Stony Brook University

Characterizing "Minor" African American Women's Everyday Singing in African American Literature

A Dissertation Presented

by

Patrina C. Jones

to

The Graduate School

in Partial Fulfillment of the

Requirements

for the Degree of

Doctor of Philosophy

in

English

(African American Literature)

Stony Brook University

December 2011

Stony Brook University
The Graduate School

Patrina C. Jones

We, the dissertation committee for the above candidate for the
Doctor of Philosophy degree, hereby recommend
acceptance of this dissertation.

Rowan R. Phillips – Dissertation Advisor
Associate Professor and Graduate Director, English

E. Anthony Hurley - Dissertation Advisor
Associate Professor and Chair, Africana Studies

Tracey L. Walters – Chairperson of Defense
Associate Professor and Undergraduate Director, Africana Studies/English

Eugene Hammond
Director, Writing & Rhetoric Program, Outside Reader

This dissertation is accepted by the Graduate School

Lawrence Martin
Dean of the Graduate School

Abstract of the Dissertation

Characterizing "Minor" African American Women's Everyday Singing in African American Literature

by

Patrina C. Jones

Doctor of Philosophy

in

English

(African American Literature)

Stony Brook University

2011

A tradition in fiction that echoes throughout the African American literary canon is the commonplace 'minor' characterization of female singers who translate the conditions of their everyday lived realities through a uniquely womanist practice of vocal performance. The vocal form of this aesthetic of singing is also represented as a culture of rendered voice and as a sustained motif for personal and group identity. This dissertation argues for the narrative centrality of "minor" African American female singers and also for value to a reading practice that augments secondary characterization on the basis that the literary phenomenon of female singing reformulates traditional reading practices, which placed a text's principle value on its 'major' characters, in order to better understand the significance of African American female singers in modern narratives.

DEDICATION

"Lift Ev'ry Voice and Sing": All praises to the Most High! Thank you to my parents, my beloved mother, Agatha E. Jones, and father, Pat Jones. My brothers: Chris, Eddison, Erwin and Paul. My ingenious Aunt, Gillace Graham, my beloved Grandmother, Lucy Drakes, and all family members. Thank you to my Motherland, Africa, my Homeland, Grenada, and my Home, Brooklyn. To my Dissertation Committee: Dr. E. Anthony Hurley, Dr. Tracey L. Walters, Dr. Rowan R. Phillips, and Dr. Gene Hammond: thank you for getting me to this special place. Stony Brook University, Binghamton University, Teikyo Post University, and the Turner Dissertation Fellowship Committee. Thank you to the English, Africana Studies, and Writing Departments. Thank you Mary-Alice Ozechoski, Dr. David Bartine, Dr. Isidore Okpewho, Dr. Mary Pernal, Dr. Peggy Sheehan, Dr. David-Edward Ruiz. Finally, thank you to all of my Sistas', and thank you Music.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

.

INTRODUCTION

"[S]he gained again from the song the meaning it had held for her mother, and gained a new meaning for herself"
-James Baldwin
Go Tell It on the Mountain

One 'primary' cultural reading of African American womanhood is traditionally constructed to marginalize, through a stereotypical emphasis on sexual deviancy, the African American female identity and culture. This stereotypical reading emerged out of the institution of American slavery in which an important role of African American women involved forced sexual relationships with European American and African American men. Marginal perceptions about African American womanhood also gained primacy as a result of a largely accepted patriarchal worldview which defined all women as subordinate to men. When the slave trade was finally abolished in the United States, a new system was set up to enable the use of African American women's bodies by force for the specific intention of reproducing more enslaved bodies. As Angela Davis observes in Women, Race and Class:

> As females, slave women were inherently vulnerable to all forms of sexual coercion. If the most violent punishments of men consisted in floggings and mutilations, women were flogged and mutilated, as well as raped. Rape, in fact, was an uncamouflaged expression of the slaveholder's economic mastery and the overseer's control over Black women as workers. (7)

One reading of the African American female identity as inferior was thus conditioned by the systemic practice of forced sexual violation of African American women's physical bodies for economic and material expansion. Sexual violation, in this case, also connoted the forced or coerced imposition of an oppressive system of values and beliefs which enforced the

subordination and enslavement of African American women's identities. The silencing of women's worldviews or voices later empowered distorted readings of African American women as an inferior cultural group. This primary, patriarchal reading positioned African American women and their (silenced) worldviews as having little validity within a Eurocentric, male-dominated society. Since African American women were deemed powerless to respond to stereotypes about their identities, cross generational oppression and distorted perceptions of female marginality were internalized by the larger culture, and by African American women themselves. African American women's lived experience often included the sexual violations of their humanities, but also a tradition of silence and/or perceived insignificance surrounding their voices or attitudes. The power of silence enslaved and dehumanized African American women to patriarchal constructs which insisted on conditioning the female identity as minor.

This dissertation offers a different reading of African American womanhood based on African American women's daily communication of their voices or worldviews. The dissertation argues that the worldviews of African American women are often embodied through everyday, spiritual singing. A fundamental recognition of singing as also constitutive of women's worldviews promotes the vocal expression of experience as both a culture and critical practice that African American women sketch out as a basis for social visibility and personal worth. This dissertation's claim for a different reading of African American women, in this respect, re-constructs African American female subjectivity according to the musical characterization of an oral point of view. Defining singing as one medium for expressing a point of view, this project draws on the fact that African American women use singing to determine the unique features of what it means to be a woman. These voices, in a culture that gives

primacy to patriarchal and Eurocentric visual or surface perceptions, are often read as 'minor' or insignificant. The further privileging of visual attitudes also projects primary value to the sexual materiality and objectification of the female body, and marginal value to the communication of a woman's point of view. On the one hand, African American women regenerate and internalize these externally defined cultural beliefs and conventions as essential facts about female marginality. Such conditions, on the other hand, also influence African American women's personal reliance on non-visual subversive realities for cultural survival, and for expressing female facts about their respective natures. For the purposes of the dissertation, this project will read for African American women's successful subversion of systemic patriarchy and racial marginality through daily singing. This reading practice will also afford to African American women primary significance.

One important non-visual experiential system of meaning used by African American women to vocally challenge their marginality, and to also reconstitute the significance of their identities, is affect. In her collection of essays, Sister/Outsider, Audre Lorde examines emotional experience as an internal, invisible reality that gives meaning and significance to female subjectivity. In her essay from this collection, "Poetry is Not a Luxury," Lorde claims that, "[t]he Quality Of Light by which we scrutinize our lives has direct bearing upon the product which we live, and upon the changes which we hope to bring about through those lives. It is within this light that we form those ideas by which we pursue our magic and make it realized" (36). Lorde begins by describing a notion of "light" as signified by its quality. While "light" can be defined as electromagnetic radiation, in this case "light" also functions as a motif for personal truth. Lorde's reference to "quality of light" magnifies this truth as mediating self-understanding, and as forming impressions (conscious understanding) about everyday reality.

Lorde calls this emotional experience with enlightenment, "poetry as illumination, for it is through poetry that we give name to those ideas which are - until the poem – nameless and formless, about to be birthed but already *felt*" (36; emphasis mine). Here, Lorde does not subscribe to a traditional reading of poetry, what she calls "the sterile word play that, too often, the white fathers distorted the word *poetry* to mean – in order to cover a desperate wish for imagination without insight" (37). Instead, Lorde defines poetry as "a revelatory distillation of experience" (37). Lorde orients "poetry" as an emotional impression, and as the knowledge that is generated from affective interpretations of experience. Lorde explains this emotional experience as one type of "poetry" that leads to the discovery of facts or "light." Due to the fact that external, visual markers can euphemize or distort facts related to female subjectivity, and keeping in mind that language does not yet give primary value to emotional facts related to a certain type of gendered experience, Lorde gives validity to affect as a powerful resource for female enlightenment. Lorde encourages African American women to rely on the power of felt realities in order to understand their "poetry" or lived experiences, and to also recognize the "light" or truth about their subjective identities: "[b]ut as we come more into touch with our own ancient, non-European consciousness of living as a situation to be experienced and interacted with, we learn more and more to cherish our feelings, and to respect those hidden sources of our power from where true knowledge and, therefore, lasting action comes" (37). Emotions, the author argues, are central for discovering virtuous and valuable perceptions and beliefs about female subjectivity. Significance to emotional perceptions also determines African American women's ability to recognize and give worth to their perspectives. In this way, Lorde encourages African American women to privilege emotions as an epistemology for self-knowledge and self-empowerment.

The interior non-visual system of emotions enlightens African American women with the power to read and interpret personal and cultural beliefs. The ability to communicate this interior knowledge also liberates African American women from distortive visual stereotypes which define their identities as inferior. In Ghostly Matters: Haunting and the Sociological Imagination, sociologist Avery Gordon makes a telling point about knowledge which relies exclusively on visual judgment or encounters:

> In a culture seemingly ruled by technologies of hypervisibility, we are led to believe not only that everything can be seen, but also that everything is available and accessible for our consumption. In a culture seemingly ruled by technologies of hypervisibility, we are led to believe that neither repression nor the return of the repressed, in the form of either improperly buried bodies or countervailing systems of value or difference, occurs with any meaningful results. (16)

As an external structure for knowledge-formation that accounts for everything, which implies therefore that what is not seen is perceived as non-existent and insignificant, visual knowledge is problematized by Gordon as limited not only because of phenomenological experiences or events which confound visual detail and explanation, but also because of non-visual experiences which possess a wealth of facts and practical value. To this extent, Gordon re-situates knowledge produced from visual judgment as distortive and incomplete. Gordon develops this latter theory around the term "haunting," what she defines as "organized forces and systemic structures that appear removed from us" (19) but which "make their impact *felt* in everyday life in a way that confounds our analytic separations and confounds the social separations themselves" (19; emphasis mine). Gordon claims that "felt" contact between emotions and lived experience explains "gaps" or experiences which escape visual representation. The non-visual system of emotions, suggests Gordon, also accounts for missing or overlooked facts, truths, and principles. According to this theory, the epistemology of affect is determined by felt experience that then culminates into meaning and beliefs. To give value to non-visual emotional impressions or

hauntings is to translate an affective experience into a visibly physical and/or vocal sign. The representation of voice implicitly signals value to an emotional impression for meaning and representation. Thus, an ontological basis for emotions lies in its functionality. To be emotional, from the Latin *emovere*, which means to move or move out, refers to the interpretation of a felt impression into a meaningful, external experience or performance. This analysis traces the episteme of emotions to the emergence of an engaged behavior or conduct. Sara Ahmed asserts in The Cultural Politics of Emotion that "emotions work to shape the 'surfaces' of individual and collective bodies" (intro; 1). Ahmed further claims that the significance of emotions lies in their external circulation. By associating the interiority of emotions with its external performance, affective experience is fashioned as fundamentally devoid of meaning and significance until externally communicated or performed. This formulation recognizes affect as expressional in nature, primarily through physical energy or power. As an experience, then, emotions are disciplined by behavior or activity.

Due to the fact that an affective experience exerts meaning through expression and also through power, African American women's emotional singing is symbolic of female power. One way that this emotional power exerts itself is through the physiognomy of the human vocal chords. Singing, generally framed as the workings of the lungs, vocal folds (chords) and larynx, operates in accordance with airflow into the lung area. Next, the centrality of force or power of air delineates vocal tone. Vocal tone, the attitudes rendered through the voice, is a direct result of value given over to an emotional impression. The performance, and success, of the human vocal chords depends on whether or not voice achieves its projected tone or perspective. Vocal tone also signifies the quality and unique character of voice. The importance of this notion culminates in a fact that no two people can duplicate the same exact tone. Thus, voice is an

important affective practice for determining and expressing individuality. This project argues that singing, structured around an interior system of emotional energy, is an opportunistic and practical convention for signifying emotional experience. This project also claims that singing *is* a visible sign of an invisible (emotional) reality. African American women's privileging of affect and its epistemological signification through external performance gives validity to a reading of emotions as a non-visual worldview that attains visible value through physical performativity. African American women's self-reliance on affect also explains one reason why women typically project their perspectives through singing. This dissertation's examination of African American women's use of emotions to vocally discipline their discursive manifestations facilitates a new social reading of singing as a phenomenon that combines the power of a felt impression with the instrument or device of the physical voice. This combination contributes to an overall understanding of the especial use of singing as a gendered practice that empowers female identity through emotional intuition.

The emotional singing of voice derives from psychic *and* cosmic spiritual sources. In relation to the former definition, African American women's psychic power involves their authority to self-define and determine their subjective perspectives and behaviors. According to the latter definition, African American women's emotional power also manifests from a pre-existing, transcendental realm. In The Psychic Life of Power: Theories in Subjection, Judith Butler suggests that "we understand power as *forming* the subject as well as providing the very condition of its existence and the trajectory of its desire" (intro; 2). Butler calls the former theory of invisible power "essential for the formation, persistence, and continuity of the subject" (intro; 3). Butler also emphasizes the attainment of psychic power as a path or journey into subjectivity. To attain subjectivity, moreover, to develop and authorize personal perspectives,

values, beliefs and philosophies, is to also concomitantly achieve subjective power. The psychic power or ability to exercise authority over personal identity is defined by this project as the essence of African American female singing. In this way, African American women's self-authorization of singing is cultivated by an interior emotional force of power. This power is also the very mode or progenitor from which African American women vocally signify their visibility or presence. The dissertation argues that African American women achieve subjectivity and subjective power through the employment of singing. This self-regulating system materializes through the female practice of giving value and meaning to the trajectory of emotions as an intuitive power that is then exercised vocally.

Emotional singing also gives value to moral sensibilities. Such a view accounts for affective impressions as a universal interpretative framework that determines the negative or positive tendencies in ideas, beliefs, values, and social practices. Emotions ensure that what feels right or wrong is indeed plausible at the level of human interpretation. This felt, invisible worldview precludes the inner voice or intuition as both a thought and action that materializes visually. In this way, feelings signify its non-visual 'signs' through a context of felt belief and knowing. In an introduction to David Hume's An Enquiry Concerning the Principles of Morals, J. B. Schneewind paraphrases Hume's philosophical drawing of attention and belief to the significance of human behavior as a matter of externally performing inner characteristics or signs:

> Morality, he holds, is not simply a matter of external behavior. The pagan moralists, like Cicero, were right: virtues and vices are the very stuff of an inner life, and they are what we most directly approve or disapprove. External acts are the signs from which we can learn an agent's inner character. The inner and outer aspects of human life are unified in morality. (intro; 4)

In discerning the difference between right and wrong and in also having the power to will human conduct accordingly, Hume posits human subjective knowing as a lived encounter with "an agent's inner character" (intro; 4). This philosophical approach determines a person's interiority as an authentic basis for reading and interpreting the human identity. This felt text on moral understanding is further associated by the philosopher with the solidary unification of an "inner life" and an external, physical behavior. Circumscribing personal identity as an experiential encounter with an interior life or reality, Hume formulates an important definition of moral subjectivity as the visible performance of an inner meaningful emotional characteristic. Hume explains the virtues of moral characterization as a human subject's ability to externally perform his/her affective beliefs and intuitions. This intuitive belief, as Hume suggests, is "not in terms of the working of reason but in terms of the working of *feeling*" (intro; 5 emphasis mine). As Hume also explains, "*reason* and *sentiment* concur in almost all moral determinations and conclusions […]. It is probable, I say, that this final sentence depends on some *internal sense or feeling, which nature has made universal in the whole species*" (intro; 15 emphasis mine). The development of a moral character is synonymous with the development of value to emotional cognition as a belief-system that ethical recognizes positive and negative sign systems and worldviews. If, as Hume claims, positive and negative behaviors are distinguishable and delineated according to emotional impressions, affective human conduct is one visible 'sign' for representing "some internal sense or feeling" (intro; 15). The ability to cultivate emotions, which constructs character based on the mastery and conscious development of felt impression and perceptions, models personal identity according to an emotional worldview of moral impressions or impulses which then signify themselves through external behavior. This added value and significance in emotions is central to the valorization of self-control and choice or will

power. Accordingly, the "inner life" of affect is augmented as one primary 'visible' sign and symbol of a moral or immoral human constitution, while also serving as a belief system for signifying voice or point of view. Attention to African American women's singing recognizes the African American female culture as possessing and nurturing a range of moral and virtuous characteristics. Women's moral reliance on emotional impression to interpret and orient their voices, and behaviors, in this way, defines spiritual values and beliefs as one important emotional *raison d'etre* of the African American female lived experience and identity.

