I Ain't Yo Uncle* 9-10). I read Stowe's question as Alexander's own questioning of his role as an African American author whose intertextual conversation with Stowe's novel attempts to revise and thus to create ideological change. In other words, Alexander asks: can simply rewriting Stowe's text undo 140-plus years of misrepresentation of the black male? Of course, we cannot

ignore Topsy's voice in the play. Despite George's masculinity, his rage cannot match that of the female character, "jes grew" Topsy, who represents the voice of the angry black female. Stowe's characterization of her truly relied on racist archetypes of the unruly, ugly, dark, comical, and impish black female child. This figure was a particular favorite of the minstrel adaptations and often the most offensive portrayal of blackness in the shows. With this in mind, Alexander rightly characterizes Topsy with centuries of anger bubbling to the surface to wrestle centuries of misrepresentation of black female identity. However understandable her anger, her declaration of, "I love to watch shit burn. I love to hear motherfuckers scream," ends the play with no real resolution, and is therefore problematic. Tom 's question, "Any volunteers to take Topsy? Y'all think she came from nowhere? Do ya 'spects she just growed?" further problematizes black female identity and black female anger that appears to simply explode and generates no response but shock and possibly fear. To my mind, the final Topsy seems to recreate another stereotype—the angry black female. Notably, Topsy is re-written as an independent female voice, and unlike Wright's black female characters, Alexander's Topsy stands side by side with the black men ready to do battle with Stowe and is no hindrance to their progress. But then, unlike Eliza, who Topsy refers to as "lemon drop" and is clearly more sympathetic to Stowe during the trial, Topsy actually has an axe to grind with Stowe. She is, after all, after Uncle Tom the most popular offensive character of the minstrel stage adaptations of *Uncle Tom's Cabin*. Although she is a female character, I would argue that the fact that she often presents her anger in rap—a masculine musical genre—masculinizes her.

> Topsy: Dat's right. Topsy Turvy in effect. This ain't no motherfucking play. I'm the governor of this bullshit story! Harriet didn't make up. Well, well, well…look at all these crackers and peanut butter. (68).

Like the nineteenth-century Topsy, Alexander's is also comical, but this stereotype creates unresolved tension—both inter-racial and intra-racial tensions. Clearly, recuperating the image of Uncle Tom is the primary concern of Alexander's play.

In *I Ain't Yo Uncle,* Alexander appears to suggest that African Americans can indeed rewrite history. Revising the Stowe/Aiken text allows Stowe's African American characters, particularly Uncle Tom, who has created an image problem for black men and has been their albatross, to go back and rewrite themselves while remaining within the present. They create a *new* narrative that will more accurately and positively influence American culture just as Stowe's text influenced discourses of race and black masculinity to create problematic stereotypes. Alexander reimagines Tom's stoic, self-sacrificing actions. While Stowe envisioned Christian martyrdom, Alexander portrays Tom's actions as a manly sacrifice. Tom explains to Topsy, George, and Eliza that he remained on the plantation not because of his loyalty to his white masters, but he "stayed behind so y'all could git ahead" (*I Ain't Yo Uncle* 10). Uncle Tom does not rewrite his ending; he still dies whipped to death by Legree, but he revises the meaning of his death. When George asks why Tom does not change his own ending when other characters change theirs, Uncle Tom responds, "If I live, nobody'll remember me. My dying stays in everybody's face" (*I Ain't Yo Uncle* 68). By having Uncle Tom, the black male, choose his own ending, even as it reiterates Stowe's ending, this time however, Uncle Tom articulates his primary desire for self-sacrifice as a martyrdom for his own race, rather than one centered on transforming white masters. Now that Uncle Tom has a voice and the agency to write

his own ending, it is far more meaningful and therefore transcendent. Alexander also recognizes the role that Uncle Tom's death serves in facilitating discourses on race and gender which reinsert African American men within American history. As with Reed, Alexander is making the audience aware of how the act of rewriting itself creates change, or at least the possibility of change, in the literary and cultural characterization of blackness. By re-telling his story, black male revisionists resurrect Uncle Tom, and through him they reassess American discourses on race and black masculinity, and explore gender and racial identity that speaks to particular moments in history. Ultimately Uncle Tom allows African American artists to imagine possibilities beyond the binaries of black and white, feminine and masculine, as in the case of Bill T. Jones.

Uncle Tom in the Promised Land: Rethinking Black Masculinity in Bill T. Jones's "Last Supper at *Uncle Tom's Cabin*/The Promised Land"

"One of the questions driving my work for the past 12 years has been that, 'I know we're quite different, but what do we have in common as a people? A culture? How can we see past superficial differences?'" (Bill T. Jones in *Princeton Weekly Bulletin*, 2001)

In his 1994 television interview, "Dancing to the Promised Land," dancer/choreographer Bill T. Jones explains how the reference to Stowe's most famous character and novel began initially as a joke because of the pejorative meaning of the phrase "Uncle Tom." However, as Jones explains, what began as a joke between him and his partner, Arnie Zane, became a realization of the powerful meaning of Stowe's novel and her hero. After Zane's death and the consequent deep sense of loss, Jones explains that he decided to change the original tongue-in-cheek title of "Last Supper at Uncle Tom's Cabin with 52 Handsome Male Nudes" to "Last Supper at Uncle Tom's Cabin/The Promised Land." This sprawling, theatrical dance narrative became a personal

journey and a profound exploration of Stowe's historical text as a vehicle by which to investigate race, gender, faith, and sexual orientation. As Jones explains, he felt a personal connection with the historical resonance of the violence and sentimental streak that runs through Stowe's *Uncle Tom's Cabin*. The final product of Jones's musings on Stowe's famous/infamous text is a non-linear, dissonant dance narrative that refuses to operate within binaries. Instead Jones's work employs the power of juxtaposition to create a complex engagement with Stowe and her protagonist, Uncle Tom. It is particularly interesting to see how Jones, a gay African American man, approaches Stowe's representation of black masculinity and how that informs his revisionist efforts. Jones ponders the age-old questions surrounding Uncle Tom. Is he a redemptive figure or a blight on African American male sense of self? Has he become culturally acceptable for the African American community or is he a symbol of weakness (and an insult capable of producing deep long-lasting psychological wounds when hurled at African American men)? As *Last Supper* is indeed a sprawling production, my analysis focuses only on moments that I believe reveal intersections of race and gender and how Jones (de)constructs his own vision of ideal black male heroism.[15]