African American women signify their subjectivities through the text of singing. Musical performance also serves as a context for female power. The use of voice to translate emotions further implicates singing as both a natural and nurtured manifest power that reveals a common assumption about African American women's essence as grounded by the oral performance of their felt perspectives. Ralph Ellison provides an important cultural theory about the exceptional relationship between African American singing and African American women. In a chapter entitled, "As the Spirit Moves Mahalia," from his text on literary theory, Shadow and Act, Ellison describes the adaptation of African American women to vocal music not simply for entertainment purposes, but primarily as a structure for giving "simple dignity" (213) to "their immediate presence" (213). The author defines singing as an affective discourse that empowers African American women:

> Perhaps this power springs from their dedication, their having subjected themselves successfully to the demanding discipline necessary to the mastery of their chosen art. Or, perhaps, it is a quality with which they are born as some are born with bright, orange hair. Perhaps, though we think not, it is acquired, a technique of "presence." But whatever its source, it touches us as a rich abundance of human warmth and sympathy. Indeed, we feel that if the idea of aristocracy is more than mere conceit, then these surely are our natural queens. (213-14)

Ellison, in examining African American women's use of singing as a practice that secures female power and worth, theorizes the relationship between an economy of singing and African American women's exceptional giftedness with song as a musical convention that secures important values about the female nature. Ellison's theory regarding a culture of female singing is broadly supported by an African American heritage of singing as a practice and philosophy that signifies personal and group perspectives. African American women, in this way, reproduce an adhered mode of cultural representation that is specifically musical and oral. Ellison also claims that African American women's mastery of vocal music could perhaps be innate in the same way that some people are born with different color hair. This last point addresses an earlier idea that African American women are cosmically selected or pre-ordained with an exceptional characteristic that is typified by an internal framework of emotions. Ellison augments emotions as an important female intuitive view that successfully mediates African American women's "ability to move us" (215) with "the projected *emotion* of song" (215; emphasis mine). The author also theorizes that singing is "an art which employs a broad rhythmic freedom and accents the lyric line to reinforce the *emotional* impact" (216; emphasis mine). African American women's justifiable practicing, and giftedness, with respect to singing, Ellison points out here, is bolstered by their valuing of emotions as an important female perceptive standpoint that reads and translates subjectivity and lived reality, and, that the propagation of affect is a prominent feature that governs the success and effectiveness of performed music.

African American women's traditional use of singing debunks social myths and stereotypes which orient all women as powerless and inferior. Hazel Carby argues that African American women sing to represent their social presence and power in ways which challenge cultural constructs and symbolic representations of the African American female identity as a

'minor' or inferior sub-culture. In an essay on African American women and vocal music, "In Body and Spirit: Representing Black Women Musicians," Carby describes African American women's use of singing as a gendered motif of resistance against any kind of "cultural domination in both form and content" (179). As 'minor' members of an already 'minoritized' group, the theme of gendered self-expression is especially central to Carby's reading of African American women who depend on sonic expression to "challenge […] sexual conventions and gendered social roles" (180). Here, African American vocal music is defined as a communicative structure that impresses African American women to inquire and contest the traditions which relate to their 'minor' status as 'Woman' and as 'African American.' Challenging generally accepted standards, suggests Carby, is a practice that African American women pursue through the convention of vocal singing. Carby also stresses the notion that vocal music, instrumented by voice, re-constructs the value African American womanhood as the ability to expertly and craftily perform a musical perspective. This power of singing, Carby also suggests, is emancipatory for women. This interpretation suggests that African American women's expression of their voices liberates from confinement or restraint the latter's objective and verifiable nature as subjects who, in the act of singing, behave and perform affective choices free of coercion or constraint. This fact also recognizes that women, through the everyday mode of vocal singing, disparately liberate themselves from oppressive systemic perceptions which dehumanize their worth through the visual practices of sexual objectification, and female inferiority. By performing voice, African American women free themselves from these patriarchal values, and position their worth through their capacity to self-express.

For African American women, a heritage of singing arose out of a necessity to represent, interpret, and also to heal from an African American cultural and historical experience that was

concomitantly emotional and traumatic. One such reality that affected all African Americans, in the context of the United States, was the emotional experience with physical, mental, and spiritual cultural enslavement. African Americans, in order to challenge systemic practices and beliefs which violated and attempted to silence them, communicated meaning to their perspectives and values through the symbolic singing of vocal music. If patriarchy, in particular, forced or "raped" African Americans into internalizing and practicing ideals and principles which dehumanized their identities, African Americans, subsequently, took up singing as a way to re-claim and re-present their personal beliefs and spiritual identities. With the disappearance or death of enslaved African Americans, many of these vocal perspectives and histories, particularly as they were orally embodied in song, disappeared or were lost. The emergence of a new science of archiving songs into songbooks or texts, consequently, preserved African American vocal music into creative and historical narratives. Ronald Radano, in "Denoting Difference: The Writing of the Slave Spirituals," defines transcribed African American songs as a middle ground between the African American literate present and its African oral past. Looking specifically at Frederick Douglass's narrative, Narrative of the Life of Frederick Douglass, An American Slave (1845), Radano reads Douglass's textual documentation of the singing moment in the woods as his linking of a literate present to a sound-filled African past (507). Douglass's narrative is one of the earliest narrative texts to document singing as a symbol for an African American cultural voice or worldview. In his narrative, Douglass imagines spiritual singing as a primary and necessary experience for expressing his humanity and also for accessing his communal heritage. Douglass documents the singing voice as an emotional powerful instrument that self-develops and self-empowers subjectivity. Douglass also transcribes singing into text in order to 'visibly' represent his cultural heritage, and in order to

symbolize and represent one example of the invisible, emotional significance of slavery for both him and for the represented African American community:

> I am going away to the Great House Farm!
> O, yea! O, yea! O! (18)

Near the ending of chapter two, the enslaved African Americans perform the above song while walking through a wooded area, a middle passage or passing ground between their home, and the Great House Farm. Within the entire group, Douglass included, the attitude of "going away" signifies a collective point of view about migration as a larger allegory for the going away of the representative, African American group from an invisible emotional heritage to the visibly, material Great House Farm that is the American culture. The inevitability of affective loss and *longing* are tantamount to the representative African American enslaved experience of "going away." In the *external* world that is the Great House Farm (America), Douglass explains that the reason the enslaved characters go away is to get their material allowances, paid to them in both food and goods, which they take back with them to the plantation for distribution among themselves, and the other African Americans. While this alluded material world is rich in symbolism, it is the *internal* world of the enslaved African Americans, perceived as joyful yet also as sorrowful, that warrants a closer reading: "they would make the dense old woods, for miles around, reverberate with their wild songs, revealing at once the highest joy and the deepest sadness" (18). Douglass's exploration of the interior, private worldview of the African American collectivity is an important thematic feature of the narrative. The private and public or internal and external identity of the group, which also includes Douglass, is separated into two distinct realities or double consciousness. Whereas an external cultural reading of 'slave' life is visually read as joyful, the internal invisible African American perspective on enslavement draws on a collective felt experience of sorrow. Douglass concludes the passage by mentioning the fact that

he did not understand the meaning and purpose of his childhood singing, "I did not, when a slave, understand the deep meaning of those rude and apparently incoherent songs. I was myself within the circle; so that I neither saw nor heard as those without might see and hear" (18). One way to interpret this lack of understanding is to read the moment for Douglass as his admission that African American singing sometimes manifests unconsciously. Even though Douglass performs this collective perspective, as does the representative African American community, he is unconscious or unaware to its meaning until later on. This layer of humanity is represented as sometimes expressing itself unconsciously, involuntarily or without intent. In this way, voice is represented as a layer of humanity which transcends enslavement, and which cannot be enslaved by another human being. Another interpretation levels private self-reflection as an important interpretive tool for constructing personal knowledge. Douglass therefore translates self-reflection as central to an understanding of his "incoherent" past. Douglass also uses self-reflection to interpret the relationship between his cultural status as a 'slave' and its connection to his incomprehension and therefore distorted personal perception about his childhood experience with singing. Here, Douglass gives a reading of enslavement as the physical, mental and spiritual becoming of some-one (thing) else. Physical, mental and/or spiritual enslavement, furthermore, confuses, distorts, and makes almost impossible comprehension, understanding, or even knowing subjective identity and voice. Personal freedom, then, is oriented by Douglass as the ability to characterize, understand, and translate voice and subjectivity. From birth, Douglass is forced into becoming a 'slave' to a system that perceives him as having no personal humanity or history prior to enslavement. Vocal and transcribed African American music, for Douglass, is an African American worldview that is consciously or unconsciously used to counter cultural myths which refer to African Americans as having no voice, and as having an unavailable and

uncivilized worldview. Formerly a 'slave' to a cultural system that forces him to internalize a foreign worldview which recognizes him as not human and therefore without a past or tradition, Douglass's vocally felt knowing reverses the justification for enslavement. Once no longer a 'slave,' once he is mentally, physically and spiritually free, the song also translates a spiritual attitude that becomes for Douglass the essence of his personal emancipation. Re-imaging one important aspect of slavery as a mental or psychological condition instead of as an innate state, Douglass defines African American singing as a haunting (affective) powerful force that determines self-liberation. Emotions are represented as impressing Douglass with self-understanding and a later desire or *longing* for freedom. For example, Douglass admits, "Those songs still follow me, to deepen my hatred of slavery, and quicken my sympathies for my brethren in bonds" (19). Here, Douglass redraws affect as an experience that impresses within him felt facts about his humanity and about the conditions which affect his lived reality. Douglass also defines affect as the driving power behind his sympathizing with his "brethren in bonds," later admitting that he connects with other human beings when he allows emotions to guide his moral and personal life choices. This emotional strategy of unity also transforms Douglass's initial feelings of loss and estrangement, conditions of his existential "going away" state. Emotions, in this way, are used by Douglass to translate a cultural standpoint on slavery, and also to feel at "home" with his fellow cultural members.

In addition, Douglass's narrative representation of African American singing reconciles cultural reception and perception of African American music as entertainment or minstrel. In "America's First Black Music Historian," Robert Stevenson concludes that throughout the nineteenth century European audiences mostly judged African American music as "ante-bellum minstrel songs" (384). As late as 1878, nineteenth century reception of African American music

was, suggests Stevenson, distortedly classified: “American “Negro” music in 1878 still meant “Massa’s in the cold, cold ground,” “Nelly Bly,” and “Uncle Ned” (383). Radano echoes Stevenson’s claim by also suggesting that by transcribing African American vocal music into text, Douglass personified an honest “character of slave singing” (507). Using literary language and style to counter European American reception that read all African American music as “the minstrel theme of the happy “Sambo” (507), Radano reads Douglass as depicting enslaved life in such a way as to literally and symbolically turn “up the volume of slavery's horror” (507). The motif of vocal music is rendered to literally amplify the terror of racial enslavement. In this way, Douglass encourages his European American audience to re-imagine enslavement, from the personal voices of the enslaved, as traumatic and sorrowful. Perhaps in the most moving moment of the narrative, Douglass admits, “The mere recurrence of those songs, even now, afflicts me; and while I am writing these lines, an expression of feeling has already found its way down my cheeks” (19). The pain associated with enslaved life leaves Douglass highly emotional and grief-stricken. Douglass finds solace and healing in his reliance on song as a spiritual and holistic structure for coping with emotional pain. Joining affect and voice to evoke a discussion on cultural enslavement, Douglass rebukes the predilections of slavery as uncompromisingly violent and destructive. Instead, Douglass negotiates his freedom by using the powerful instrument of voice to re-member his heritage, and also to eventually overcome his enslavement.

The transcription of singing into text establishes written music as an affective language, and as an important conventional discipline for representing the African American cultural experience. W. E. B. Du Bois, throughout The Souls of Black Folk, represents a fact about African American vocal music as “bursts of wonderful melody, full of the voices of my brothers and sisters, full of the voices of the past” (265). Du Bois also codifies African American vocal

singing as 'recordings' or oral documents about the African American existence in the United States. In this way, Douglass, Du Bois and Radano define transcribed singing as an African American epistemology for personal and cultural preservation, and also as emanating from an African oral tradition of representation. When African Americans began to sing as a way to earn employment, and this is also documented by Du Bois, it was in a context of uplifting African American cultural life, and of expressing their collective *longing* to freely exist in harmony. For example, the Jubilee Singers, one of the first documented groups of African American paid performers, used their earnings to found the Historically Black College (HBC) Fisk University. Alain Locke, in his anthology, The New Negro, also positions African American singing as a musical reality that African Americans relied on to represent their suffering, but to also mediate spiritual healing and transformation: "the Spirituals are spiritual. Conscious artistry and popular conception alike should never rob them of this heritage, it is untrue to their tradition and to the folk genius to give them another tone" (201). As Locke suggests, African Americans drew from these songs, performed in both religious and secular settings, both as a way to examine and give meaning to their lives, and also as a way to inspire their spiritual desire for freedom. The Spiritual genre of African American singing drew on themes of displacement and escape, migration, a longing for justice, and more importantly, faith and belief in freedom. These spiritual themes ultimately communicated an African American worldview of giving 'primary' value to African American existence.

African American women define and organize their unique female worldviews within this historical context of African American spiritual singing. Borrowing from this heritage, African American women create a basis for personal meaning through the productive articulation of their perspectives, principles, and beliefs. Female power is also conceptualized according to

the emotional singing of voice. This felt mode of female expression also formulates self-esteem and self-worth as beneficiaries of performed vocal music. African American women's singing further symbolizes a shared womanist perspective on how to affectively read social and personal experiences. This dissertation's use of *womanist*, a term that was first coined by writer Alice Walker in her book of collected stories, In Search of Our Mother's Gardens: Womanist Prose, speaks to this project's defining of African American women's singing as a conscious or unconscious culture of "outrageous, audacious, courageous or willful behavior" (1). The courageously powerful female behavior of singing, performed in a patriarchal society that prefers female silence as a condition of value, is argued by this project as also proof of African American women's phenomenal belief in female uplift. Within a system that is highly idealized by patriarchy and 'white' supremacy, African American women forge a civilizing pursuit towards spiritual emancipation by using the convention of singing to personally re-construct their worth and existence. The courageous championing of singing into a mode that also facilitates group survival produces in women some noteworthy qualities, namely self-determination, perseverance, and moral goodwill. Doubtless, African American women's engagement with singing, in a culture that perpetuates female silence, supports a gendered philosophy about harmony and existence as an outcome of opposing forces or opposites. The implicit optimism of this womanist view argues that actions and ideas which are positively and negatively opposing anticipate personal and group success and transformation. The latter relies on the choice to construct attitudes and behaviors which are antithetical to patriarchal notions of female inferiority and insignificance as parameters which determine female autonomy and power.

The significance of cultural readings of African American women's cultural experiences is similarly akin with the processes which form and contextualize the African American literary

text. The ideas which self-fashion and characterize African American women's identities and voices are also theoretically fundamental to the construction of narrative fiction. At a fundamental level, African American women's self-construction of their personalities, and vocal structuring of meaning, can be read or framed as a literary text in itself, whereas the female singing voice operates as a symbolic context for a woman's character or nature. The relevance of treating African American women's identities as subjectively constructed texts justifies a referring to literary fiction as an important discipline for exploring female identity-formation processes. The central assumptions and formulations which condition narrative fiction contribute to a genuine understanding of African American women's self-representing of their identities and also to the social conditions which personify female characterization. For one, literature is an important discourse for examining and constructing the human character. This is because one of the most important merits in the creation of literary prose is the characterization of subject matter or subjectivity. This important narrative feature invokes literary fiction as an important discipline and discourse for reading and generating meaning about women. Giving value to literary representations of female characters is also important due to a traditional circularity, within the canon, of a particular text on female subjectivity that fashions one example of African American women's meaning and culture according to their everyday encounters with singing. This rather fascinating literary tradition of constructing African American female characters in minor roles as singers gives further legitimacy to the significance of literature as an important discipline for reading and translating the text of African American womanhood. This literary economy of female singing produces a convincing reading about both the subjective text and narrative context that exists between African American women and their voices (character).

In many African American novels, the transcribed sub-genre of African American female singing operates as a literary motif that unites the physical *body* of the African American book to its emotional, spiritual *voice*. This narrative voice or attitude is represented through visible and invisible frames. The visible frames include language and the surface characteristics of secondary, female characters. The invisible frames manifest as the emotional tones, and spiritual beliefs, of the novel. Throughout Figures in Black: Words, Signs, and the "Racial" Self, Henry Louis Gates, Jr. argues that emotions are central to the construction of African American literary prose. Furthermore, Gates defines narrative as a genre that engages with "structures of feeling," a term he borrows from the Marxist literary critic Raymond Williams. In this way, Gates theorizes African American fiction as foregrounded by emotional impressions which culminate as a narrative tone or attitude. In this case, the literary construction of African American minor female singers constructs women as a symbolically minor emotional voice within the narrative text. In Blues, Ideology, and Afro-American Literature: A Vernacular Theory, Houston Baker also espouses the literary significance of performed African American singing as "translators [that] offer interpretations of the *experiencing* of experience" (7; emphasis mine). Baker defines this musical aspect of African American cultural life "not as a function of formal inscription, but as a forceful *condition* of Afro-American inscription itself" (4; emphasis mine). Through narrative encounters with female singing, Baker argues, African Americans writers translate the process of representing 'representation.' This creative process represents singing, similarly to writing, as an experience and as an experience or encounter *with* meaning. In this way, the literary representation of vocal music is not conceptualized as an activity apart from writing, but as a creative experience and as an experience that represents experience. One theory and practice related to African American writing, then, is the literary construction of vocal music as

an experience with experiential meaning. This point identifies the literary highlighting of singing in fiction as a practice that projects the nature of experience and representation. In this way, the textual construction of African American female singers defines one creative practice about representation as a subjective experience and as an *experiencing of experience*. This literary representing of 'representation' conceives the minor female singer as representative of the real.

Secondary female singing characters communicate some emotionally "minor" tones of a narrative text. The experience of narrative singing about experience further serves as a frame for the formations which account for reality and representations of reality. This imagined literary community of secondary female characters is also constitutive of a traditional narrative construction of the African American worldview as both vocally musical and affective. The didactic reference to this imagined as secondary or minor is akin to a historical referencing of the African American culture and cultural members as a social minority group. Minority status to African American women therefore structures the African American female singer as a symbol of the African American cultural identity. These assumptions explain the artistic production of female singers within a background context in the literary text. Douglass's Narrative of the Life, an important early narrative accounting of African American singing, focuses on the emotional and political implications of African American singing from a group standpoint. The minor character of singing is specifically anthologized as a unified, communal performance. Douglass's discussion of the significance of singing as an emotional instrument of group power, and as an expression of a group attitude, however, is recalled and analyzed from the standpoint of a masculine authority. While the narrative reference to singing is clearly rendered in the first-person (We), Douglass's singular masculine vision projects the cultural ritual of singing through

the personal agency of an African American male. One of the earliest narrative renderings of an African American female singer as symbolic of the African American voice and culture, subsequently, occurs in Zora Neale Hurston's modern novel, Their Eyes Were Watching God (1937). While Hurston's novel reinforces Douglass's traditional rendering of reality and identity as reflective of African American spiritual singing, Hurston constructs the mentioned encounter through a modern, fragmented female subject. Hurston's novel is an early, important 'renaissance' text on minor female singing. This depiction also shapes an entire body of fiction written by African American male and female artists throughout the twentieth century. Richard Wright's Native Son (1940) Ann Petry's The Street (1946), James Baldwin's Go Tell It on the Mountain (1952) and "Sonny's Blues" (1957), Paule Marshall's Brown Girl, Brownstones (1958), and PraiseSong for a Widow (1982), Toni Morrison's The Bluest Eye (1970), Song of Solomon (1978), and Jazz (1992), Gloria Naylor's The Women of Brewster Place (1982), and Alice Walker's The Color Purple (1982), to name a few, all determine one important reputation within the canon according to the construction of secondary female singers whose identities mark both the exceptionality and marginality of the African American identity and culture. As a uniform, coherent literary practice, many of the mentioned writers devote a portion of their fiction to the construction of this common every day, female singing. Ann Petry's Lutie Johnson, although the primary protagonist throughout The Street, is detailed for her struggles with social marginality and oppression due to her position as an African American single mother. She is most recognizable for taking up singing as a justifiable means to earn a wage living, and also as a way to communicate the concerns and conflicts which perpetuate her marginalization. Baldwin's minor singer in "Sonny's Blues" uses her symbolic "tambourine" or voice to project an everyday testimony on African American female survival as a hopeful experience of cosmic

proportion, "*it has rescued many a thousand*" (52). A prostitute named Poland, Toni Morrison's singer in The Bluest Eye, structures her singing in a similar fashion in an attempt to express and deal with the fundamental loneliness that she implies relates to the social fashioning of unnatural distance amongst people of 'different' races and genders. Particularly prone to segregation and personal estrangement, as an African American woman, Poland reaches into the depth of her *blues* in order to personally generate meaning about her interior state of excessive depression. Two important minor singers in Alice Walker's The Color Purple, Squeak and Shug Avery, use vocal music as a vehicle to personally validate their self-worth and perspectives. Squeak, more importantly, communicates an African American emotional point of view about the significance of racial and gendered stereotypes: "*They calls me yellow/like yellow be my name/They call me yellow/like yellow be my name/But if yellow is a name/Why ain't black the same*" (99). Within this uniquely female culture, singing is appropriated as *the* privileged form for social visibility and for characterizing female identity. The end result of this exceptional argument for female significance is that singing serves as a coping mechanism for surviving patriarchal violence, and as an empowering economy that secures women's autonomy and existence.

The common literary representation of secondary musical characters suggests that an imaginative longing for female unity shapes one formal *raison d'etre* of African American creative expression. This interpretation is supported by the narrative offsetting of a unified community of African American female singers who employ an attitude of unity in relation to their methodology of self-expression, and in relation to the spiritual beliefs and values which mediate their singing. This worldview is embedded with a unified shaping of a singular point of view that recognizes the context of creative self-expression as a power that is resolutely determined by affective will power and by a cosmic source. One basis for this represented

female singing is a profound, phenomenal faith and belief in moral principles. The mentioned virtues trace meaningful values and performed behavior to the downfall of enslavement and oppression, and as an imagined genealogy for social and personal justice. That the modern, African American cultural experience is narratively predicated on harmonious singing as characteristic of power and opposition to injustice foregrounds intra-group divisions and conflicts as an attitude and reality that destroys cultural life. Within African American fiction, this important topic of representation symbolically structures African American women as sharing common assumptions, beliefs, and lived realities. The associations and connections which condition this imagined community emphasize, as its objective, cultural unity.

This project's fashioning of the African American artistic and female communities as unified breaks with a traditional depiction of division within African American cultural life. This divisive characteristic of the latter community has been particularly prone to a historical focusing on artistic ruptures, conflicts, and hostility as indicative of cultural life. In contrast, the emergence of a phenomenon in fiction of constructing African American female singing as a motif for intra-group unity transforms a sense of artistic disunity into a new precedent which bears as its convention artistic togetherness. This new theory, in particular, supports a re-reading of perhaps the most infamous example of artistic conflict amongst writers Zora Neale Hurston, Richard Wright and James Baldwin. For this reason, this dissertation will observe and explore the one unifying driving force behind the narrative existence of secondary female singers in Hurston's Their Eyes Were Watching God (1937), Wright's Native Son (1940), and Baldwin's Go Tell it On the Mountain (1952). While these writers characterize their minor singers in diverse ways, they produce a rendering of female subjectivity and worth in a similar way, again and again. This principled legacy is a modern statement on the aesthetic principle of African

American artistic creation and theoretical assumptions. This interdependent dialectic of writing as an experiencing of cultural connection narrates an emotional longing or desire for female and cultural harmony.

Narrative representation of African American women's self-fashioning of their identities through singing will structure the dissertation's chapters. This constitutive processing of singing and the relationship between African American women and reading practices which draw on descriptions of marginality will also be treated with particular detail. Chapter One will take into account a heritage of African American women's everyday use of voice as a mode for social visibility and female worth. The chapter will look particularly at nineteenth century, pre-modern African American women's attempts to construct their worldviews and value in a patriarchal and hostile cultural system. This nineteenth century historical and narrative precedent serves as an important context for the modern production of African American's women's everyday singing. Chapter Two will theoretically demonstrate the various critical practices adopted by African American writers to represent minor female singing. Attention to the formal assumptions which ground the modern characterization of African American women will also serve as a methodology for reading and interacting with the three narrative case studies specified in chapters three through five. Chapter Two will also describe the dominant modes of female behaviors and emotional beliefs, visible and invisible, which characterizes African American women's everyday encounters with singing. Further exposition of language and historical contexts in relation to African American music will also be considered. Chapter Three will examine the significance of Zora Neale Hurston's important representation of a 'minor' African American female singer to notions of female power and social subversion in Their Eyes Were Watching God. This theme of female subversion, in public, everyday settings, is an emphasis

throughout Their Eyes, and as such, the chapter will contextualize singing as a practice that determines female visibility and significance. These interests are constructed as in opposition to traditional readings of African American women as marginal and invisible. Chapter Four will place into perspective the domestic or interior economy of female singing as a lived experience of developing home or 'native' values in Richard Wright's Native Son. The explicit construction of an African American mother who sings daily in the home environment details Native Son's linking of the private or interior sphering of voice as a basic criteria for subjectivity and cultural survival. Finally, Chapter Five will describe the cultural materiality of African American women's everyday singing through the formation of the institutional space as a site for celebrating African American women's worldviews and beliefs, but also, more importantly, as a site for solidary interaction amongst women. James Baldwin's Go Tell It on the Mountain, as the final narrative case study on female identity and singing, is grounded by a common theme of female unity. This unity, as the subject matter of Baldwin's analysis of female church singing, identifies cultural support and allegiance as inseparable from the creation and regeneration of African American women's voices.

Bibliography

Ahmed, Sara. The Cultural Politics of Emotion. New York: Routledge, 2004.

Baker, Houston. Blues, Ideology, and Afro-American Literature: A Vernacular Theory. Chicago: U of Chicago P, 1984.

Baldwin, James. Go Tell It on the Mountain. New York: Dial Press, 1966 [1952].

Baldwin, James. "Sonny's Blues." The Norton Anthology of Short Fiction. Seventh Edition. Eds: Richard Bausch and R.V. Cassill. New York: W.W. Norton & Co, Inc., 2006 [1978]. 37-59.

Butler, Judith. The Psychic Life of Power: Theories in Subjection. California: Stanford UP, 1997.

Carby, Hazel. "In Body and Spirit: Representing Black Women Musicians." Black Music Research Journal. 11.2 (Autumn 1991). 177-192.

Davis, Angela. Women, Race & Class. New York: Random, 1983 [1981].

Douglass, Frederick. Narrative of the Life of Frederick Douglass, An American Slave. Delaware: Prestwick House, 2004 [1845].

Du Bois, W.E.B. The Souls of Black Folk. New York: Signet, 1995 [1903].

Gates, Jr. Henry Louis. Figures in Black: Words, Signs, and the "Racial" Self. New York: Oxford UP, 1987.

Gordon, Avery. Ghostly Matters: Haunting and the Sociological Imagination. Minneapolis: U of Minnesota P, 1997.

Hill-Collins, Patricia. Black Feminist Thought: Knowledge, Consciousness, and the Politics of Empowerment. 2nd Edition. New York: Routledge, 2000.

Hume, David. An Enquiry Concerning the Principles of Morals. Ed: J. B. Schneewind. Indianapolis: Hackett Publishing Company, 1983.

Hurston, Zora Neale. Their Eyes Were Watching God. Philadelphia: J.B. Lippincott Co., 1937.

Locke, Alain. The New Negro. New York: Atheneum, 1992 [1925].

Lorde, Audre. "Poetry is not a Luxury." Sister Outsider: Essays and Speeches. California: The Crossing Press, 1984. 36-39.

Morrison, Toni. The Bluest Eye. New York: Random House, 1970.

Petry, Ann. The Street. Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1991 [1946].

Radano, Ronald. "Denoting Difference: The Writing of the Slave Spirituals." Critical Inquiry 22 (Spring 1996). 506-544.

Walker, Alice. In Search of Our Mother's Garden's: Womanist Prose. New York: Harcourt, Brace, Jovanovich, 1983 [1967].

Walker, Alice. The Color Purple. New York: Harcourt, 2003 [1982].

Wright, Richard. Native Son. New York: Harper Perennial, 2005 [1940].

REVIEW OF LITERATURE

The last ten years, in the interdisciplinary field of cultural studies, has seen critical analysis on the social significance and function of African American vocal music. Throughout, the field has established that a relationship exists between singing and identity-formation processes. These processes are explained as the workings of history, memory, affect, and lived reality. The fields of history, musicology, anthropology, sociology, and also literature, in particular, also theorize the performance of African American singing as inter-relational with traumatic cultures. Two important readings that derive from musicological studies on trauma cultures are (1), a reading of the significance of musical self-expression to subjective conditions of healing, and (2), for cultures where trauma has led to erasure or loss of personal and/or collective memory, a reading of vocal music as an emotional worldview or "haunting" that initiates the recovery of historic and even pre-historic origins and value systems. African American singing of lived experience is documented by anthropologists as tantamount to a process of genealogical recovery. The emotional discourses typically associated with cultural trauma studies fashion singing as an important mediator of self-reconstruction. These possibilities privilege singing as an expression that accounts for human experience, knowledge and purpose. Such a reflection implicates African American singing as an institution that conditions practices and domains which perpetuate describing and analyzing the social realities in which singing emerges in the first place. Moreover, the last ten years in the field of cultural studies, has primarily focused on the materiality of African American singing as a constructed narrative that is a dominant feature in literary, sociological and anthropological discourses.

The efficacy of vocal music lies in its ability to communicate and archive affective impressions or felt experiences. The historical work of Julie Brown documents a connection between traumatic events and the production and circulation of African American vocal music, particularly in relation to a discourse of singing as a personified character of traumatic experiences. In her introduction to Western Music and Race (2007), Brown defines African American singing as informed by a triadic "historical, cultural and biological identity" (intro; 12). Brown suggests that these elements are constitutive of "a range of archival, historical and critical approaches" (intro; 16) that represent everyday experience, particularly affective experiences. Brown also theorizes that singing is an important phenomenal structure because it communicates the silence that is often symptomatic of trauma. By highlighting these foundational elements in African American music, Brown's essay examines the expressive significance of vocal performance, as an object of study, to the formation of cultural publics, and also the implications of vocal music as a social experience that subverts "muted traumas" (18). In order to do this, Brown looks at African American oral songs which are repressed, forgotten, or marginalized from official historical documentation. The author claims that "in the case of traumatic events, canonization involves the mitigation or covering over of wounds and creating the impression that nothing really disruptive has occurred" (intro; 17). The development and use of singing is documented by Brown as enabling African Americans to represent invisible forms of lived experiences with emotional and spiritual traumas, non-visual experiences which are often synonymous with the silencing and dehumanization of cultural life. In theorizing and highlighting the power of self and group expression in relation to survival, recovery and healing, Brown situates the ontology of music as an experiential philosophy that African Americans rely on to record and process everyday visible and invisible realities which are fashioned by stressful

and life threatening situations. The systemic haunting of pain and sorrow underlies the cross-generational persistence of invisible musical perceptions and realities which mediate African American life. Additionally, Brown explores the inherent difficulties with documenting the interior dimensions of trauma, for example, emotional or psychic scarring. Brown suggests that "deeply unpleasant events" (intro; 17) poses a problematic when "writing history" (intro; 17). Emotions therefore form an important epistemology for self-understanding and for examining social traumas that suppress the healthy autonomous development of personal existence and cultural life. In this way, Brown codifies singing as an especially important emotional device for working through the invisible, often emotional characteristics of violence.

This dissertation examines representations of singing, in fiction, as a structure that African American women use to communicate experiences with female-specific violence and marginalization, and also healing and self-expression. Whereas Brown does a close historical reading of African American singing, this project observes literary fiction's analogizing of female singing. The narratives examined by this project represent female freedom and identity as in conflict with social restraints, namely racial and gendered oppression. Resistance to oppression, for this representative community, is constructed as a woman's ability to sing and network within a patriarchal culture that discourages African American women from unifying and vocally challenging a common experience with oppression. Most importantly, the project examines the implications of what many of these narratives seem to recognize as the oasis of African American women's cultural survival, transformation, and their musical communication of a spiritual attitude or perspective.

The convention of singing was used by African Americans, within a historical context of slavery, to liberate themselves from subjugation, if not in the physical flesh, then in will power

or spirit. Guthrie P. Ramsey's essay, "Secrets, lies and transcriptions: revisions on race, black music and culture," (2007) historicizes this value of African American singing to personal power and freedom. Mostly, Ramsey argues that singing, as a structure for self-reflection and perceptive knowledge, emboldened enslaved African Americans with the resources to inquire about and analyze their historical conditions in relation to an American ideal that assumed freedom and equality as for all, yet, conversely, produced knowledge and traditions which discouraged African Americans from acquiring the mentioned ideals. African American historical access to freedom, Ramsey suggests, was conditioned by their ability to voice a right to the claims which were attributed with American citizenship. Ramsey also advocates for an alliance between African American singing or self-expression and cultural visibility**.** The opposite of this paradigm, silence and invisibility, is defined as bearing responsibility for social norms which enslaved African Americans. In this context, Ramsey foregrounds one element of enslavement as a personal encounter with speechlessness. Singing, subsequently, represents African American subjectivity into a sphere, symbolic and literal, of visibility and worth. For African Americans, the unique history of systemic restriction from literacy and writing also circumstantially mediated meaning and value to alternative (oral) structures for subjective and social representation. In this way, the emergence of African American singing doubled in significance due to its redefinition of self-revelation as a complex meshing of power and behavior into a conduct and personality that came to signify the authentic character of liberty. Resistance to enslavement was therefore connected with an American vision of liberty that corresponded to the revelatory function of self-expressing a desire for freedom. The later translation and transcription of African American vocal sound into written text also reformed African American voices into textual archives. Non-visual vocal symbols and signs, translated by

language into visible songbooks, Ramsey points out, became resourceful and informative historical and cultural documents about the African American cultural experience. This function of documentation gave rise to cultural 'recordings' as a social science. The building and organization of knowledge, through a practice of hypothesizing and explaining African American ritual singing, inaugurated a body of scientific knowledge about the shared nature, beliefs, and cultivation of culture. The science of transcribing African American singing was "considered as a modern scientific artifact, a specimen fit for capture by the spreading nets of an emergent ethnoscience'" [and] "served the interests of a modernist scientific impulse to classify and objectify racialised people and their attendant cultural artifacts" (27). As the scientific discipline suggests, the transcription and translation of African American vocal sound precipitated a new body of science, including anthropology and sociology, and mediated the formation of social sciences that were later to be used to study American cultural life.