Does Jones revise Stowe's narrative because he is bound, like his male African American predecessors, by a need to revise Uncle Tom and re-envision him within Jones's own ideological perspective? That is, what draws Jones to *Uncle Tom's Cabin*? He explains that he was drawn by Stowe's narrative, particularly by the "whipping scene," because of its historical resonance. Not only does it contextualize the mental and physical trauma experienced by African Americans during slavery, but it also describes the same traumas that are part of his own familial narrative. Jones recalls his mother's

description of days working in cotton fields. In one incident the white male boss decided to punish his maternal grandmother for visiting relatives even after he had denied her request to do so. The white man lined up all her children (including Jones's mother, who was then a little girl) in a barn and made them watch as he whipped the mother. Jones's uncle (then a boy) attempted to intervene, but his hand was lashed by the leather strap and his small finger was broken and permanently crooked (Jones, *Dancing to the Promised Land*). It is interesting to note that what began as a story about his mother/grandmother ends up with Jones's remembering the impact the incident had on his uncle; the black female story turns into the story of black men's subjugation by white male oppression. This biographical fact clearly influences Jones's work. He often uses personal experience in his art and also encourages his dance troupe members to use their own personal experiences to create a larger quilt that narrates differences, memory, and history. When Jones tells the familial anecdote, he invites the audience to grasp truly the historical impact of Stowe's novel and Uncle Tom on African American realities. Having grounded his audience in Uncle Tom's cabin, Jones takes them on a leap of faith to see his vision of the promised land, the leap becoming actual for those community members invited, at the end, to join the performance by stripping naked in front of the audience seated in the "Promised Land" section.

Last Supper weaves multiple historical texts into the fabric of the production:—*Uncle Tom's Cabin*; Sojourner Truth's "Ain't I a Woman" speech; and Martin Luther King's "I have a Dream" speech. The performance also includes personal texts: Ella Jones's onstage prayer; R. Justice Allen's rap chronicling his life story; Heidi Latsky's Jewish-identified, female narrative about surviving abuse by men; and, of course, Jones's

own multifaceted narrative of love and loss and the social ramifications of being black and gay. To truly grasp *Last Supper*, I begin where Jones begins his intersection with *Uncle Tom's Cabin*—outside of the dance in his insightful explanation of what drew him to Stowe's narrative. Hence, the permanent crookedness of Jones's uncle's finger, the origins of which he explains in his interview, can be interpreted not just as a symbol of a black boy's attempt to defend his mother, but also of a white male's attempt to suppress black manhood. What stands out in this account of trauma, one of the many that his mother experienced growing up in the South, is that the traumatic experiences do not change her deep Christian beliefs. Jones equates her faith with Uncle Tom's Christian faith. Thus, the impact of the real incident of the violent whipping on the son/uncle and the steadfast religiosity of the daughter/mother are conflated through the sentiment of the familial narrative. Feminine and masculine experiences merge as expressions of family and, more broadly, of African American survival narratives. As Jones elucidates in his interview, Tom's seemingly passive acceptance of Simon Legree's brutal whipping evokes the black, Civil-Rights-era's Christian ideology of passive resistance as espoused by Martin Luther King (whose "I Have a Dream" speech is recited backward in the final act). I contend that the way in which violence and sentiment threads through this familial narrative reflects Jones's intertextual conversation with Stowe's narrative. He interprets Uncle Tom's apparent submissiveness not as weakness but, in its own manner, as an act of resistance when framed within Martin Luther King's Civil Rights ideology. Unlike Reed and Baraka, Jones embraces the sentimentalism of Stowe's text because, for Jones, the juxtaposition of the violence and sentiment is, in the end, more powerful a political tool than violent resistance alone. Violence might catalyze the struggle, but sentiment,

Jones argues, provides the space for all to come together to build an egalitarian and inclusive American society.

Like other African American male writers who respond to *Uncle Tom's Cabin*, Jones is in a triangular conversation with another African American revisionist and Stowe, illustrated by a scene toward the end that includes parts of Baraka's *The Dutchman*, which is played out by two characters (I will return to this later). Ironically, decades earlier James Baldwin, another gay African American writer, had rejected Stowe's rhetorical use of sentimentalism and Richard Wright's use of propaganda, viewing both sentimental "feeling right" and "violent anger" as ineffective means for bringing about social change. However, Jones is proposing a sociopolitical agenda that merges the two; the result being not so much *feeling right*, but *acting rig*ht as a step closer to a utopic, promised land. But Jones does not completely embrace Stowe's text. He enters *Uncle Tom's Cabin* with the same reservations as the other African American male writers who take up their pens to battle with Stowe.

Jones certainly understands and recognizes how Stowe's novel, with its own romantic racist characterization of blacks, set the foundations for stage adaptations which produced racially offensive coon shows that reinforced and exaggerated some of Stowe's black archetypes to the point of creating pro-slavery tales.[16] Jones thus approaches Stowe's text with a level of irony; like Robert Alexander, Jones enters *Uncle Tom's Cabin* via the minstrel stage adaptations it engendered. The drama of the traditional minstrel shows provide a historical launching pad for Jones's dance because it both historicizes the performance and merges dance with drama to create Jones's genre of

narrative dance—a play/dance. Anne Cooper Albright so eloquently describes Jones's *Last Supper*:

> At once fragmenting and reinventing the tropes of blackface, the family, religious faith, womanhood, slavery, and "Uncle Toms," Jones outlines the ambivalent relationship his dancers have with those historical characters. Employing theatrical devices to foreground the performance of racial and gendered stereotypes, Jones indicates the contradictory closeness and distance—the similarities and the differences—between then and now. (155-56)