This dissertation gives value to Ramsey's readings on the scientific institutionalization of African American singing. This project, more specifically, refers to African American literary representations of female singing as documented artifacts on female beliefs and values, namely self-reliance, and liberty and justice for all women. Principally, the values of individual and autonomous self-creation and self-reliance, conceived as valuable, remain important American characteristics that underlie the essence of African American women's everyday singing. In the face of social tensions and conflicts, for example, this dissertation documents African American women who relied on singing to re-present their personal identities, and to access personal freedom. Further subverting a dominant belief in freedom as a reality that is granted from an external cultural source, African American women historically re-defined the parameters of liberation into an experience that was self-produced. The cultural co-operation of transcribing

into text vocal or oral worldviews transformed the ways in which African Americans and European Americans read and understood American democracy.

Non-visual senses, in exploring how emotional signs operate within an episteme of racial ideology, are conceptualized as intrinsically complicit with the cultural delineation of European American and African American racialized identities. Mark Smith's text, How Race is Made: Slavery, Segregation, and the Senses (2006), makes a meaningful intervention into cultural studies on racial ideology, racism and racial segregation as manifested through non-visual senses such as smell, hearing, emotions, tasting and touching. Smith claims that "[t]aking seriously the sensory history of race and racism helps us appreciate just how unthinkingly race is made, how racism is learned, and how the ideology of race and racism has arisen historically" (intro; 3). The author details the theme of sensory stereotypes as foundational to his examination of race and subjectivity:

> This is a broad, two-hundred-year story about how many southern whites manufactured sensory stereotypes about black people and how black people in turn challenged those assumptions. […]. A central argument is that the sensory construction of race held important benefits for whites. Not only did the invention and subsequent application of the stereotypes help justify slavery and segregation, but the senses also allowed white southerners not to have to think about race. (intro; 4)

The author suggests that because racial identity is fluid and visually near impossible to sometimes name, due to the nature of inter-mixed relationships between European Americans and African Americans, sensory stereotypes emerged as an important dogma on race and racial supremacy. Smith documents a Eurocentric dependence on non-visual senses to stereotype and oppress African Americans, and to also reinforce and reproduce their imagined desire for racial 'purity' and dominance. Smith also suggests that "[t]he association between the senses and emotion, between race-thinking and gut-feeling, was, in many ways, a central theme of southern

history" (intro; 2). Smith's revision of southern history claims that within a system of racial separation, in which many European Americans had come to believe that they could no longer solely rely on the visual as a signifier of racial purity, racial difference became dependent on the development of an alternative system for recording and constructing racial difference. In this way, attention to the senses, by way of paying aural attention to delineated speech patterns, value to intuitive perceptions of body language and behavior, racial smelling, and the performance of emotional reception to skin color, fashioned racial status according to a system of non-visual signs that operated in tandem with irrational and illogical racial generalizations and stereotypes. Alongside the visual, these non-visual models for sensing race became foundational to the domination of 'whites' over 'blacks.'

This dissertation theorizes affective experience as playing a primary role in the production of meaning to African American women's realities, and also in the development of African American women's voices and identities. Due to the destructive and painful nature of racial enslavement on the physical body and mind, for example, the use of torture to control the physical body, African American women sensed their identities according to a framework of emotions which also became central to their social discourse on the context of lived reality. Moreover, the dimensions of singing, as a motif for a point of view, also developed according to a system that mirrored the emotions of everyday American cultural life. By also producing a reading of emotions as having empowering and emancipatory ramifications on the development and representation of African American women, this dissertation examines the centrality of emotions to the meaningful formation of African American women's culture. The textuality of this female text on emotional singing and identity, fashioned by a narrative body that characterized women through a network of emotional signs and power, equates constructive

value and significance to non-visual realities, namely the portrayal of the African American female quest for freedom and equality as an important episteme for self-knowledge and cultural subversion. The fact that African American women perform affect through their everyday singing projects a construct of the self-made African American woman according to meaningful emotional conduct. Whereas Smith explains the Eurocentric use of non-visual senses as a basis for the distorted and fictive conceptualization of race, African American women refer to the senses in meaningful ways. A good example of this, perhaps, is the performing of emotional singing to interpret the truth or facts about culture and cultural signs which mark and recognize subjectivity. The dissertation's examination of literary representations of African American women's everyday singing in fiction also disrupts a tradition of patriarchal ordering that suggests that the value and significance of womanhood lies in her ultimate ability to conform to a system of silence, and also male domination and dependence. Smith's reading of the primary role of non-visual senses in the formation of racial identities in the Americas acknowledges the negative and dehumanizing uses of the senses to justify and reproduce the racial oppression of African Americans. European American use of emotions mirrored dominant cultural ideologies which sought to stereotype all African Americans as inferior and non-human and all European Americans as racially superior. In particular, the senses of smelling and feelings were used to stereotype and divide the American culture according to superficial hierarchies. These discourses are traced by Smith to the social emergence of racial oppression, discrimination and exclusion. This project, following Smith, ties African American women's use of emotions to situate, evaluate and communicate the facts about their social standing and experiences. African American women are represented in narrative as using their interior system of emotions to

structure their own personal worldviews, and essentially, to acquire and appropriate personal freedom from patriarchal enslavement.

The aesthetic and experiential musicological qualities of African American singing are related to the actualization of American democratic ideals. In Lying up a Nation: Race and Black Music (2003), Ronald Radano explains that the character of American identity is reflected in "the remarkable and wondrous experience of black music" (10). African American music, for the author, is symbolically representative of the principles of American democracy. These principles include the ability to express or claim a say in matters pertaining to livelihood, personal and collective participation in the development of democratic ideals, and the exercise of self-determination or personal agency, free from oppression and/or coercion. In this way, the performance of singing, through the medium of vocal music, also connected to the act of self-creation, characterizes the democratic goals and vision of the larger American culture. Radano defines the African (American) experience as an "African American culture forged under circumstances of enduring racial oppression" (12), a "social tragedy" (12) that nonetheless enabled African Americans to "rise up miraculously as the voice of social uplift" (12). This musicological approach to reading African American music defines the significance of African American musical genres as its affirmation of personal and cultural identities and survival against all odds (13). The author's comment on the significance of music to the development of individual and communal identities is considered concomitantly with the performance of singing. Singing, Radano suggests, communicates the particular character or qualities of an individual or culture. The theme of assertion is an important basis for understanding the tension between depending on others for self-perception and recognition and self-developing and authorizing individualistic notions. The self-development of individual identities is also connected to the

ordering of cultural distinctions, especially in societies where there is recognition of individual (cultural) 'differences' as unhealthy or unproductive to social evolution and progression.

Narrative representations of African American singing function as a creative structure for representing and interpreting lived reality. Radano's book is therefore meaningful to this dissertation because of his definition of African American music as "creative expression" (13). Radano explains his title, Lying up a Nation, as a phrase he borrows from author Zora Neale Hurston. In her own writing, Hurston defines 'lying' as the telling of a good story. In turn, Radano explains African American singing as a creative structure that tells a good story or 'lie.' Here, African American vocal music is read as a storytelling convention. Looking at African American literary representations of transcribed African American vocal music, voiced or performed by minor African American female characters, this project moves away from perceptions of music as antithetical or opposite to storytelling. Certainly, for Radano, singing "tells stories that convey a range of meaning, its power deriving from its accessibility and capaciousness, from its forceful articulation of a broad base of social realms" (14). With this claim, vocal music is rendered as especially beneficial for communities that have been silenced or dehumanized by social circumstances. More significantly, the effective and persuasive qualities of singing are furthered by its ability to narrate a wide range of topics of interest. African American singing performs or narrates a point of view, tonal characterization, lyrics, conflicts, plot sequences, and vocal styles. This project's claiming of a bond between literature and singing symbolically recognizes the power of connections, however unlikely, as imaginatively important to the achievement of equality and justice.

The sounds, rhythm and flow of African American music signify the larger American urban, industrial experience. Joel Denerstein's historicizing of African American culture,

Swinging the Machine: Modernity, Technology & African American Culture Between the World Wars (2003), defines African American music as an important "soundscape of modernity" (intro; 5) that communicates everyday modernist sonic experience, and that appropriates the development and commodification of African American music with the larger American cultural experiences of industrialization and capitalism:

> When the preeminent modernist architect Le Corbusier visited New York, the preeminent modern city, in 1935, he marveled equally at the skyscrapers and at African American music and dance. "Jazz, like the skyscrapers, is an event … represent[ing] the forces of today. *The jazz is more advanced than the architecture*. If architecture were at th[is] point … it would be an incredible spectacle." By "the forces of today," the architect meant industrialization and mass production. (intro; 3)

The author references but does not discuss the theme of African American music as an internal emotional experience. Instead, Denerstein's book reads African American music at the turn of the century as representative of the atmospheric, aural experiences of American modernity, for example, the rhythm and sounds of the subway, factories and street cars. This music, in essence, is described by Denerstein as personifying and contextualizing industrial life. Sonic accenting of brass sounds, the musical experiencing of clashing metal, and attention to the atmosphere or mood of everyday work life, at least in theory, are explained as reflecting the aural contents of modern life. A tradition of modern, urban noise, the author claims, is viewed as an important descriptive identity of African American musical modernity. The modern development of industry is documented as concomitant with a discourse of sound constructs that temporally and spatially arrange and compose sound, rhythm and harmony.

While Denerstein is primarily occupied with African American music's relationship to the aural essence of urban reality, the author also briefly alludes to African American music as a conventional practice that mediates personal identity. Particularly, the author cites the function

of African American music for working class women in a historical moment when women had yet to gain the right to vote, or even the right to public self-expression:

> Kathy Peiss has shown that dance was the social activity most enjoyed among working-class women between 1900-1920. Regardless of work fatigue, young women geared themselves up to go dancing even on work nights. In her classic studies of 1920's college youth, *The Damned and the Beautiful*, Paula Fass identified dance as "unquestionably the most popular pastime" among upper-class white students. Jazz dances represented rebellion, sensuality, and sexual liberation. (intro; 13)

These women, despite their economic exploitation, cultural marginality, and social invisibility, are documented as using African American music to perform their attitudes and subjectivities. Likewise, the dissertation explores the relationship between African American singing and African American women's modern liberation. Denerstein draws a connection between music and the aural effects of industrial capitalism; he also briefly notes, perhaps unconsciously, the importance of the spiritual and internal emotional longing or hopes which are indicative of African American music and cultural life. Overcoming racial oppression, or the ability to communicate a desire or vision for a better life, music is portrayed as an ideological system that positions lived reality as reflective of interior attitudes, perceptions and emotions. Denerstein documents this fact about African American's use of singing to dream up and create healthy and meaningful realities. The power of cultivating hope through singing is crucial to this project's theoretical reading of music as a spiritual structure for authorizing the lived, social journey. A reading of this emotional power in African American music projects African American music as an externalized motif for the modern material and industrial subject.

The oral elements in African American vocal music inform a sub-genre within the African American narrative tradition. In Spirituals, Blues, and Jazz People in African American Fiction: Living in Paradox (2002), A. Yemisi Jimoh points out that "[f]rom ancient times music

and storytelling have been closely tied among peoples of oral cultures worldwide" (intro; 1), and also that, "[h]istorically, among many African oral cultures, the ancient tradition of singing the lives of the people was given a special and valued designation" (intro; 1). As an oral philosophical worldview for articulating values and attitudes, the conscious or unconscious African transmutation of singing is foregrounded by Jimoh as predominant in the African American ideological systematizing of self-expression. Orality is also appropriated into African American narratives. Even as African American storytelling adheres to a European system of communicating through the written text, literary transcription of performed vocal music constructs a vocal or spoken component as part of the identity of the book as text. What follows is a positioning of narrative interpretations, alongside written representation and signs, through the ability to voice aloud a text. This ability to imaginatively voice characters into being, perhaps, is also an exercise in subjective understanding, and of giving value to the dimensional components of narrative characters, whether according to race, gender, class, and/or sexual orientation. Interestingly, although Jimoh makes a brief mention of the genre of African American spirituals at the beginning of his introduction, he spends the majority of the book exploring the musical genre of minstrelsy:

> Professional blackface minstrelsy begins in the United States in 1843 with the first organized white minstrel performance. […]. But after the Civil War, black musicians retrieve their music and dance from the caricature and exploitation imposed on them by blackface minstrelsy. (intro; 2)

Jimoh, discussing African American music, considers the cultural significance of African American minstrelsy as a musical form of American entertainment that consisted of singing, dancing, and comic performance. Minstrelsy also served as a dramatic model for European Americans to act out or represent their perceptions of what they deemed to be African American racial identities. As a burgeoning entertainment business, minstrelsy relied on racial stereotypes

and generalizations to attract audience attention and money. In this way, minstrelsy became fashioned on the dehumanization and distortion of African Americans. Such stereotypes, acted out by European Americans and African Americans, constructed African Americans as lazy, ignorant, buffoonish and happy. The stock constructions of the African American racial identity became a popular form of public entertainment throughout the nineteenth century. Singing, or vocal performance, was, according to the author, a key feature of minstrel performance, whereas a troupe of performers would sing songs and crack jokes, sometimes simultaneously, other times, separately. Singing underscored the stock characterization of African Americans into archetypal figures such as the overly sexual African American woman, or as the 'mammy' figure. Jimoh claims that the significance of minstrelsy lay in the fact that this paid industry served as the sole lens for European Americans to 'see,' perceive and stereotype African Americans. Often, the voices or perspectives of blackface shows belonged to European Americans, and Eurocentric worldviews, not African Americans themselves. The participation of African American entertainers in minstrel shows suggests that African Americans subverted "blackface" in order to re-tell or remodel many of the stereotypes which dehumanized them. African Americans embraced the minstrel stage because it afforded them a space from which to voice to their identities. The author therefore focuses on minstrelsy in order to explain one way African Americans musically deconstructed European American perceptions of African American identities. The narrative theme of minstrelsy also functions, for Jimoh, as an important literary metaphor for debunking Eurocentric constructions of race. This literary technique is interpreted by Jimoh as problematizing the absurdities of racial stereotypes produced by European American cultural publics. The author also provides a literary discussion of the role of minstrelsy, and African American music, in the literary works of authors such as James Weldon Johnson and

Wallace Thurman. Crucial to Jimoh's literary exploration of African American music, in the works of the following authors, is his interest in the relationship between Eurocentric literary traditions and African American music. Jimoh reads this musical-literary relationship as an attempt to "integrate" the African American culture into a European American modern society:

> Du Bois illustrates the unarticulated voice and invisible social position of its maker(s) within his or her culture, yet he inserts this black voice into a fracturing cultural space located in an early-twentieth-century moment of burgeoning modernity with its social fragmentation and personal alienation. […]. Du Bois's positioning of a text from the dominant culture and one from African American culture discloses the similar ideas that both convey, especially when the title of the Spiritual is known. His juxtapositioning of the texts also demonstrates their social positioning—a privileged text and a marginal text; this strategy suggests that both are vying for primacy as viable expressions of change (intro; 8-9).

Discussing Du Bois's own theory of African American Spirituals, Jimoh suggests that African American singing gave meaning and significance to African Americans who had been marginally written out of the human experience. This project adds to Jimoh's reading of African American transcribed narrative singing by suggesting that the singing or perspectives of African Americans, alluded to by Du Bois, and informed by the processes of self-expression and self-reliance, made real the American ideal of democracy and liberty. Literary representation of African American singing is proof that both cultures certainly depended on each other, particularly during moments of cultural tension and conflicts, for modes of representation that could translate cultural reality and American ideals on freedom and justice. Through the creative processes of writing and singing, these literatures gave significance to the fact that both cultures developed, together, a fuller understanding of the discourses of American individuality, and multiculturalism.

The public politicization of singing responds to sexual stereotypes which unjustly treat African American women as inferior. Focusing her thesis on this empowering characteristic of

female singing, Katherine Boutry, in her literary analysis, "Black and Blue: The Female Body of Blues Writing in Jean Toomer, Toni Morrison, and Gayl Jones" (2000), challenges a discourse that situates African American women's singing according to a patriarchal text of male desire and sexual objectification: "the best-selling works during the 1920's were often records by African American, *female* singers, the blues became a locus of myths about Black womanhood, anxiety and admiration commingling in an appreciation of music's (and performers') dark, sexual powers" (92). Conversely, the sexual objectification of the female singing body is re-oriented by Boutry as African American women's situating of their worth and identities according to voice, a discourse that re-defines female identity according to a context of a meaningful point of view, and not the physical body. The sexualization of female singers is explored by Boutry as indicative of distorted patriarchal notions of womanhood. For many of these paid female entertainers, the public performing of singing undeniably cultivates a feminist or gendered discourse on womanhood that positions women's identities according to a status as subjective vocalists. For Boutry, re-reading womanhood according to voice subverts male-centered readings of female entertainers as objects for male sexual desires. Consequently, female submission and dependence on these traditional perspectives gives way to a new worldview that depends on what women have to publicly sing about (for) themselves. Boutry attests to the fact that African American women use singing to give public significance and value to their emotional and spiritual worldviews. The author claims that African American women are often forced to choose between performing patriarchal perceptions associated with womanhood or subverting distorted male constructs by expressing or representing female-centered meaningful perspectives about their nature and worth. Many women, as Boutry documents, perhaps in order to book gigs, or to earn a living, sing patriarchal themes or topics,

mainly topics related to patriarchal sexual desires. In spite of this, Boutry documents African American women as achieving mainstream success and significance as a result of their ability to publicly express their identity in very vocally powerful ways.

African American vocal music is ideologically and affectively linked to African American histories, memories, and emotions based on transatlantic enslavement. In her essay "That Old Black Magic? Gender and Music in Ann Petry's Fiction" (2000), Joanna X.K. Garvey defines the oral or vocal basis in African American music as "[r]ooted in Africa, marked by the horrors of the Middle Passage, and intertwined with the manifold experiences of enslavement" (119). Garvey explains that African American singing is a vocal structure that African Americans rely on to represent their lived experiences, and to also emotionally re-member and therefore heal from a heritage that was rooted in enslavement. The interior system of emotions is oriented into an African American repository of cultural rituals, perceptions, memories, and practices. Within the framework of emotional ideology and experience, feelings comprise a network of impressions and sentiments about the enslaved past, and a pre-enslaved past homeland. Garvey also theorizes the relevance and significance of emotions, attached to African American singing, due to its "capacity to deal with loss and death through the expressive power of art" (120). With this underlining link, the author suggests, as does the dissertation, that African American singing enables African Americans to spatially feel and be at home with the self (identity/heritage/roots). Garvey designates singing as drawing on emotive and spiritual resources to also mediate African American experiences away from home.

African American women use their bodies to symbolically 'voice' resistance against social oppression. Tera Hunter, in "Sexual Pantomimes: The Blues Aesthetic, and Black Women in the New South" (2000), claims that early twentieth century African American women's

everyday cultural experiences depended on "who had the prerogative to control black, especially, female, laboring bodies" (146). This conflict with subjective control led to "African American working-class expressions of creativity and resilience in their dancing and their refusal to follow the dictates of the elites" (146), a phenomenon that Hunter describes as codifying "the emergence of a modern culture" (146). Hunter defines body performance as a symbolic voice that "generally exploded outward from the hips" […] performed from a crouching position with the knees flexed and the body bent at the waist, which allowed a fluidity of movement in a propulsive rhythmic fashion" (150). Hunter describes the physical voice or point of view of dance as a human activity that enabled African American women to respond, in particular, to economically exploitive conditions. This dissertation examines African American women's identities according to the use of physical performance as a structure for self-expression. Hunter centers her argument on lower body motions, particularly torso and legs movements, while this dissertation examines the workings of the upper body, mainly vocal and oral expressive articulations. Hunter claims that modern dancing enabled African American women to temporarily liberate themselves from gendered, racist and economic oppression**.** The emergence and popularity of African American women's dance, notes Hunter, provided women with a personal mechanism for expressing a social identity that also communicated a desire for a more humane and compassionate working atmosphere. The later social institutionalization of dance, in daily life, subverted female economic exploitation by re-presenting physical performance into a body language that addressed, among other things, a gendered desire for justice, liberty, including physical freedom and equality in the social workplace.

African American music is an important sub-genre in African American literature. Throughout her "Introduction: The Agency of Sound in African American Fiction," from the

anthology Black Orpheus: Music in African American Fiction from the Harlem Renaissance to Toni Morrison (2000), Saadi A. Simawe suggests that singing and literature are interconnected due to the fact that African American writers frequently incorporate the traditional convention within their works, and also because scholars such as Jacques Derrida and Ferdinand de Saussure argue that words are intrinsically musical due to their innate rhythms and linguistic meter schemes. Simawe also underscores the technical relationship between transcribed music and narrative fiction: "in most of the African American fiction, particular kinds of music are used as foils in characterization and in theme" (17). Here, Simawe stresses the transcribed use of singing as a narrative technique that enhances or highlights both the physical and internal personalities of literary characters. The use of musical performance as a sub-plot that foils the main plot is described by the author as enhancing the narrative with the addition of a "story within a story," plot sequence. Altogether, the literary representation of African American music is identified by the author as a practice that reinforces the creativity and expertise of a particular narrative (and writer). An accomplished novelist, Simawe suggests, is one who can prepare and portray a literary story with such excellence as to ultimately draw on multiple literary features and techniques to render brilliantly a perspective or reality. As far as narrative representations of reality, Simawe explains African American singing as a creative desire to appropriately construct as best as possible everyday African American lived experience. In this way, music functions as a motif for reality. Recognizing the fact that people communicate in the everyday, through a variety of mediums, including singing, the literary use of singing addresses and establishes the ways in which African American cultural life is celebrated and expressed. Furthermore, the performance of vocal music, by African American women, revises one narrative characterization of gendered silence in a narrative space that signifies or represents characterization, primary and

secondary, through the expression of representation. Many of these narratives represent, quite expertly, the multiple sources for which the presence of particular character is shaped. What proves to be so exemplary about the narrative representation of everyday female singing, perhaps, is an underlying literary assumption about the significance of identity as equivalent to a point of view. In doing so, many African American novels signify African American voices according to an African American worldview that privileges orality as associative to an emotional logic or system of meaning. This literary belief celebrates singing as a convention for "self-realization, which seems to find, according many iconoclastic writers, its full expression in the medium of music and poetry" (intro; 15). Simawe calls this African American creative expression central to "the human search for identity and freedom" (intro; 16). As a structure for developing self-knowledge and understanding, the performance of vocal music is, at the same time, a process of self-inquiry. The question of "Who am I?" which then becomes the declarative "I am …" is a process of singing understanding and realization of the ideals which constitute human worth and subjectivity. This creative performance can be, in itself, an individual activity that, through awareness and training, leads to the development of human genius and giftedness. Simawe also suggests in her introduction that the inherent power of music carries "not only a healing a therapeutic power, but also an effective survival technique" (intro; 15). Here, the author makes a meaningful reading, as does this dissertation, about vocal music as a powerful holistic resource for healing and survival. The process of enslavement, albeit to a system or idea, is synonymous with the potential destruction and silencing of a personal identity and worldview. Treating or remedying such realities, suggests the author, is dependent on a subject's ability to communicate or express. Self-expression is a process of self-liberation. The impressionable power in singing dramatizes self-control over the processes

which influence the formation of subjectivity, and in case of oppressive realities that prove too powerful to overcome immediately, for example, physical enslavement, the choice to sing as applicable to survival. Singing, as a coping mechanism for survival, is represented as sometimes involving the temporary conforming to a set practice under a presumption that such a strategy will eventually lead to an opposite result, such as personal freedom. In the struggle to stay alive or to live, singing, privately or publicly, is theorized as building and developing potential strategies for freedom, or, as balancing a position of dehumanization with an opposite perspective or attitude that encourages perseverance and new imaginative possibilities and realities.

This dissertation adds to cultural studies scholarship on African American musicological practices. Using some of the aforementioned theories as a framework for interpreting the literary sub-genre of African American vocal music, this project examines the implications of female singing in the construction of racial and gendered subjective identities. In particular, the project underlines the ways in which singing re-scripts the characterization of African American women according to a motif that insists that the self-assertion of voice is central to disproving myths about African American women as non-human, and, through a conscious or unconscious recognition of the emotional power in self-expression, the achievement of female liberation from social restraints and dehumanizing patriarchal perceptions. The initiation of singing, for African American women, is examined by this dissertation as a lived reality that self-develops inner, spiritual worth and self-esteem. The repositories of affect and lived experience are also considered by the project as relationally dependent on each other for both the development and performance of individual exceptionality. Ultimately, African American women's self-reliance on the impressionable power of emotions to represent and critique cultural reality revises social

facts about the objectiveness or naturalness of social processes which construct subjectivity in the first place. African American women's self-representation of their unique individualities also calls into question a dominant patriarchal reading of female subjectivity as operating in silence. The dissertation contributes to the literary field of cultural studies a new analysis on characterization which recognizes, through the African American female self-asserted singing of an autonomous voice or perspective, secondary or minor narrative (life) actors as equally significant and valuable to the social and literary processes. The formation of a reading practice that projects and recognizes secondary female singing characters in fiction as exceptional and central to cultural and literary analysis produces a philosophical argument about the mastery of reading and understanding as experiences that operate best without a dominant or distinguishable arbitrary hierarchy of worth. The embracing of this common reading assumption results in the association and connection of value to commonality and equality as the intrinsic nature and character of human creation and creativity.

Bibliography

Boutry, Katherine. "Black and Blue: The Female Body of Blues Writing in Jean Toomer, Toni Morrison, and Gayl Jones." Black Orpheus: Music in African American Fiction from the Harlem Renaissance to Toni Morrison. Ed: Saadi A. Simawe. New York: Garland Publishing, 2000. 91-118.

Brown, Julie. "Introduction. Music, History, Trauma: Western Music and Race, 1883-1933." Western Music and Race. Ed: Julie Brown. Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 2007. 14-20.

Denerstein, Joel. Swinging the Machine: Modernity, Technology & African American Culture Between the World Wars. Amherst: U of Massachusetts P, 2003.

Garvey, Johanna X. K. "That Old Black Magic? Gender and Music in Ann Petry's Fiction." Black Orpheus: Music in African American Fiction from the Harlem Renaissance to Toni Morrison. Ed: Saadi A. Simawe. New York: Garland Publishing, 2000. 119-152.

Hunter, Tera. "Sexual Pantomimes," the blues Aesthetic, and Black Women in the New South." Music and the Racial Imagination. Eds: Ronald Radano and Philip V. Bohlman. Chicago: The U of Chicago P, 2000. 145-167.

Jimoh, A. Yemisi. Spirituals, Blues, and Jazz People in African American Fiction: Living in Paradox. Knoxville: U of Tennessee P, 2002.

Radano, Ronald. Lying up a Nation: Race and Black Music. Chicago: The U of Chicago P, 2003.

Ramsey, Jr. Guthrie. "Secrets, lies and transcriptions: revisions on race, black music and culture." Western Music and Race. Ed: Julie Brown. Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 2007. 24-37.

Simawe, Saadi A. “Introduction: The Agency of Sound in African American Fiction.” Black Orpheus: Music in African American Fiction from the Harlem Renaissance to Toni Morrison. Ed: Saadi A. Simawe. New York: Garland Publishing, 2000. 19-25.

Smith, Mark M. How Race is Made: Slavery, Segregation, and the Senses. Chapel Hill: U of North Carolina P, 2006.

CHAPTER ONE

African American Women's Nineteenth Century Public (Vocal) and Private (Text) Voicing

"O woman, woman! Upon you I call; for upon your exertions almost entirely depends whether the rising generation shall be anything more than we have been or not"
-Maria Stewart
"An Address Delivered Before the Afric-American Female Intelligence Society of America"

This chapter will provide important readings of African American women's nineteenth century documented performative use of their voices in public, social settings and in literary narratives. Throughout the nineteenth century, many African American women regarded the public expression of voice with a harmony that is quite noteworthy. This experience of female unity bears a fact about a harmonious heritage of African American women as daily experience that was mediated by the communication of a gendered point of view. This chapter focuses on a select group of exceptional women who signified voice as an epistemology for a female worldview and female worth, and as a unified convention for investigating and challenging gendered and racial enslavement. The publicly documented speeches of Maria Stewart and Sojourner Truth, and the writings of Anna J. Cooper, Harriet Jacobs, and Ida B. Wells-Barnett, inform this chapter's exploration of voice as a womanist motif for female subjectivity. The significance of an array of African American women from diverse backgrounds, Stewart, a notable political writer, Truth, a famous abolitionist orator, Jacobs, the first woman to publish a 'slave' narrative, Wells-Barnett, a notorious newspaper firebrand, and Dr. Cooper, an intellectual who received her doctorate at the Sorbonne in France, also speaks to a fact about these African American women as *united* in a common struggle for female justice. Aspects of this unity interrelate with African American women's common experience as a marginalized polity, and in their conscious or unconscious use of voice to represent their subjectivities, and to redress their

social conditions. Attention to this common female custom of performing voice recognizes a basis for togetherness as the sharing of a common worldview. The selected women are especially relevant to this chapter, moreover, due to their recognition of voice as an important practice for female conservation. Finally, access into the minds and hearts of these courageous nineteenth century African American female figures informs a womanist philosophy on the lived experience of African American womanhood as a journey of spiritually voicing into being.

African American female enslavement, influenced by stereotypical perceptions and social myths about African American women as a 'minor' or minority social group, influenced the development of a fundamentally female oriented vocal epistemology. The nineteenth century historical current of enslavement also influenced African American women's authorization of a gendered text on womanhood that defended female autonomy as a woman's representation and documentation of her creative voice. This gendered worldview emerged out of a culture that was systematically patriarchal, capitalist, and racist. Indeed, in some respects, the dehumanization of African American women was envisaged by a materialist relationship that established female value according to perceptions of the physical body as a site for sexual objectification. The additional acculturation and emergence of systems of male and 'white' supremacy, as 'primary' social ideologies, sanctioned cultural myths about African American women as culturally inferior. These Eurocentric modes of thought, logically, reinforced systemic patriarchy by restricting women's ability to respond to or challenge dominant perceptions. The identities of African American women, in this way, were constructed according to a motif of silence i.e. vocal suppression that became reinforced through systemic and individual acts of physical violence and/or sexual rape. The relationship between African American women's social enslavement and silence is a fundamental topic in bell hooks's Ain't I A Woman: black women and feminism.

hooks, in her introduction, claims that, historically, African American female silence was due to a patriarchal system that reinforced power through "the silence of the oppressed—that profound silence engendered by resignation and acceptance of one's lot" (intro; 1). Female silence made it near impossible for the latter group to disrupt cycles of cruel oppression and marginalization. The inability to communicate resistance gave value to distorted perceptions which circulated a false impression about women as being content and complicit in their own dehumanization. Since the nineteenth century common motif of 'breeder' was also consistent with African American women's social value, the political economy of the latter group oriented the general relationship between African American women and European and African American men according to deviant sexual behaviors.

The historical starting point of African American women's resilience against the mentioned dominant patriarchal readings called attention to the public performance of a female point of view as foundational to a re-presentation of women's overall worth. African American women, both in terms of belief and behavior, used the politicized exercise of communication to search for personal meaning and to expound on values and rituals which could reorient facts about their identities as spiritual and significant. These women relied on personal beliefs, namely spirituality, and inner emotions, as frameworks for analyzing and validating facts about their nature and environmental conditioning. Through a discourse of public speaking, African American women authorized their identities according to principles which expressed positive self-worth and meaningful life goals. This womanist point of view, as *the* basis of female character and conduct, recognized female value as a function of performing voice in a public setting. These women's deriving of value from the public positioning of voice established the interiority of character as an epistemology for establishing social presence or significance.

African American women's public questioning and criticizing of beliefs and institutions, which indicted all women as sexual objects and as muted condoners of their realities, debunked racist and sexist perceptions about the female identity as marginal. This nineteenth century vocal epistemology re-aligned self-expression as an emotional experience of constructing female subjectivity according to spiritual beliefs related to a personal attitude. This communication of female ideals, values, and beliefs, re-characterized the significance of womanhood according to an orally preformed worldview. The tenaciousness of African American women's choice, and belief, in their voices as an everyday customary ritual for survival, and for representing their humanities, presented the former group as supporting a spiritual conviction that they believed to be aided by a common belief in female worth. Women's performed testimonies to this belief suggested an emotional fact about the significance of womanhood as a lived experience and human conduct which manifested externally in the forms of character traits and physical behavior. These women's refusal to submit to the parameters of male dominion, racism, and capitalist dogma, also made apparent their conscious or unconscious point of view on enslavement as a condition of feeling psychologically, emotionally, and spiritually worthless. On this basis, the mentioned women communicated a reading of voice as *the* agency for personal freedom and personal significance. The facts of this context accounted for imprisonment or enslavement as an experience of being held imprisoned to fictitious principles which contradict the healthy development of female subjectivity. It is apparent, in this way, that *the* central nineteenth century African American female school of resistance against physical and psychological enslavement incorporated spiritual behavioral approaches and self-expression into their basis for autonomy.

African American women's public use of voice is represented as an empowering instrument for communicating female uplift. Maria Stewart, a political speaker and first African American woman to lecture on women's rights, used public speaking to inform and educate other African American women about political issues which affected the rights and liberties of all women. As part of her desire to impart to African American women a perception about public speaking as a political and spiritual tool for personal empowerment, and female justice, Stewart inflected her speeches with religious and didactic motifs. Implicitly, Stewart constructed voice as inseparable from spiritual or meaningful public conduct. Explicitly, women's personal ability to communicate their worldviews, always for the uplift and development of other women, is augmented as simultaneously political. Stewart implicated the possibilities for female justice according to a gendered culture that she suggested must be supported by meaningful ideals, namely self-worth and self-determination. The maintenance of these values, through public expression, was used to set up a binary between the elements and behavior of personal significance and external, cultural assumptions which dehumanized and subordinated the African American female identity. Political activism, in this sense, followed self-validation as an everyday activity that reflected a political stratagem or effort to bring about change or transformation. Stewart exercised an important aspect of politics by expressing to her identity according to her own perspectives. The vision in this kind of self-expression politicized or changed Stewart's personal guidelines concerning what it meant to be an African American woman.