The Bill T. Jones/Arnie Zane Dance Company is a multiracial and multiethnic cast of men and women with different body types and Jones uses their differences to blur racial and gendered identities. A white man plays Aunt Chloe and Eliza is played by four different women—black, Jewish, white, and biracial. Jones's company members with their different racial, gender, and sexual identities reflect his larger ideology of inclusiveness, but their roles in the performance also reflect his dismantling of the tradition of the minstrel show, where the actors are whites in black face. The multifaceted identities of the company also insists upon the shared similarities of humanity—of pain, of sorrow, and of struggles for liberation—irrespective of race. In Act 1, "The Cabin," Jones addresses the racism of Stowe's text and the coon shows that it spawned. The white female playing Stowe introduces the audience to *Uncle Tom's Cabin* as the dancers speed through the novel's iconic moments on a stage set that evokes the old minstrel Tom shows. The actors wear exaggerated masks as they perform dances reminiscent of black-face minstrel-show Jim Crow dances with their offensive representation of blackness. The older white actress playing Stowe narrates the novel while a black man "both narrates and supplies a black man's ironic counternarrative ..." (Brennan, *Last Supper*). At the end of the story, dancers perform all their previous movements backward, "rewinding" until they stop at the whipping scene. As Jones explains in his interview

with Ann Daly, "the whole ramification of Uncle Tom as the black martyr Christian and his subsequent fate at the hands of the brute Simon Legree informed the whole latter half of the piece—'The Last Supper' and 'The Promised Land'" (Cunningham 122). Jones thus does not completely reject Uncle Tom's death, but rather embraces the idea of his death as salvation for all. Therefore by having us rewind back to the whipping scene just before Uncle Tom's death, Jones demands that, as one does by rewinding a videotape to a particular scene, we rethink our earlier assumptions about this scene. Jones forces us to return to Stowe's text, so that we not only comprehend the scene as continuous re-enactment of the very real violence perpetrated upon the black body, but also for us to re-assess the scene and rethink our conclusions. When we return to Stowe's text, away from the stage adaptations, and leave behind what has become our cultural memory—different from Stowe's version—of the grey-haired shuffling slave, we might arrive at different conclusions. Certainly, Uncle Tom's death facilitates transformations with other characters: it facilitates the escape of the two black female slaves, Cassy and Emmeline; it softens Cassy and re-energizes her maternal desire to ensure that Emmeline never experiences slavery in the way that she had; it transforms the black male slaves, Sambo and Quimbo, from Legree's brutes to caring Christians; it transforms the young white master Shelby from a slave owner to one who emancipates his slaves and pay for his slave's labor; and Stowe would argue, it transforms the white reader from passive member of the society, to potentially active abolitionist. In this light, we can conclude that for Bill T. Jones, Uncle Tom's redemptive power facilitates the possibility of a communal coming together of everyone, irrespective of race, gender, faith, or sexual orientation. Jones argues that if we recognize and acknowledge Tom's suffering, rather

than sweep it aside, but engage with its relevancy for our collective American history rather than sweep it aside, then we can derive generative meaning from his death. The last act thus calls on the audience to leave behind earthly obsessions and create on earth, not in heaven, our own paradise.

In addition to the whipping scene, Jones stages another iconic moment in *Uncle Tom's Cabin*: Eliza crossing the ice. She is represented by four different women, but the dance culminates with a black male Eliza in drag wearing a white miniskirt and pumps. His exaggerated femininity is both comical and yet powerful in the manner in which it questions gender and sexuality within the one body. Murphy explains Jones's deconstruction: "Stowe's heralding of 'feminine sentiment' in *Uncle Tom's Cabin* is thus moved into an arena that opens the stage, and the book, to the position of not just 'woman' but also the construction of gender, and more specifically, in Jones's context, the position of gay men and their bodies in this sentimental economy" (95). This drag persona of the fifth Eliza's "hip-swinging act" not only stages homosexuality as spectacle, but also, I contend points to a literal feminization of a black male body—a contrast to Stowe's metaphorical feminization of her black male hero. Jones explains that this final Eliza, like Jones himself, has a "sexuality [that] exists on neither shore, that of femininity and masculinity. It is its own thing, but because of the strictures of our society, we are left suspended, doubtful, fearful even, of where we belong" (Albright 165). The section begins with Eliza's female narrative—acted by a female performer, but it ends with another performance of Eliza's story—acted by a male performer in drag—and as such becomes a narrative of black masculinity that insists on acknowledging the black male gay identity within the spectrum of black masculinity. Likewise, the familial

anecdote begins focusing on the grandmother and ends up highlighting the story of the uncle and the permanent mark left on that body. The black masculine crisis remains just as pronounced in Jones's signifying revision of *Uncle Tom's Cabin*. However, Jones expands the definition of masculinity and complicates our binaries of masculine and feminine; the drag body confuses normative gender signifiers and announces itself as a jumble of gender traits. The feminine hip-swinging performed by the male body in drag also highlights the conflation of masculine and feminine in one body. The final Eliza thus offers a different type of black male identity—one clearly on the opposite end of the spectrum from Baraka's vision of black masculinity.

Jones appears aware that his vision problematizes the hypermasculinity espoused by writers such as Reed and Baraka and destabilizes the 1960s and 1970s Black Arts movement's advocacy of racial separation. It is certainly significant that Bill T. Jones inserts a scene from Baraka's *Dutchman* at a pivotal moment in the production. As he explains "I interjected LeRoi Jones's *Dutchman* into this piece, which we think is about the coming together of races but at the most crucial point is an ugly, ugly public display of a fight between a white woman and a black man in which she ends up killing him" (Cunningham 122). Jones uses the pivotal moment of Baraka's play just before he enters the final section "the Promised Land."