The great need for institutions which could foster African American women's worldviews is outlined by the visible performance of a female voice in a public social setting. The social environment, as an institution that establishes social ordering and governed behavior,

is an important and beneficial site for women's exploration and analysis of their subjective acculturation. Public self-expression provides African American women with a political sphere for communicating facts and information, and also for expressing desired resolutions into public policy. In addition, information shared in such a setting materializes into debates which permit social awareness since it is here that questions and concerns are acknowledged and potentially resolved. By the same token, the public performance of voice discloses information previously suppressed by systemic forces which encourage or coerce women into silence. Dis-empowering silence debunks and challenges myths and assumptions which require violence and the absence of feedback (communication) to function or remain relevant. In an essay, "An Address Delivered before the Afric-American Female Intelligence Society of America," Stewart institutionalizes the public dimension of female self-expression into a gendered system that molds spiritual, and leadership, qualities in African American women. The potential of this institutionalized development of voice re-presents social reality as an important space for acquiring knowledge. To speak up or out, in a social setting, is to give value to the female identity. This vocal activity also mediates social understanding and heightened awareness about women's various perspectives and/or concerns. Connected with to the performance of the female voice, Stewart suggests, is the valuable emotional attitudes of fearlessness and high self-esteem. Operating through these emotional mechanisms, Stewart hypothesizes one aspect of women's political activism as an approach that produces voice:

> The frowns of the world shall never discourage me […]. I fear neither men nor devils. […]. The only motive that has prompted me to raise my voice on your behalf, my friends, is […] purely to promote the cause of Christ, and the *good of souls*, in the hope that others more experienced […] might go forward and do likewise. (50; emphasis mine)

Stewart's emphasis on the female development of an emotional state of fearlessness is a logical consequence of her existence within a society that is both patriarchal and racist. This environment, sharply defined by emotional distress and perceived threats, is represented by Stewart as atmospherically discouraging and dangerous. The obvious merits of the reinforcement of such a culture include the restriction of African American women, due to fear of recourse, from challenging oppression. Thus, as a whole, an emotional climate of fear is documented as regenerating the systemic subordination of African American women. Stewart's establishment of a female mode of behavior that retains emotional courage as a felt ontology for living therefore regards the hostility of "frowns" and discouragement with an attitude which synchronizes physical fortitude and moral courage into a resilient conduct that is framed as the most operative response to unjust opposition. Stewart reveals that the circumstances which encourage emotional courage also develop self-esteem and female worth. This conclusion is underscored by the personal stressing of values and principles which attribute a woman's voice with self-respect and personal integrity. Stewart's desire to promote her wellbeing, in this light, is synonymous with her congenial confidence and respect for her humanity. Stewart's choice of the phrase "good of souls" (50) in relation to her African American female audience, posits the female expression of voice as essential to the development of gendered confidence and respect. The spiritual advocacy of African American women as inhabiting "good souls" politicizes the latter group's access to liberty and justice as causational to the development of moral and meaningful personal perceptions. The significance of this passage makes comparable the regeneration of women's systemic oppression to social beliefs about African American women as immoral and inferior. Female esteem, then, is augmented by Stewart as indistinguishable from the public communication of voice. A woman's voice, here, becomes *the* authority of a

belief in personal worth and significance. That the spiritual text of voice also doubles as a ritual of political activism makes obvious the concept of the personal as political, along with theology as a form of social activism that mediates social justice through the honing of spiritual concepts of self-worth, through the basis of *expressing* it. Here, political activism is defined as a spiritual everyday conduct of communicating a worldview that observes any and all ritualistic practices as indistinguishable from personal and communal uplift. Thus, Stewart's reputation as a political speaker is rationalized according to her efficacious modeling of self-worth into a political policy of personal and community uplift. Stewart's social visibility, here, unites her interior, non-visual assumption of personal worth with her social conduct of moral behavior.

The concept of female unity is also referred to by Stewart as essential to African American women's overall empowerment and freedom. Stewart therefore communicates intra-group female division as concomitant with the reproduction of social injustice: "'It appears to me that there are no people under the heavens so unkind and so unfeeling towards their own, as are the descendants of fallen Africa. I have been something of a traveller in my day; and the general cry among the people is, "Our own color are our greatest opposers" (53). Such "unkind" and "unfeeling" conduct, which include being harsh, unsympathetic, and unpleasant, is documented as perpetuating intra-group female hatred and injustice. In a groundbreaking move, Stewart encourages African American women to "manifest a different temper and disposition towards each other […] in the holy bonds of love and union" (53). Expressing a conviction about gendered justice as resulting from everyday unified contact amongst women, the speaker politicizes unity as an important female weapon for challenging social oppression. African American women stand to gain by coming into group togetherness. Other benefits of female unity include the formation of havens of protection and support systems, freedom, and the

nurturing and uplifting of women into valuable and significant political agents. Whereas the myth of African American intra-group conflict supports racial and gendered segregation, Stewart's female-centered vocal philosophy, founded on a principle of female harmony, supports the everyday contact amongst African American women, measured by self-love and female worth, as essential to both female justice and freedom.

The nineteenth century patriarchal use of visual perception, to codify racial and gendered inferiority, constructed a grand narrative about African American womanhood as operating according to a capitalistic subject-object sexual relationship, and also according to a racist/sexist master-slave dichotomy. African American female visibility, here, was constructed according to physical sexual contact between the latter and men, and as material objects whose value was to be measured by consumptive and exploitive purposes. This slave economy inculcated the identities of African American women as subjectively insignificant but as sexually valuable objects. Central to this unjust perception was an inability, on the part of African American women, to express and measure their own identities and life purpose. Such views on womanhood were further cultivated by the suppression or silencing of women's communicative methods. The everyday routine of silence assured perceptions of African American women as products or 'slaves' rather than as human beings. Abolitionist Sojourner Truth, on the basis of this oppression, re-worked the significance of a woman's personal voice into an important epistemological structure for re-signifying African American women's visibility as spiritual and valuable human beings. The public expression of this felt instinct was envisioned by Truth as the most reliable system for re-orienting women's presence from that of 'slave' to that of a human subject. This affective economy of female knowledge, which included as its duty the public communication of perspectives which pointed out information or facts about African

American women, and their lived realities, was treated by Truth as an important by-product of personal honesty.

Re-centering value to non-visual systems which impress voice, especially the personal systems of spiritual principles and emotional impressions, the invisible power of a female point of view stands in contrast to visual frames which fictively and distortedly communicate dehumanizing stereotypes about African American women. Female liberation, then, is defined by Truth as an act of communicating or self-expressing female truths or facts. The everyday communicating of 'truth,' in a public, social setting, is supported by Truth's own personal example as a public speaker who connected facts relative to her personal identity as an African American woman with a spiritually chosen life purpose. As is documented, Truth earned notoriety and respect because of "her ability to deliver folksy as well as fiery speeches that denounced slavery" (245) and also due to a fact that she "had come to represent a brand of female, communitarian, vernacular African American leadership that rivaled the masculine, individualist, self-consciously literary model of black spokesman espoused by Douglass himself" (245). Writer Harriet Beecher Stowe is quoted as once saying about Truth: "I do not recollect ever to have been conversant with anyone who has more of that silent and subtle power which we call personal presence than this woman" (245). Truth also "worked tirelessly on several civil rights fronts" (245), was "a leading exponent of liberty in both the abolitionist and feminist movements" (245) and "led a successful effort to desegregate the streetcars of Washington, D.C; and counseled President Abraham Lincoln" (245). In sum, Truth's life exemplified one fact or 'truth' about the African American female identity, later reflected in her life purpose to testify "of the hope that was in her" (245). 'Testifying' to concerns and questions about patriarchal attitudes which disempowered all African American women and also European American

women, Truth used her voice, instead, to uplift and re-educate all women about their fundamental identity as valuable, powerful and vocal.

Perhaps the most famously documented rhetorical 'testimony' refuting the New World enslavement of all African American women is Truth's "Ar'n't I a Woman?" Presented at a women's convention in Akron, Ohio in 1851, Truth's public speech was addressed to a religious and feminist gathering of theological ministers and European American feminists that, in spite of the fact that both groups were clearly committed to forwarding women's rights and liberation, hypocritically ignored African American women's plight as an enslaved sub-culture. This circumstantial exclusion also motivated Truth to self-assert the following declaration, "I want to say a few words about this matter" (246). Immediately, Truth establishes oral and transcribed voice as synonymous with social visibility or presence. Visibility, here, operates in two important ways. To be visible, in one sense, is posited by Truth as the ability to self-represent or to imply a perspective. Although we cannot actually 'see' Truth, she is 'visible' to us as readers or listeners because her voice functions as a motif of her identity. The content of this voice fosters the identity or character of Truth's subjective existence. In this way, Truth is present or visible because of her point of view. On the other hand, the performance of voice is a literal experience that comes from the physical body of a human being. As an essential system of self-expression, to communicate is to occupy a space of visibility. The function of self-expression signifies one representational conduit of humanity. The literal image of a speaking subject codifies human expression as one form of visibility or lived presence. Once visibility is established, Truth uses her voice to project a personal worldview on her experience as an African American woman living in a patriarchal culture:

> I am a woman's rights. I have as much muscle as any man, and can do as much work as any man. I have plowed and reaped and husked and chopped and

> mowed, and can any man do more than that? I have heard much about the sexes being equal. I can carry as much as any man, and can eat as much too, if I can get it. I am as strong as any man that is now. (246-47)

Using her laborious experiences of "plowing," "reaping," and "husking," alongside men, Truth challenges patriarchal assumptions which read all women as inferior and unequal. The latter context is adopted from Truth's experience as an enslaved woman who is forced to work within an exploitive slave system. Taking advantage of this social 'truth,' Truth justifies the equality of African American women as a right that emerges, ironically, out of the unjust and oppressive terrain of African American enslavement. One of the principles which supports Truth's womanist tenet on self-sufficiency is her rhetorical or oratorical questioning of her personal beliefs, and cultural conditions, in relation to her significance as a worker, against her will. Truth's everyday social contact with 'slave' work contradicts some important theoretical myths on womanhood. These myths, which gives little value to women's worth as hard-working and self-determined, are made problematic by the mere fact that Truth, as an enslaved African American woman, draws on characteristics of her womanhood that reflects physical and emotional power. Truth's statement bears in mind the epistemology of personal experience as sometimes differing from the ideals which pattern female subjectivity according to antithetical behaviors. Through lived experience, Truth is able to recognize and underscore assumptions concerning womanhood as categorically distortive. Rather than accepting this constructed 'nature,' Truth conceptualizes a point of view on womanhood that takes as its proof her lived reality. As a starting point of her new analysis on gender, Truth describes her new female identity according to its relationship to manual labor. This she later uses to shape a common shared characteristic between herself and "any man" (247). The information gathered from her female enslavement establishes an aspect of her oppressive condition as indicative of her

equality with men. Whereas established myths promulgate attitudes of female inferiority as a source of intrinsic difference between men and women, and as the reason for male privilege, Truth indicates the level to which the mentioned myths distort facts about women's true significance. The importance of African American women's unique social role as enslaved, which entirely accounts for their vitality, and self-development of hard working values, is recognized by the speaker as the true identity of womanhood. To be a woman is recognized by Truth as a person who carves out a personal identity that culminates a culture of self-empowerment. Truth's example of social survival also corresponds with this new understanding on gender. Deconstructing distorting myths about womanhood that operate through a parameter of gendered subordination, Truth simultaneously unearths a 'truth' about European American female entitlement as an illusion that deceptively reproduces male domination and female inferiority. Perceptions of womanhood which rely on notions of self-expression, a politics of equality and respectability, and images of women as hard-working, self-sufficient, and productive, conversely, are augmented as honest renderings of a true cult of womanhood. Thus, taken altogether, the question, "Ar'nt I a Woman?" refers to a discourse on womanhood which points out the following rhetorical questions as in tandem with female empowerment and freedom: Do I have the freedom to self-express my personal point of view? Do I perceive myself as socially equal? Do I operate within an ethic of self-sufficiency, hard work and autonomy? The answers to these questions establish womanhood according to a female worldview that is principled by equality, liberty and voice. The significance of these womanist mantras frames antithetical patriarchal values, in actuality, as a discourse that orients women, through a grand illusion of entitlement, into slaves.

African American women's liberation implicates the level to which a community achieves civilization. The suppression and silencing of women's worldviews, and therefore personal liberties, subsequently, signify the stunted and to a certain level uncivilized status of any given society in which women are made to be subordinate. Here, social development is observed as the full and equal intellectual, cultural, and material participation of all social members. Within African American life, particularly, cultural unity and progress are positioned as making real the shared ideal of civilization. The processes which include or exclude African American women from achieving personal autonomy are also inter-relationally dependent on the systems which benefit or oppress the rights of all African Americans. African American women's struggles with systemic, and intragroup, racism and sexism speak to the dominant characteristics of gendered marginalization as a social plague that stunts the fundamental development of civilization. If, then, women are perceived as weak, insignificant, and inferior, and placed at the lowest end of the social hierarchy, such evidence points to the philosophical and moral underdevelopment of society. These ideological assumptions, eventually, consciously or unconsciously dehumanize even members that are perceived as human, and primary. In A Voice from the South, prominent African American scholar Anna J. Cooper echoes this claim that "women in society determine the vital elements of its regeneration and progress" (21). Cooper's speculation that a community's progress can be traced to the treatment of its women acknowledges a central role of African American women as important regenerators of African American society. The gender-specific role of motherhood is given particular prominence by Cooper due to a fact about the African American mother having firsthand contact with society's members, its children: "The training of children is a task on which an infinity of weal and woe depends" (22). Motherhood is represented as giving birth to social subjects and also to the

perspectives which systematize social identities. A mother is charged with the responsibility of disciplining and establishing a society of children with knowledge and principled values. These maternal lessons are significantly influenced by the unique female-centered worldviews of women. To enslave and oppress African American women, through institutional racial and gendered practices, as Cooper suggests, is to simultaneously disempower and dehumanize the 'societies' women regenerate. The subordination of African American mothers attributes community subordination to the mere fact that the logics which define motherhood as inferior transfer to the children (people) that account for society. Cooper outlines one example of African American women's cultural significance through a natural characteristic in women as inhabiting the gift to give birth to children. This gender-specific trait, attributed to the literal creation of social members, is presented by Cooper as an important fundamental element of civilization. Cooper's position corresponds to a tenet of social progress as indeed the ability to retain or cross-generationally sustain human life. This thought holds human annihilation and death as equivalent to the destruction of civilization. The importance of Cooper's position typifies the intrinsic necessity of women to the continuity of human culture. The New World tendency to treat African American women in an uncivilized manner, mostly by enslaving them, is also part of Cooper's desire for a new tradition of thought which attributes value to female subjectivity. Economic and sexual dependency on African American women is explained as an underdeveloped and backward social treatment. These relationships are fundamental to Cooper's patriarchal society and therefore reflect the collective deprivation of African American women from their rights as citizens. The substandard living conditions experienced by the very members who also have in their possession the creative gift to produce life coalesce with Cooper's attributing of African American women's overall enslavement with society's eventual

underdevelopment and demise. Cooper's recognition of the African American mother also frames a reading of the latter's inability to develop and craft her 'creative' potentialities as one example of society's movement towards primitivism. Re-orienting African American women as "vital" (22) and as "sacred" (22), then, Cooper attributes society's progress towards a civilized status of statehood based on the healthy development of mother-child relationship, and the uplift of all women to a status of social equality. African American women's social equality, therefore, is tantamount to the community's recognition of women as significant. Women, Cooper argues, are a "large, bright, promising fatally beautiful class that stand shivering like a delicate plantlet before the fury of tempestuous elements, so full of promise and possibilities, yet so sure of destruction" (25). Women's vulnerabilities with "destruction" are described as the workings of "no shelter, no protection nearer than the great vault above, which half conceals and half reveals" (25). Cooper advocates for women's liberty and equality: "Oh, save them, help them, shield, train, develop, teach, inspire them! Snatch them, in God's name, as brands from the burning! There is material in them well worth your while, the hope in germ of a staunch, helpful, regenerating womanhood on which, primarily, rests the foundation stones of our future as a race" (25). Cooper provides an alternative worldview about women that associates education, security, social worth, and uplift, as synonymous with the development of the African American female identity. The mentioned values are altogether framed by the author as necessary for social progress and civilization. Cooper also addresses the antithetical everyday realities for women, conditioned by violence, illiteracy, conflict, and discouragement, as stunting African American cultural progress. More than that, however, Cooper introduces a new personal worldview about the significance of African American women as primary to the building up of any society. This civilized notion of society, Cooper advises, is tied to African American

women's perceptive and literal elevation from the South (bottom) to the North (top). Such a womanist position, from the personal voice of an African American woman, unearths a fact about African American women as equally primary and significant to a society's overall advancement. This fortification of women as essential to the progress of a society relates the occupation and status of female subjectivity as 'creators' of society. From this perspective, the actual and imagined realities of African American women establish the latter as especially responsible for social ordering. Women, here, are fashioned as an emblem of state levity or catastrophe.