Baraka's one act drama follows the interaction of two characters, black male, Clay, and white female, Lula, on a New York subway train ride. Lula initiates a flirtatious sexually charged banter with Clay, but quickly turns to attacking his self-image as a middle-class educated black man: "what right do you have to be wearing a three-button suit and striped tie? Your grandfather was a slave, he didn't go to Harvard"

(*Dutchman* 18). His confident response to her pointed attacks appears to push her further into dismantling his notion of himself. First she questions his manhood, and then once his insecurities about his class, race, and masculine identities bubble to the surface, she lances him with the debilitating Uncle Tom insult: "There he is Uncle Tom…I mean, Uncle Thomas Woolly-Head. With old white matted mane. Old Tom. Old Tom. Let the white man hump his ol'mama, and jes' shuffle off in the woods and hide his gentle gray head. Ol' Thomas Woolly-Head" (*Dutchman* 32). Predictably, Clay crumbles and responds with the persona of the angry black male. He charges at Lula letting her know that beneath the middle-class veneer is an angry black man capable of killing her. In fact, he turns his anger to the other white passengers on the train, signaling out a white man: "I could rip that *Times* right out of his hand, as skinny and middle-class as I am, I could rip that paper out of his hand and just as easily rip out his throat" (*Dutchman* 33). He unloads a bitter articulate tirade about racial injustices and the bohemian whites and their belief they know and understand black people through partaking in cultural tourism of black music and arts. His anger dissipates; he announces his acceptance of his identity as a middle-class educated black man, and decides he is no longer interested in her. Once Lula realizes she no longer has any control over him, she stabs him. However, as Murphy explains, "the Bill T. Jones dance piece, though, doesn't end with the murder that Baraka's drama does, where the audience leaves with the impression that that violence is an indisputable and perhaps even necessary fact of interracial contact" (99). Although Jones connects *Dutchman* and *Last Supper* to illustrate the tension that exists in interactions between black and white, the anxiety of black male identity and the term "Uncle Tom" as a signifier of black male weakness also connects Baraka's and Jones's

works. I would contend that there is a parallel between the white woman killing the black male and the white female author killing her black male hero. Of course, there is also a decided difference in the two: the death of Uncle Tom is about salvation and relies on religious sentiment. Even as Tom's death is violent, his death is Christ-like—he prays for the murderous Legree and his henchmen Sambo and Quimbo. In contrast, the murder of the black male is an expression of the inevitable violence that occurs in the interaction between the two races. Ultimately, by inserting Baraka's play just before "the Promised Land" section, Jones presents the persistent black and white violent conflict as a sort of purging of racial trauma before we enter the utopic promised land. By intersecting *Uncle Tom's Cabin* with *Dutchman*, Bill T. Jones enters the historical debate over the fate of Stowe's hero. While Jones embraces the Christian ideal and martyrdom of Stowe's hero, Baraka, as he demonstrates in his play *Slave Ship*, rejects Uncle Tom as a definition of black heroism. Perhaps Jones's ability to re-assess the feminized religiosity of Uncle Tom is also informed by his affective relationship with his mother—she is on stage just before the "Supper" section sermonizing; Uncle Tom and the mother become one—nurturing, loyal, steadfast, and devout in their Christian faith. Jones's embrace of the black feminine to create a space within the cabin for her story and for her voice to be heard is significant. Unlike Wright's treatment of the black mother in *Native* Son, in Jones's narrative the mother is not abjected or rejected, but incorporated into his story and becomes our story. Of course, Jones's gay identity also informs his identity politics as a black man; he thus recognizes the variances in African American masculine identity without insisting on a monolithic identity for all black men.

The *Dutchman* scene leads into the final movement of the dance, "The Promised Land," where Jones envisions a utopic democracy. Here, the dancers and members of the community—black, white, yellow, male, female, lean, plump, heterosexual, homosexual, etc. —are naked while singing and weaving among each other. They embrace, push, pull, each other until they are finally standing naked in front of the audience. *Last Supper* begins with the suffering narrative of Uncle Tom, moves to Eliza's liminal position between slavery and freedom, and ends with a narrative about "all of us" (Scorer, *Dancing to the Promised Land*). Other African American men have found Uncle Tom an unredeemable figure, but Bill T. Jones enters the cabin and reinvestigates its contents. He suggests that perhaps Uncle Tom is actually a redemptive figure because he is willing to embrace all—black and white, master and slave—he represents an ideal for everyone to emulate. After all, the last supper, which evokes Leonardo da Vinci's famous painting, is envisioned at Uncle Tom's Cabin. Tom is therefore a Christ figure; his blackness, his gentleness, and his sacrifice offer salvation—not just for blacks, but for everyone. The scene of joining together in prayer and nudity becomes an act of faith for both the performers and the community members taking part in the scene. As Jones states, "we were not just naked, we were singing together. At that point it stopped being art and became an act of faith" (Cunningham 130). Jones's faith does not rely upon a Christian belief system, but upon faith in humanity. Jones offers the naked body for all to see, because when we strip down, we are all vulnerable as individuals, but together we feel less exposed. We might ask, does Jones's revision celebrate Uncle Tom's humanity, his ability to never waiver in his faith, and to never succumb to Legree's cruelty and lose his

humanity? Jones recognizes the power of Tom's belief; he also suggests that Uncle Tom is no less of a man because he loves all.

Alexander also re-assesses Uncle Tom's death, and concludes that, unlike Stowe's other black characters, Tom need not change his destiny, because his death is meaningful. However, he challenges Stowe's purification and feminization of her hero, as well as his Christian stoicism because they diminish his masculinity. Reed and Baraka on the other hand, reject the very idea of Uncle Tom as heroic, viewing his Christian stoicism and eventual violent death, not as salvation, but as reflections of Stowe's Anglo myopic view of race. Stowe, they argue, lacks true understanding of the black male psyche; hence, she constructs a hero whose actions, or lack of action, and absolute loyalty to his white masters make him the target of their ire and derision. If Jones's narrative dance imagines a utopic vision of American inclusiveness, then Baraka's vision for the future in *Slave Ship* is one that embraces the idea of binaries—white and black, separated but equal. His declares the death of Uncle Tom insisting there can be no room for such a figure in African American future.

The incongruous overlapping of the middle passage or the antebellum South with the present in all four works also reflects the specific racial tensions of each authors historical moment, from the post-Civil Rights racial tensions and the struggles of black men in the 1970s, to race tensions, epitomized by the Rodney King race riots, of the 1980s, and 1990s. Reed, Alexander, and Jones insert indices of modern society, such as telephones, airplanes, and rap music, into the nineteenth century in order to disrupt our perceptions of history as linear, and yet insist upon a historical continuum with black struggle. Indeed, the synchronous weaving of past and present also enhance Reed's satiric

novel and Alexander's parodic play. We might laugh at how Reed's and Alexander's black characters play jokes on whites, but these comic moments exposes the absurdity of racism, and symbolically subverts the racial hierarchy. In *I Aint Yo Uncle* and *Flight*, humor is realized in the way the texts signify upon Stowe's *Uncle Tom's Cabin*, making our laughter at times uncomfortable.