One primary nineteenth century commitment to the conservation of African American women's standpoints includes women's reliance on the formalist and institutional practice of writing. African American women often used writing to polemically foreground their perspectives. The collected writings from this period politicized writing into a forum for discussing and studying female cultures. Statements projected into other printed forms, such as the newspaper, overtly functioned as grounds for interpreting and investigating social norms. Society, as a context, co-opted the writing voice with the purpose of emphasizing a fact about African American women's unified *longing* to be liberated from female enslavement and social oppression. These prevailing perspectives formulated African American women's brand of writing into a unified voice for evaluating social values specific to the African American female experience. While the African American female identity entailed the public performance of voice in a social setting, African American women also voiced their desire for value and significance through the structure of textual documentation. Writing empowered African American women with the personal power and authority to contend with patriarchal texts. These female-centered textual subversive acts de-centered the text of male privilege by giving

significance to African American women's voices. The context for documenting this female worldview also provided important facts about the processes of subjectivity as a construct. More than that, however, African American women's vocal traces, evidenced by their texts, ensured that the political and social missions of women could survive as facts and proof of African American women's histories, customs, and myths.

One predominant theme in African American women's writings is the New World ideological assumption that sexual deviancy is an intrinsic character of African American female subjectivity. Many African American female writers examined the troubled invention of sexual stereotypes and its relationship in common with general public perceptions about all African American women as morally inferior. In also documenting their perspectives on the mentioned sexual themes, women voiced their female perspectives on the systemic threat of rape against African American women as demonstratively tied to racism and patriarchy. These psychological and physical realities of sexual enslavement are narratively constructed as devastating the spiritual development of African American women's voices. The narrative plot of rape, as a motif for speechlessness, is further used to portray African American women's social and personal inability to perform to their own voices as an experience with intimate violation. The muteness of voice is further constructed as an act of being physically and spiritually forced to internalize and reproduce ideologies which are counter-productive and self-destructive. Incidents in the Life of a Slave Girl, Harriet Jacobs's compelling re-enactment of her personal experience as an African American 'slave' woman, recalls the brutality of sexual slavery and its particular effects on African American women. The main reality that shapes the author's voice is her everyday experiences with sexual abuse at the hands of her patriarchal 'owner.' As a dominant social reality, Jacobs represents the system of patriarchal enslavement as 'raping' or

forcing African American women to give up or suppress their worldviews. This violated boundary between the two worldviews is constructed as women's literal experiences with sexual violation. The convergence of internal, abstract, attitudes with external, real experiences identifies social behavior and perceptions as mutually constitutive. Jacobs, however, through the performativity of writing, gives significance to her voice, and, in doing so, self-transforms a lived experience based on silence and violation into a reality of self-expression and therefore freedom from patriarchal violation. The writing of voice into text, as such, is narratively projected as an important site for exploring sexual violations which silence African American women's voices, and for experiencing the imaginative emancipatory potentialities in discovering and representing the female voice.

Through the writing of her personal narrative, Jacobs constructs her racial and gendered identity according to the values of a uniquely African American female worldview. The beliefs and practices which signify this female culture are demonstrative of the intrinsic contradictions, ambiguities and tensions between Jacobs's male-oriented social environment and the perspectives which reinforce female worth and value. Beginning her narrative with the revelation, "I was born a slave; but I never knew it till six years of happy childhood had passed away" (281), Jacobs explains the reasons why she is naively unaware of her social status as female property: "My father was a carpenter, and considered so intelligent and skillful in his trade, that, when buildings out of the common line were to be erected, he was sent from long distances, to be head workman" (281). Jacobs also recalls that her mother was an African American woman "who had been a slave merely in name, but in nature was nobly and womanly" (282). In recollecting her beloved grandmother, she claims: "my maternal grandmother […] was a remarkable woman in many respects. […]. She was a little girl when she was captured and sold

to keeper of a large hotel. I have often heard her tell how hard she fared during childhood. But as she grew older she evinced so much intelligence" (281). Jacobs describes her grandmother as a business woman who sold baked goods and amassed enough money to free some of her own children from enslavement (282). Through an imagined community of African American women, Jacobs represents values which reflect female beliefs in self-reliance and self-sufficiency. Jacobs also appropriates these values into the narrative in order to explain this female oriented worldview as shaping her later cultural survival and freedom. The practical values which apply to this female worldview, in contrast to patriarchy, include notions of women as socially equal and valuable, concepts of women as autonomous and self-sufficient, and components of freedom, such as the constitution and everyday communication of voice, as spiritual resources for healthy living. These important spiritual characteristics re-orient African American women as naturally imbued with the necessary characteristics to subvert. The main character in subversion, Jacobs suggests, lies in the representation of voice as a conduct that mediates personal beliefs and knowledge which are antithetical to enslaved behaviors and attitudes. That voice encourages the inverting of female stereotypes to invoke a sense of worth as a quality that is made articulate, at best, in the very performing of a meaningful point of view. Through the textual performance of expression, or writing, Jacobs is able to assert her female power, and contest the institutions which reproduce female subordination. Jacobs also attributes her personal power to her unity with other women, to her ability to contribute to community life, and to her affirmation of spiritual female beliefs. Female enslavement, then, is antithetically constructed by Jacobs as operating according to an antagonistic system that 'rapes' or forces African American women to give up, or reject, their personal perspectives. By revealing to her readership that although she is born a 'slave' she does not comprehend or understand what this

status really means, Jacobs suggests that female enslavement is an unnatural lived reality that stunts and/or destroys the natural self-sufficient and brilliant development of African American women's voices. The binaries of natural/unnatural and life/death are further used by Jacobs to explain the social marginalization and unnatural silencing of African American women's voices. In this way, Jacobs sets up a binary distinction between the autonomy of a female voice or worldview (life and freedom) and silence (rape and death).

The everyday physical and psychological experiences of patriarchal rape suppress African American women's voices. Rape, in this case, is constructed by Jacobs as an experience of being forced to neglect or give up personal will and voice. A consequence of this is the appropriation of attitudes which, on the one hand, perceptively isolate women's principles as 'minor' or insignificant, and, on the other hand, condoned of behaviors that enforce social practices of violation and force between men and women in order to reinforce the subordination of women in status and worth. Jacobs recalls, once she is sold to a physician doctor by the name of Dr. Flint, two primary strategies used to violate or rape her: "Sometimes he had stormy, terrific ways, that made his victims tremble; sometimes he assumed a gentleness that he thought must surely subdue" (287). Jacobs signifies Flint's use of psychological and physical strategies, such as violent force and the subtle use of emotional seduction, to "corrupt the pure principles that my grandmother had instilled. He peopled my young mind with unclean images, such as only a vile monster could think of" (287). Jacobs further delegates a link between reading practices and external behavior as symptomatic of women's violation. Flint's reading of Jacobs reflects in his deviant behaviors towards her. The perception of African American women as objects or sites for male sexual desires influences Flint's reading and treatment of Jacobs in a way that seems understandable to him, but that is dehumanizing to Jacobs. The forced

assignment of this patriarchal perception onto African American women also augments certain deviant sexual perceptions of women as unnatural to women themselves. Flint, nonetheless, 'rapes' Jacobs into internalizing his "unclean images" (287). Jacobs' revelation, in her own voice, that Flint corrupts her spiritual worldview with vile images communicates a fact or truth about women as systemically subjected to sexual harassment, and violence, by men. Jacobs's revelation also exposes a primary contradiction in a social myth that describes African American women as sexually deviant. This last perspective on sexual conduct, socially reinforced by men as facts or proof of female inferiority and immoral worth, re-orients a truth about the raping of African American women by patriarchal ideals, ironically, as de-bunking of the presumed superiority of men.

Jacobs also subverts her social status as 'minor' and invisible in advantageous and beneficial ways. Being in the 'background' allows Jacobs to self-develop without the glare or gaze of her environment. Because her master believes her to be invisible although really in hiding, Jacobs is able to not only re-present her identity, but is also able to imagine and authorize her freedom. In the background, Jacobs somewhat evades oppression, develops her creative genius, and nurtures the values necessary for personal uplift. This theory of agency in presumed 'invisibility' describes a model for autonomy and significance as operating through the deflected use of attention. Visibility or primary attention, here, is re-framed not according to a discourse of benefits and entitlement, but as a site that engenders women with patriarchal violence and enslavement. The freedom and uplift of African American women are ensured by temporary retreat into the background and by the spiritual development of a personal voice. The female journey to freedom, in this way, is further fashioned as an experience of self-authoring a worldview. For Jacobs, voice materializes through creative writing. The point in the narrative

when Jacobs self-retreats, appropriately entitled "The Loophole of Retreat," is not so much a withdrawal or surrender but a religious or spiritual retreat into self-meditation and reflection. The narrative's emphasis on Jacobs's development of her subjective interiority revisits a womanist principle of personal freedom, and the authorization of voice, as processes which conceptually begin from within. Subjectivity, here, as a term that refers to what it means to be an individual, or to the development of individual meaning, is characterized as a view of *knowing*, with authority, personal identity. The emotional and philosophical principles and beliefs which interpret the text of subjectivity, for Jacobs, is a creative experience of becoming a human subject or being. This representational experience with subjectivity is made known to Jacobs through personal belief, namely her belief in her right to freedom and in her right to exist. The existence and development of these interior qualities qualify Jacobs's external, social behavior of self-retreat in order to construct her true self. Jacobs uses physical withdrawal to re-create her interiority according to spiritual concepts which serve in her best interest. In "Between the Rock and the Hard Place: Mediating Spaces in Harriet Jacobs's Incidents in the Life of a Slave Girl," Gloria T. Randle describes Jacobs's narrative as "the unfolding of her ability creatively to construct sites of temporary refuge where none exist; to discover space where there is no space; to identify" (43). Randle argues that Jacobs's identity "reflects an unwavering ability to locate, as crisis approaches, viable mediating spaces between the tensions that threaten her well-being" (43). The importance of physical and/or psychological retreat allows Jacobs to imagine and realize potential routes to psychological, spiritual, and physical freedom. The loophole is "for [Jacobs], a space between freedom and slavery" (52). This middle passage also mediates Jacobs's subjective re-construction: "In a very real sense, Brent in fact regresses to a pre-sexual, infantile—even, arguably, a pre-natal—state" (53). Confusing

her owner as to her whereabouts, Jacobs draws a very compelling link between her seven-year retreat and eventual freedom from physical and mental enslavement. Jacobs also signifies a parallel between external, physical freedom and her interior native development**.** When Jacobs describes hiding "herself in a crawl space above a storeroom in her grandmother's house […]. In that "little dismal hole" she remained for the next seven years, sewing, reading the Bible, keeping watch over her children as best as she could, and writing occasional letters" (279), she re-enacts a literal and didactic moment in her life. Temporarily removed from her social condition and reality, for instance, Jacobs relies on reading the bible, and writing, to develop spiritual beliefs, and to plan her escape from enslavement. Jacobs admits, in detailing the beginning of her seven-year cultural retreat, that "this continued darkness was oppressive. It seemed horrible to sit or lie in a cramped position day after day, without one gleam of light. Yet I would have chosen this, rather than my lot as a slave" (298). Jacobs also explains the difficulties of her retreat to be the result of her separation from family, and because of the fact that the small shed had no light, and very little air. Later, she discovers a gimlet, "My uncle had left it sticking there when he made the trap-door. […]. Now I will have some light. Now I will see my children. […]. I bored three rows of holes, one above another. […]. I sat by it till late into the night, to enjoy the little whiff of air that floated in" (298). The later discovery of a space for which to poke holes allows Jacobs access to light, and fresh air. In literally and spiritually withdrawing from her culture, to meditate and reflect, Jacobs is able to recover her female-oriented worldview. This female journey into subjectivity is mediated by withdrawal from everyday cultural activities, and then time given up for self-reflection and meditation. Jacobs, with patience, is eventually able to see light and breathe fresh air or new life. The reference to light and air also metaphorically refers to the facts which Jacobs discovers about her

subjectivity, and to the new life that is gained from the author's re-discovery of her personal voice. Social and personal self-retreat, a symbolic and literal middle passage between female enslavement and emancipation, is defined by Jacobs as temporary removal from social behaviors, attitudes, and values. This is followed up by a period of self-reflection and meditation. Jacobs describes the contexts of self-meditation and reflection as difficult in nature, but experiences that are necessary for authorizing the female voice and therefore liberation.

The noted journalist Ida B. Wells-Barnett used investigative journalism in order to voice and document institutional practices and events which fashion racial value according to social myths and discriminatory practices. The performance of investigative reporting served for Wells-Barnett as an important cultural practice for voicing facts about African American women's social events, issues, and trends. Wells-Barnett envisioned the journalistic investigation of social myths as concomitant with the gaining of equal rights, and justice, for African American women. Wells-Barnett's willingness to shape her voice and counsel around the issues of African American men also supported her commitment to women's overall struggle for liberty and justice as implicitly tied to the liberation of all African Americans. The speaker's investigation of these distinct realities as one common struggle challenged a patriarchal ideology that premised male/female division as justification for racial segregation, and promoted unity amongst all African Americans as concomitant with the achievement of social equality and justice. In one particular newspaper article entitled, "The Black and White Of It," Wells-Barnett focuses on the myth of the African American male rapist in order to deconstruct and challenge an institutional rationale for the systemic lynching of African American men. Conducting one interview, Wells-Barnett reported the following: "Mrs. J. S. Underwood, the wife of a minister of Elyria, Ohio, accused an Afro-American of rape. […]. She tried to drive him out with a heavy

poker, but he overpowered and chloroformed her, and when she revived her clothing was torn and she was in a horrible condition" (20). Feeling guilty later, however, "*the woman's remorse led her to confess to her husband that the man was innocent*" (20; emphasis mine). As reasons for her choice to fabricate a rape story, Mrs. Underwood claims that "one was the neighbor saw the fellow here, another was, I was afraid I had contracted a loathsome disease, and still another was that I feared I might give birth to a Negro baby. I hoped to save my reputation by telling you a deliberate lie" (21). Wells-Barnett polemically stresses the fact that Mrs. Underwood's rape accusation against an African American man is systemically designed to benefit the power hierarchy between European Americans and African Americans. Mrs. Underwood's charge of being raped, as she defines and describes it, has everything to do with saving her reputation. This 'reputation,' as it applies, emotes a social reading of 'white' womanhood as pure, free of diseases or imperfections, self-contained, and racially homogenous. Having a relationship or any kind of connection with an African American male is culturally mythologized as an act of becoming impure, infected, and as complicating the reproduction of future generations of 'pure' 'whites.' 'White' supremacy, in particular, assumes to European American women the responsibility of keeping themselves self-contained, 'pure' or innocent, within the borders of their race. Mrs. Underwood, in order to maintain this fictive ideology, constructs a narrative that positions an African American man as violating the very purity and innocence that are consistent with the myth of 'white' womanhood. Mrs. Underwood's admission, later, that "alone in the room […] I sat on his lap" (20), in fairness, complicates the latter myth. Mrs. Underwood, in turn, admits that an innate fiction lies in a social belief that to be a 'white' woman is to be racially homogeneous, naturally pure, and superior. Instead, by sitting in the lap of the accused, William Offett, Underwood debunks a polity about 'white' womanhood as innately virtuous and

innocent. Underwood's 'real' womanhood, instead, is fashioned as sexual in nature, and, despite being married, open to sexual relations with other men. That these everyday sexual habits are also hypocritically practiced by European American men validates Wells-Barnett's voicing of a social fact about European American men, undoubtedly, as rapists ("a large majority of the 'superior' white men prominent in the affair are the reputed fathers of mulatto children" (24)). The intersections made by Wells-Barnett deconstruct myths which characterize African American women's social identity as sexually deviant. Subsequently, Attention is given to the ways in which European American men operate as rapists, and also to the ways in which the cultural practice of dishonesty informs a lived experience of associating African American men with sexual violation. In particular, Wells-Barnett's investigation makes a connection between the myth of the African American male rapist and the myth of African American female sexual wantonness. Wells-Barnett also documents the social practice of rape as a construct that shapes myths about European men/women as morally superior and African American men/women as morally inferior. Attention to the politics and socialization of sexual myths about African American men and women as deviant, during a period when African American men are projected as sexual violators of European American women and African American women are characterized as sexual victims of European American men, draws as its major signifier the institutionalization of sexual fictions as an everyday social practice for reinforcing racial oppression. Sexual fictions are used to mediate the contexts and perceptions which shape unequal and oppressive racial hierarchies. Some consequences of the mentioned fictions literally include the cruel domination of European Americans over African Americans and the fixed valuing of African American men and women as immoral and inferior. Wells-Barnett, by engaging her voice as an instrument for investigating and discovering the truth, revisits these

deeply entrenched myths in order to uncover their inherent distortions and contradictions. Wells-Barnett also documents the ways in which, systemically, European Americans manipulate racial and gendered perceptions and symbolic images to maintain and reinforce grossly inaccurate social myths which posit certain races as possessing characteristics which may be unnatural to other races. Most importantly, Wells-Barnett situates the power of self-expression as a spiritual medium that, in some capacity, unites character with morality. The female voice, in this way, is augmented by Wells-Barnett as rooted in a discourse of investigative truth-finding. This theory suggests that in order for a woman to have voice, she must also be willing to *tell* the *truth*. The virtue of this worldview, in another sense, defines notions of female liberty and justice as tantamount to a politics of personal honesty. The value in honesty places especial emphasis on a text or discourse of factual oral communication as in binary conflict with the text of fictive self-silence or gross inaccuracies. The communication of Wells-Barnett's perspective employs the rhetoric of questioning as a position that steers the subject towards fact-finding. To conceal voice, subsequently, is to perpetrate and maintain fictions or myths. Wells-Barnett, emphasizing the character of voice into her life purpose as a journalist, also identifies a basic female belief in the media of communication as implicitly expository. This critical grounding of African American womanhood interprets the text of her worldview as an act of promoting social justice through the personal example of communicating facts about lived reality.