Baraka's, Reed's, Alexander's and Jones's collective re-envisioning of *Uncle Tom's Cabin* demonstrate how black artists signify on Stowe's novel and the history of American race politics in order to investigate a broad range of gender, race, and identity issues in contemporary American society. While Reed and Alexander radically rework Uncle Tom and other characters giving them agency and radical civil rights political voices, Jones's vision is perhaps the most complex. His dance vividly expands the idea of Uncle Tom, and as such he recuperates the "feminized" black male as a way to challenge heteronormative conceptualization of black masculinity, and as a redemptive figure whose self-sacrifice is a lesson for us all. Jones enters the Uncle Tom battle, and challenges the whole battle over the meaning of (black) manhood, and thus problematizes the notion of norms for masculinity that has been crucial to this historical drama from the beginning. His utopic vision demonstrates that the crisis of masculinity catalyzed by Stowe's stoic Christian hero, clearly produces a range of different responses from the African American men who have taken up the story of Uncle Tom and made his(story) their stories.

Notes

[1] Baraka's African ancestors are Yoruba. He makes a point of using Yoruba language and gods in order to reject Christianity and figure it as the religion of the oppressor. The slave ship thus connects the past to the present to ensure that the black future is built with African aesthetics rather than Western ones.
[2] See Chapter One for summary of Henson's life and Stowe's involvement with him.
[3] Gris-gris in Vodoun (Voodoo) can mean many things from a charm or talisman to protect the wearer, to a curse, or a spell depending on the geographical location in which it is used. It is believed to originate in West Africa, but now used with Vodoun practitioners in the Americas—from New Orleans to Haiti. See explanation of gris-gris at http://www.nicholls.edu/gris-gris/about/.
[4] See Darryl Dickson-Carr's *African American Satire: The Sacredly Profane Novel*. Missouri: Missouri UP, 2001.
[5] Reed's Neo Hoodooism is derived from an African Voudon derived aesthetics that includes satire and literary parody. Time is often synchronous—multiple moments in history occur simultaneously.
[6] Christian Moraru unearths the myriad of intertextual relationships between Reed's *Flight to Canada* and other texts, from *Uncle Tom's Cabin* to Edgar Allen Poe's gothic short stories, to explain Reed's signifying skill at deconstructing American history. The novel's raven motif, Moraru suggests, does not just come from one source. He explains that *Flight's* imagery comes from the interplay of Poe's famous poem, slavery poetry, and Native American mythology.
[7] I have always been intrigued with Melville's *Benito Cereno* as an evocative exercise of interpretation. While many scholars debate Melville's powerful short story, I remain on the side of interpretations that see the Anglo captain as blinded by his own racist notion of intelligence, which can only perceive the black other as inferior and, therefore, incapable of outsmarting the Anglo male. W.E.B. Du Bois's concept of the black double consciousness makes the mystery of Melville's tale easier to understand. Babo employs the African American double consciousness to his advantage, knowing that the white Captain Delano would never look beyond the acceptable relationship between white master and loyal black servant. As such, Babo is able to outsmart both white men. Cereno dies precisely because he is unable to shake off the malaise that follows his recognition of the black man's capability to overwhelm him physically and mentally.
[8] Alexander probably also understands the necessary task of educating his audience—black and white—about a novel of great historical importance, that many recognize, but yet, few have actually read, and many comprehend through their knowledge of the pejorative "Uncle Tom" insult.
[9] See Chapter 1 for more detailed discussions of nineteenth century "Tomitudes." I am indebted to Stephen Railton's "Uncle Tom's Cabin & American Culture: Uncle Tomitudes" section for the array of examples of Uncle Tom paraphernalia. http://utc.iath.virginia.edu/tomituds/tohp.html.
[10] Stowe's novel was more successful that she and her publishers had ever anticipated. In pre-copyright era, without laws protecting her work from foreign publication or from being adapted at home many other also profited from Stowe's novel without her permission or knowledge. See Claire Parfait's *Publishing History of Uncle Tom's Cabin, 1852-2002.*
[11] For discussions about the history of stage adaptations of *Uncle Tom's Cabin*, see John Frick's essay *Uncle Tom's Cabin* on the Antebellum Stage http://utc.iath.virginia.edu/interpret/exhibits/frick/frick.html
[12] The wide broadcasting of white policemen severely beating an African American man, Rodney King, in March 1991 in Los Angeles, and the consequent trial and acquittal of all four officers, sparked race riots in 1992. The riots led to a white truck driver being dragged out of his truck and beaten by African American men and Korean shops being burnt and looted. The more recent race riots in Ferguson, Missouri catalyzed by the shooting death of an unarmed African American teenage boy, Michael Brown, by white policeman Darren Wilson, clearly indicates the simmering racial tensions, which are still a reality of American society.
[13] In Chapter 1, I discuss the contrast of Stowe's description of Uncle Tom as physically strong and broad-chested versus the images of Uncle Tom as a grey-haired, old man popularized in the nineteenth century.
[14] Clarence Thomas was nominated to the Supreme Court by President George H. W. Bush in July 1991. His confirmation was controversial because of the sexual allegation by Anita Hill, who worked with Thomas. Although an African American, Thomas's anti-affirmative action pitted him against the black community who saw Bush's nomination of Thomas as a confirmation of Thomas's "Uncle Tom" identity: he would sell out blacks in order to facilitate a white agenda. Thomas continues to represent the more

conservative voice of the Supreme Court and to be perceived by many African Americans as an "Uncle Tom" figure. For insight into Thomas's relationship with the African American community see Fossett, Ken. *Judging Thomas: Life and Times of Clarence Thomas*. New York: Harper Collins, 2004.

[15] Jacqueline Shea Murphy's reading of *Last Supper* addresses the production as a whole while focusing on the use of dance in both Stowe's *Uncle Tom's Cabin* and on Jones's commentary on Stowe's dance, which reflects her racist ideological need to erase African movements—deemed uncivilized—and replace them with the tempered, civilized European dance.

Last Supper at Uncle Tom's Cabin/The Promised Land is a highly theatrical narrative work divided into four main sections and two entre'actes. The first, "The Cabin," retells Harriet Beecher Stowe's anti-slavery novel. "Eliza on the Ice" focuses on the protagonist, illustrating her story with four Elizas, each of whom reflect different aspects of women's experiences. In "Entr'acte: The Prayer," Jones dances to the cadences of his mother's voice while she performs a prayer or song. The third section, "The Supper," reenacts, as its climax, Leonardo da Vinci's famous painting. The two final sequences feature members of the community in which the work was performed: In "Entr'acte: Faith," Jones dances to a Bible reading by a minister, after which the two sit down to discuss the idea of faith; in the conclusion, "The Promised Land," the community members, along with the company, disrobe throughout ritualized excerpts of LeRoi Jones's *The Dutchman* and end the performance by singing naked. (Needham 227-233)

[16] Jacqueline Shea Murphy explains that Tom shows ran without interruption from September 1852 into 1930 with at least twelve scripts in circulation and roughly five hundred Tom troupes traveling the country.

Conclusion

The end is in the beginning and lies far ahead. (Ralph Ellison, *Invisible Man*)

In 2008, when Barrack Hussein Obama won the election to become the 44th President of the United States, former democrat, then independent Ralph Nader, in a Fox News radio affiliate interview said: "[T]o put it very simply, he is our first African American president; or he will be. And we wish him well. But his choice, basically, the question is whether he is going to be an Uncle Sam for the people of this country, or Uncle Tom for the giant corporations" (Otterman). His use of "Uncle Tom" raised many eyebrows, even as Nader attempted to explain his particular application of the phrase, [1] and the historical significance of the term to the Fox News anchor Shepard Smith, Nader was abruptly cut off, leaving viewers wondering exactly what Nader was about to explain. I for one, could not help but wonder whether Nader was trying to explain the history of *Uncle Tom's Cabin* and the use of the Uncle Tom insult in the black community, or whether he truly understood the significance of Stowe's protagonist and his historical connection to American discourses of black masculinity.

Not surprisingly, Nader's comment stirred up heated debate amongst political pundits on both sides of the aisle—with clear lines of division between those who lambasted him and those who insisted there were no racist implications in his comment. To my mind, the relevancy of the statement lies in the term's ontological significance. If Nader truly had grasped the historical significance of the insult, he might have realized the gravity when he, as a white male, appeared so comfortable saying "Uncle Tom" in reference to any black man, let alone the first black president. Whether he realized it or

not, his comment questions Obama's masculinity precisely because it suggests that being black, Obama might not be *man* enough to stand up to big corporations, which, we imagine are led by white men. Nader clearly misses the import of the Uncle Tom epithet, and I would argue, he also does not truly comprehend its historical significance—this pejorative word carries over 150 years of baggage.

Even when voiced by African American men against other black men, "Uncle Tom" has a powerful psychologically debilitating effect, even to some extent an emasculating one; indeed, it is employed because of the enormity of its insulting sting. As Brando Simeo Starkey explains, it is purposefully employed as a means of self-policing within the black community to ensure racial loyalty.[2] What is important to note here is that this race "self-policing" mostly occurs between black men, which certainly begs the question: does the Uncle Tom jibe do more than just ensure racial loyalty? I would answer that the underlying intent of the phrase is also to question, and thus undermine, the masculinity of the person under attack.

Obviously Stowe's protagonist continues to appear in national discourses of race, as evidence by the fact that in 2013, Dr. Benjamin Carson, a conservative African American neurosurgeon, and now Republican presidential candidate, had to defend himself against charges of being an Uncle Tom. Carson explained to Fox News anchor Megyn Kelly, "You know I've heard some people refer to me as an Uncle Tom. Well, obviously they don't know what Uncle Tom is because they haven't read Harriet Beecher Stowe's novel *Uncle Tom's Cabin*. You'll see he is very, very subservient, kind of go along to get along type person. Obviously, that's not what I'm doing" (Chasmar). Like Nader, Carson claims to know the historical significance of the "real" Uncle Tom.

Indeed, I read more in his comment. It implies the difference between the lugubrious, avuncular, and shuffling Uncle Tom who is always acquiescing and loyal to a fault, and Stowe's broad-chested strong hero who is steadfast in Christian ideals and can be viewed as the embodiment of heroic passive resistance. Carson's comment also begs the question of what constitutes being a race traitor. Even as he claims he is no Uncle Tom—not passive and subservient—he clearly chooses to ignore, or perhaps misunderstands, the African American usage of the epithet to mean race traitor. Carson is labeled an Uncle Tom because he is perceived to be collaborating with whites against blacks because of his conservative politics, and more significantly, because his assertion that the implementation of the Affordable Care Act is tantamount to slavery for blacks. To some African Americans, these positions mark him as a race traitor. Like Nader, Carson fails to realize and truly grasp the implication of the Uncle Tom insult for African American male masculinity. By calling attention to the slur, Carson appears to enter naively into the historically contentious battle surrounding black manhood. The fact that he attempts to persuade Fox viewers that he is no Uncle Tom clearly demonstrates that the insult did in fact achieve its objective. If in fact we accept Carson's dismissal of the suggestion that he is no go-along-to-get-along guy, then should we assume that he implicitly acknowledges that *not* to be an Uncle Tom—passive and subservient—implies a combative form of masculinity? How does the Uncle Tom jibe impugn Carson's masculinity? In the twenty-first century is the only form of "authentic" black masculinity still one that must be antithetical to Uncle Tom, and therefore must be militant masculinity?

Both Nader and Carson rightly insist that to understand the implications of the Uncle Tom phrase, we should seek its meaning within the context of Stowe's text. To

truly comprehend it as used by black men, I believe we have to return to Stowe's feminization and characterization of her protagonist as stoic, Christian, pacifist, loving, and always forgiving. This characterization, and the fact that Stowe's novel came to inform cultural discourses of race and black masculinity in America, produces in African American men an anxiety about their own masculinity. For black male writers, to be an "Uncle Tom" extends beyond simply being a race traitor, to imply subservience and weakness, traits which themselves imply being less than manly—feminized. Thus, a "real" man—*not* Uncle Tom—would not only defend the race, but would metaphorically and literarily take up arms to do so when necessary. Irrespective of whether those that use the phrase have any knowledge of Stowe's nineteenth-century abolitionist novel and the "real" Uncle Tom, I believe the literary origin of the term is inferred in the cultural usage. Certainly, from the moment of his fictional inception, Uncle Tom has been a contentious figure for African American men in their attempt to define black manhood and heroism, and time continues to add burdensome import to Uncle Tom, who remains fixed in our cultural imaginations.

While the focus of my project is not the popular cultural usages and meanings of the "Uncle Tom" epithet, they nonetheless help underpin my argument. As I argue in this project, the twentieth-century revisions from Richard Wright, Amiri Baraka, Ishmael Reed, Robert Alexander, and Bill T. Jones respond directly to Stowe's characterization of Uncle Tom. I would add that to a certain extent they also indirectly respond to the mass cultural meaning of the "Uncle Tom" epithet. Black men are clearly contemptuous of any hint of an Uncle Tom-like servility expressed through the acceptance of racial hierarchy, the necessity for blacks to accept the racial status quo, and to unilaterally take

responsibility for coexisting peacefully with whites. The modern idea of "an Uncle Tom" is not the same as "the Uncle Tom" created over a century and half ago, but the two figures share much of the same ideological DNA.

As my project demonstrates, the intertextual relationships between Stowe's *Uncle Tom's Cabin* and African American-male artists who signify upon and then re-envision her hero are catalyzed by an anxiety of masculinity produced by her myopic, romantic-racialist portrayal of blacks. Uncle Tom is both problematic and efficacious for discussing, deconstructing, and defining black masculinity. By signifying on Stowe's text, African American men have used it as a vehicle by which to address critical moments of racial tension and express anger at social injustices experienced by blacks. For example, Charles Chesnutt signifies on the Wilmington, North Carolina, race riot and rewrites this traumatic incident as the fictional Wellington race riot in order to expose the machinations of Southern white men and their desire to regain political power. Likewise, Robert Alexander's *I Ain't Yo Uncle* references the racial tensions of 1990s American society epitomized by the Rodney King race riots in 1991. Alexander's play also alludes to Supreme Court Justice Clarence Thomas' controversial nomination as a Supreme Court justice and his parallel descent in the African American community to become, for many African Americans, the embodiment of the Uncle Tom—a man loyal to the white master at the expense of his fellow blacks. Although the discourse surrounding Thomas' nomination was centered, on the surface, on issues of sexual harassment, I would argue that embedded in that national conversation over Thomas's nomination were issues of race and masculinity.[3] Collectively, these signifying revisions point to critical moments in America's racial history, such as Reconstruction and Jim Crow in the South, the

beginnings of the Civil Rights era in the 1930s and 1940s, equal-but-separate politics of the Black Arts Movement in the 1960s and 1970s (which notably evokes Delany's nineteenth-century nationalist ideas), and racial tensions in the 1990s, as well as the black gay pride movement subsection of the 1980s Gay Liberation movement.

By historicizing these African American signifying revisions, my project provides a linear narrative illustrating the impact of Stowe's protagonist on black men. To combat what they believe to be misrepresentations of and misperceptions about black men, these artists create their own visions of black manhood. Although much has been written on Stowe's representation of race and masculinity, my project looks anew at earlier scholarship, re-assessing the significance of *Uncle Tom's Cabin* for African American male artists and rethinking the centrality of Stowe's novel for African American literary production. Beginning with feminist recuperative thought, I re-assess *Uncle Tom's Cabin* and African Americanists' acknowledgement of Stowe's influence on early African American writers. By returning to earlier works by scholars such as Jane Thompkins, Gillian Brown, Richard Yarbrough, and Eric Sundquist, I historicize the academic discourses on race, masculinity, and *Uncle Tom's Cabin* as they also shape the growing field of masculinity studies, particularly black masculinities. The fact that both African Americanist scholar Riche Richardson's recent seminal work *Black Masculinity in the South* and legal scholar Brando Simeo Starkey's more recent *In Defense of Uncle Tom* address the socio-political relevancy, and indeed the usefulness, of Uncle Tom and Stowe's *Uncle Tom's Cabin* for critiquing race and black masculinity confirms the significance of Stowe's text and protagonist for our discourses on race and masculinity over 150 years after its publication. What informs my academic "regression" into the past

is an interest in engaging literature via history. Revisiting *Uncle Tom's Cabin* and the historical contexts from within which African American men respond to its portrayal of black masculinity facilitated an understanding of the shifts in the identity politics of African American men, and the ways they define black masculinity in their own voices. In contesting the Uncle Tom image, black men insist that they too are men, whether by appropriating Anglo definitions of masculinity during emancipation and early post-Reconstruction eras; by the espousal of homophobic and misogynistic hypermasculinity in the 1970s; or by the 1980s inclusion of black gay identity as an aspect of black masculinity that differs from the hypermasculinity of the 1990s promoted by the urban hip-hop culture.[4] The universal among these signifying revisions is their representations of black masculinity in relation to Uncle Tom.

My project therefore asks the question: Why do African American-male artists revisit *Uncle Tom's Cabin* again and again? I answer by concurring with Richard Yarborough that Uncle Tom remains an incommodious specter who continues to haunt black men's attempts at representations of their humanity and the reality of their lives in the majority white culture. I conclude that the significance of these signifying revisions and their intertextual conversations with *Uncle Tom's Cabin* is the cultural work that they clearly perform in the cause of black self-determination. Whether black men like it or not, Uncle Tom has become the foundation for defining black masculinity, as it reflects the interstices of race, gender, religion, and the role of black men in the African American community and the larger American society. The anxiety of masculinity that Stowe's characterization of Uncle Tom engenders also enables different generations of African

American men to explore their own identity as it is constructed in relation to Anglo masculinity.

By addressing these black male responses to Stowe's novel, I also demonstrate how they employ the tradition of African American signifying both directly and indirectly. My project thus weaves together Henry Louis Gates' theory of African American literary signifying and Toni Morrison's argument for the presence of blackness within white-authored texts, to argue for a parallel presence of whiteness in African American texts. Broadly, the intertextual conversations between Stowe and these black male revisionists also express shifting views of masculinity that begin with traditional heteronormative masculinity and move towards more inclusive definitions of black masculinity in the twenty-first century. In the journey from Douglass's and Delany's revisions to Bill T. Jones' dance narrative, my project illustrates how Uncle Tom and *Uncle Tom's Cabin* provide a vehicle by which to critique black masculinities. These black male challenges to Stowe facilitate an exploration of past cultural ideologies and literary philosophies of race and masculinity. Jones' intertextual conversation with *Uncle Tom's Cabin* and Amiri Baraka's *Dutchman*, for example, broadens definitions of black masculinity in a way that also eschews the misogyny of earlier discourses on race by other African American male artists. Jones's *Promised Land* envisions a space within Uncle Tom's cabin that acknowledges traumas experienced because of gender, race, and sexual orientation and imagines the cabin as a safe place of healing for everyone that promises a truly democratic society. With his inclusionist politics, Jones not only opens up definitions of masculinity beyond Stowe's narrow ideas, but he also opens up the more narrow ideas of black masculinity envisioned by earlier revisionists such as

Douglass, Delany, and Chesnutt. Certainly, his vision of black masculinity broadens Baraka's and Richard Wright's narrow insistence of combative masculinity as the only ideal black heroism. Like Chesnutt, Alexander in *I Ain't Yo Uncle* envisions the possibility of different types of black masculinity, the militant violent Nat Turner-style masculinity displayed by George, and the passive resistance form of black heroism displayed by Uncle Tom. Jones's definition of black masculinity, like James Baldwin's, broadens the spectrum that includes the binaries of sentimental masculinity, nationalist masculinity, and militant masculinity to include a black masculinity that straddles the feminine and the masculine.

Although my project ends with Jones' *Last Supper*, Stowe's novel and protagonist are by no means distant figures in today's culture. Indeed, Uncle Tom's presence remains very much part of the American lexicon. With the current eruptions of racial tension catalyzed by African American responses to the killing of unarmed young black men by policemen, America once again focuses its attention on black manhood. Some make the argument that the black male tendency to embrace hypermasculinity creates a culture of violence the consequence of which is racial tension between black men and the larger American society. However, the opposition to this argument insists that as far as white American is concerned, the only acceptable alternative masculinity is an Uncle Tom-like subservience, which many black men reject.

Not only do African American male authors such as Reed reject Stowe's definitions of black male heroism, but they also devise their own methods of escaping the ever-looming literal and figurative white presence which waits just outside the door to take possession of them, and ultimately their story and their history. By wrestling with

Stowe, the authors demand the key to that cabin and take possession of it to re-arrange the contents according to their own perceptions of black manhood and heroism. With the ever-broadening definitions of masculinity, which now includes transgendered identity and conceives of gender identity as not static, but fluid, how will future black male artistic engagements with Stowe and her protagonists proceed? After, Jones's opening of Uncle Tom's cabin to all, will a new generation of African American male artists insist that only they own the key, and indeed the rights, to that cabin, because they believe they have suffered the psychological burden of Stowe's text the most?

Note

[1] "I said that's the question HE has to answer. He can become a great President, or he can become a toady for the corporate powers that have brought both parties to their knees against working people in this country, and have allowed our country to be hijacked by global corporations who have no allegiance to this country other than to ship its jobs and industries to fascist and communist dictators abroad who know how to keep their workers in their place. This is reality here. This is not show business. It's not celebrity politics. There are people suffering in this country, and we expect a great Presidency from Barack Obama, and we're gonna try to hold his feet to the fire..." (Otterman) What is interesting here is that Nader does not mention race, so the question is why he used the Uncle Tom terminology; it probably would not have occurred to him to use the term if Obama was not black. His use of Uncle Tom certainly shows a stunning inability to understand how the weight of the term.

[2] See Brando Simeo Starkey's *In Defense of Uncle Tom: Why Blacks Must Police Racial Loyalty.*

[3] As I discuss briefly in Chapter 4, Thomas's nomination was not supported by many African Americans because of his anti-affirmative action stance, which for many African Americans made him a race traitor. Thomas therefore ironically embodied two historical black male archetypes—the weak unmanly Uncle Tom and the hypersexualized bad nigger. See Robert Chrisman and Robert L. Allen's *Court of Appeal: The Black Community Speaks Out on the Racial and Sexual Politics of Thomas Vs. Hill.* The collection of essays by scholars, both in support of Thomas and against him, generally agree on the myths of black hypersexuality attached to black men and women. Also see Ken Foskett's *Judging Thomas: the Life and Times of Clarence Thomas*

[4] By the mid-nineteenth-century black men demanded that their humanity be recognized—I am not property—and embraced Anglo definitions of ideal masculinity. Post-emancipation black men demanded that they be allowed to set up their won traditional households headed by them and independent of white paternalistic intrusion. During the Reconstruction era, black male pre-occupation centered on landownership and role as the sole breadwinner as expressions of their manhood. Post-Reconstruction Southern white male erasure of much of the socio-political gains made by blacks greatly impacted black men's ability to support their families economically, which also impacted their sense of manliness. As was the case during the Civil War, black men sought to prove their manhood and their patriotism as full citizens, by enlisting to fight during World War I and II, even as they were deemed unfit for such manly occupation. The 1950s and 160s Civil Rights era masculine rhetoric preached a Christian masculinity of passive resistance, as opposed to aggressive hypermasculinity. This very ideal would be rejected by the 1960 and 1970s Black Power Movement, which espoused a misogynistic hypermasculinity. The burgeoning Gay Rights movement of the 1980s and 1990s also informed black male identity politics. Like other races and ethnicities, gay black men challenged the heteronormative notions of masculinity to insist on a more fluid masculinity that expanded the spectrum of black masculinity.

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