African American women, throughout the nineteenth century, performed and documented their voices through the discourses of writing and public speaking. The performativity of voice, through speeches, reflected African American women's desire to see their interior realities, or perspectives, signified into visible, public subject matter. The later documentation and transcription of African American women's voices into text pointed out a fundamental

nineteenth century female tradition of representing the African American female text according to the latter's creative or investigative personal examination of social problems, and as a creative medium for imaginatively re-constructing female subjectivity. Creative writing provided African American women with the ability to imagine alternative worlds, gendered solutions and redemptive possibilities. Political writing, similarly, informed a written discourse of feminist propaganda that was central to the documentation or archiving of important African American female facts and rituals. The practice of constructing female realities, myths, beliefs, symbols and metaphors about African American womanhood, according to the attitudes and ideas of women themselves, positioned the text of the female voice as an important creative and emancipatory powerful instrument. Women's use of the public space also codified the external performance of an internal attitude or belief as tantamount to the establishment of visibility and existence. Perhaps the most important nineteenth century concept related to the theme of African American female empowerment was the notion of female unity, through a common voice or point of view. All of the women mentioned throughout this chapter advocated for unity as opportunistically tied to both group survival and emancipation. The documentation of African American women's shared harmony, in writings and public speaking, also informed a tradition of gendered texts which focused on a female longing for female justice and freedom. These activities subverted patriarchal systems and institutions into sites where women could equally communicate their perspectives, and female rituals. Finally, the public institutionalization of voice served as an important nineteenth century motif for African American women's personal identities, and worldviews. This vocal campaign for freedom and respect served as an important precedent for African American women's modern experience with everyday singing.

Bibliography

Cooper, Anna J. A Voice from the South: By a Black Woman of the South. New York: Negro UP, 1969 [1852].

Drake, Kimberly. "Rewriting the American Self-Race, Gender, and Identity in the Autobiographies of Frederick Douglass and Harriet Jacobs." MELUS. 22.4 (Winter 1997): 91-108.

hooks, bell. A'int I a Woman? Black women and feminism. Boston: South End Press, 1981.

Jacobs, Harriet. "Incidents in the Life of a Slave Girl." The Norton Anthology of African American Literature. Eds. Henry Louis Gates, Jr. and Nellie McKay. New York: W.W. Norton & Company, 2004, 280-315.

Nudelman, Franny. "Harriet Jacobs and the Sentimental Politics of Female Suffering." ELH. 59.4. (Winter 1992): 939-964.

Painter, Nell Irving. "Representing Truth: Sojourner Truth's Knowing and Becoming Known." The Journal of American History. 81.2 (September 1994): 461-492.

Randle, Gloria T. "Between the Rock and the Hard Place: Mediating Spaces in Harriet Jacobs's Incidents in the Life of a Slave Girl." African American Review. 33.1 (Spring 1999): 43-56.

Sanchez-Eppler, Karen. "Ain't I a Symbol?" American Quarterly. 50.1 (March 1998): 149-157.

Stevenson, Robert. "America's First Black Music Historian." Journal of American Musicological Society. 26.3 (Autumn 1973): 383-404.

Stewart, Maria. "An Address Delivered Before The Afric-American Female Intelligence Society of America." Maria Stewart: America's First Black Woman Political Writer, Essays and Speeches. Ed: Marilyn Richardson. Bloomington: Indiana UP, 1987. 50-55.

Stuckley, Sterling P. "Afterword: Frederick Douglass and W. E. B. Du Bois on the Consciousness of the Enslaved." The Journal of African American History. 91.4 (Autumn 2006): 451-458.

Taves, Ann. "Spiritual Purity and Sexual Shame: Religious Themes in the Writings of Harriet Jacobs." Church History. 56.1 (March 1987): 59-72.

Truth, Sojourner, "Ar'n't I AWoman?" The Norton Anthology of African American Literature. Eds. Henry Louis Gates, Jr. and Nellie McKay. New York: W.W. Norton & Company, 2004, 245-246.

Wells-Barnett, Ida. "The Black and White of It." Selected Works of Ida. B. Wells-Barnett. Complied by Trudier Harris. New York: Oxford UP, 1991.

CHAPTER TWO

Theorizing African American Women's Everyday Singing in (A) 'Minor' Text

"[t]he texts of blues singers can be seen as expressions of a black woman's standpoint"

Patricia Hill-Collins
-Black Feminist Thought

The modern narrative construction of minor African American female singers is also the simultaneous introduction of a new reading practice whereby a perspective of equality is creatively attributed to include secondary characters on the basis that the literary phenomenon of female singing justifies the latter's exceptionality as significant. On the one hand, this literary sub-genre of narrative singing defies a literary myth of according principal value to primary characters. On the other hand, the lasting influence of these literary singers lies in their innovative use of singing in ways which determine their personalities as significant. This imagined community is furthermore constructed as symbolically using songs to consciously or unconsciously question, communicate, and resist cultural perceptions which judge them as 'secondary' and therefore insignificant. Besides occupying a minimum amount of narrative space, these women are also read as secondary mainly because they occupy a context as 'African American' and as 'Women.' In this way, reading minor characterization of African American women as secondary is shaped by a primary patriarchal view on African American women as inferior. The literary representation of the sub-genre of singing also explains the 'background' contextualization of the minor female characters. In this light, singing is viewed as peculiarly misplaced and narratively tautological in large part because literature and music are perceived as separate or distinctive disciplines, and also due to the fact that within this particular body of African American fiction, singing is relegated to the background. An important question to

begin to consider here in relation to the 'minor' representation of female singing is whether or not these secondary characters should be traditionally read as having marginal value, or, according to a different reading practice that justifies 'primary' and equal significance to all literary characters. The answer to this question is connected to this project's argument that the former reading practice is informed by (a) a tradition of giving 'primary' attention to the character that takes up the most narrative focus and page space, and (b) an ideological criteria of value as opposed to the actual literary roles and functions of narrative personas. This traditional practice of reading, which attributes insignificance to characters who consume the fewest literary space and focus, is inherently flawed because it relies on reading principles external to the narrative work. The conscious or unconscious politicization of reading further interprets African American women in a way that fashions the characterized subjectivities of women as non-consequential. All of these mentioned reading processes are constitutive of social references to cultural beliefs, race and gender as contexts for translating literary and subjective texts.

The sign systems and generators of meaning, through the discourse of language, also influence the circularity of 'minor' images, definitions, beliefs, and symbolic descriptions to the reading formulas which mandate marginality to the selected imagined community of African American women. This linguistic coding influences any literary encounter with African American women, yet alone secondary female characters. The complex and shifting entangling of words, which are narratively assigned to race, gender, class and singing, determines the reading criteria that justify marginal principles to the text of African American women and their everyday singing. The language which informs this reading practice, based on the circulation of linguistic systems, beliefs and values, intrinsically translate as insignificant minor African American female singers. In Black Women Novelists: The Development of a Tradition, 1892-

1976, Barbara Christian theorizes the relationship between language and reading perceptions about African American women. The liaison between the representation and reading of linguistic signs or words, and their produced images, informs Christian's discourse about language as a series of statements which construct female and racial subjectivity. The dominant images associated with the words 'African American women,' Christian notes, are mediated by a reading belief "about the inferiority of blacks to whites […]. Whether animal or man, blacks are seen as "lewd, lascivious and wanton" (2). All linguistic signs, then, encode race and gender within a context of marginality. The words 'African American woman' are also predominantly framed by one dominant image, that of sexual breeder. As Christian argues, "there is no doubt that "an essential value of the adult slave woman rested in their capacity to produce the labor force. […]. That the black woman was valued for her reproductive capacity, however, was established as early as the 1660's" (6). The linguistic characterization of African American female subjectivity, according to this image, influences the way that these women are read. Combined with words that signify female inferiority, African American women are often interpreted according to negative and deviant sexual behaviors. Linguistic representations of these images are thus constructed to ensure and enforce gendered marginality. Similarly, throughout her chapter "Reflections on Race and Sex," from Yearnings, bell hooks examines the significance of linguistic metaphors to the shaping of perceptions about African American women. For the author, the metaphor of sexuality informs the dominant concept for understanding African American women. Through metaphoric language, hooks suggests, "black women's bodies were the discursive terrain, the playing fields where racism and sexuality converged" (57). Concepts of gendered inferiority and sexuality, superficially, construct and reinforce patriarchal metaphors which affirm "rape as an acceptable way to maintain male

domination" (59). The paradigm for reading African American women is all at once mediated by a series of patriarchal linguistic codes which draw on perceptions of sexual desire and inferiority. The 'primary' reading worldview is patriarchal. 'Secondary' to this hierarchy is any female-centered personal perspective. Conceptually, then, language reinforces a reading of African American women as already 'secondary' characters that perform minor roles.

Marginal perceptions about secondary African American female singers are also related to a linguistic network of signified and symbolic words which represent the identities and roles of African American women as inferior. Frantz Fanon's theories on the relationship between language and social identities, throughout Black Skin, White Masks, are foundational to this chapter's discussion of minor female characterization. In her essay, "Who is That Masked Woman? Or, the Role of Gender in Fanon's Black Skin, White Masks" Gwen Bergner argues that language facilitates the construction of race and "gender difference" (82). Bergner paraphrases Fanon's claim that "black identity is shaped by the oppressive sociopolitical structure of colonial culture" (76). Primary to Fanon's deconstruction of colonization is his analysis of European colonizers who use language to construct distorted racial and gendered symbols and images. Fanon defines colonial languages as a network of symbols which communicate and deem persons of African heritage, and women, as inferior and non-human. These racial and gendered perceptions, attached to a social stratification of language, operate on both a phonological level, and through certain skewed definitions of linguistic signs. Fanon further claims, in terms of the former theory, that one linguistic experience with perception is determined by the very practice of reading and/or speaking language: "[t]o speak means being able to use a certain syntax and possessing the morphology of such and such a language, but it means above all assuming a culture and bearing the weight of a civilization" (1-2). Indeed, in a

patriarchal and Eurocentric social system, these linguistic assumptions reflect in the attribution of significance and worth to ideals and rules which regard male and European identities as primary. Fanon suggests, furthermore, that "[a] man who possesses a language possesses as an indirect consequence the world expressed and implied by this language" (2). The internalization of Eurocentric worldviews, facilitated by language, negates non-European, and gendered, worth and consciousness. The learning and mastery of colonial languages, within the context of colonization, distort and make almost impossible the very process of objectively reading or perceiving racial and gendered subjectivity due to the fact that colonial languages premise themselves on the maximum privileging of colonial perceptions, and the maximum devaluation of the attitudes represented by colonized or formerly colonized cultures.

A shift in attitude or perception about the objective of language re-shapes the relationship of language to the process of reading minor female characters and therefore African American women. The communicative power in language opens up space for the critical interrogation and potential transformation of perceptions which characterize secondary African American female singers as 'minor.' Throughout "Language and the quest for liberation in Africa: the legacy of Frantz Fanon," Alamin Mazrui subscribes to Fanon's notion of language as "a reservoir of culture which controls human thought and behavior and sets the boundaries of the worldview of its users" (351). Mazrui uses this view on language to examine the colonial effects of European languages on the identities and worldviews of colonized persons of African heritage. In doing this, however, Mazrui also contends that the "deterministic power of language on human cognition" (355), a phenomenon that is a centerpiece theory throughout Black Skin, White Masks, is not only determined by the discourses within language itself, but also according to a reader's 'reading' of words. For the author, language is "encoded with a particular mode of

thought, a metaphysics that affects the speaker's experience at the level of perception" (351). Within the context of representation, the characterization of words depends on a conscious ability to interpret the implied relationship between a sign and its signified image. The simple acceptance of a linguistic discourse does not constitute an act of reading, but is merely an act of memorizing or internalizing a pre-determined system of rules. To perform a reading of language is to analyze its modes of signification. The analysis of images and symbols which orient a specific linguistic nature, and not just simply taking for granted its construction, constitutes an exercise in the skill of reading. Mazrui calls for a new way of reading language that takes into account the latter as "an instrument of communication and rational thought and not a key to enlightenment and civilization as the alienated are wont to do" (360-61). Mazrui suggests that one way to look at language, re-defined in this way, is as *one* of many communicative or expressive structures that mediates, not defines, reading or perceptive practices.

The literary transcription of singing positions language as an "instrument of communication" for representing and interpreting female facts and information. African American women's singing, moreover, is constructed as an episteme that gives significance to the worldviews which constitute the identities of "minor" gendered and racial actors. Singing is represented as signifying powerful value to the female identity according to expressive oral behavior or conduct. African American women that sing, then, redress their social and literary status as minor by giving exceptional value to the spiritual characteristics which intuit their worldviews. The discourse of singing also appeals to African American women's desire for autonomy and significance. A female perspective on language, modeled in this way, defines language as an everyday experience that is measured by oral self-expression and spiritual or uplifting musical subject matter. Women's private and public everyday singing, through

worldviews which focus on heritage, community, consciousness, and self-esteem, re-constructs perceptions about language, firstly, as a medium through which to communicate, secondly, as a structure that can be expressed verbally and/or non-verbally, and, thirdly, as a system of signs that can be subjectively subverted. In this way, language is narratively oriented as for personal authorization or private use. Vocal singing of song lyrics all the more establishes the significance of oral performance to the process of language subversion. Singing words or signs also introduces alternative linguistic values and statements to traditionally written (silent) signs and symbols. This analysis underscores a theory about singing as an experience that presents a different (world) view from that of visual readings of words. To voice words, in order to represent meaning and value to otherwise visual signs, re-orients reading as an act of orally decoding symbols, and of deriving meaning from the emotional uttering or phonetic articulation of signs. The affective singing (experiencing) of words also affirms new linguistic images and symbols. In sum, singing words has positive connotations for the re-conceptualization and re-reading of linguistic characterization.

An important early literary constitution of a minor female singing character occurs in Zora Neale Hurston's groundbreaking novel, Their Eyes Were Watching God. This modern story represents the autonomous, self-defined female standpoint of an exceptionally minor character named Mrs. Bogle through her singing of a Spiritual song. Mrs. Bogle sings a historically real African American genre and engages with a factual heritage of African American women's lived experiences in order to render her female visibility and vision. Taken together, the narrative construction of minor everyday female singers assumes the preceding beliefs of nineteenth century women, like Sojourner Truth and Harriet Jacobs, as a foundation for modern literary writings on the text of African American female subjectivity. The literal or real

context of musical genre type functions as an important critical approach to the creative formulation of secondary female characters. The real historical relevance of African American women's positioning of their identities through voice is further used to secure narrative information which is then used to explain narrative characterization. These fundamental connections made between African American literature and history, on the one hand, gives value to a relationship between the two disciplines as similar objects of construction, and, on the other hand, the essential importance of real, material conditions in the writing of imaginative literary texts. Both theories give meaning to an artistic belief in the historicist and cultural relevance of African American women, and singing, to both fiction writing, and cultural life. Namely, that African American female subjectivity, as originating through a uniquely female communication of voice, is an ahistorical fact within African American creative life.

The context of information which reflects in the overall characterization of secondary female singers as also narratively secondary or minor applies to the novel's examination of conflicts such as cultural stereotypes, systemic marginalization, and hegemonic structures which authorize innate or natural 'minor' value to African American women. The literature also constructs female singers who reflect the everyday epistemological values, customs, beliefs, and interests of African American women. This epistemology, grounded in everyday lived experiences with vocal expression, owes its existence to the historically modern phenomenon of the African American paid female entertainer. As Amiri Baraka documents throughout Blues People: The Negro Experience in White America and the Music that Developed from it, the early twentieth century influenced the development of the explosive "Race records […] commercial recordings aimed strictly toward the Negro market" (99). Baraka also notes that "the first Negro blues singer to make a commercial recording was […] a young woman, Mamie Smith, whose

style of singing was more in the tradition of the vaudeville stage" (99). The literary canon, in this way, constructs a timely minor female singing text which reflects the musical realities of the moment and beyond. The literary representation of African American lived realities, here, contains, as proof of its proximity to literal renderings, patterns of reality that apply to 'reality.' The social experience of African American professional women's singing is inseparable from the everyday culture that fashions the subjectivities of these women to begin with. The modern phenomenon of singing, as women's device of power and visibility, is accurately represented through the symbolic daily singing of an African American female character. Singing is also constructed to project African American women's personal perspectives and values. An important literary conflict worked out in the female singing of information about African American women is the effective literary problematizing of female readings on womanhood versus patriarchal readings on womanhood. This double conscious conflict also examines a binary between the cosmic ordering of these exceptionally minor women and the secular human ordering of race and gender. Both are understood as processes which determine African American female singing as cosmically valuable or as socially inferior. As in the case, this imagined community of female singers is constructed within a background context, and also as symbolic of everyday cultural trends and events. The modern framing of one representation to female subjectivity, through a construct of conventional spiritual singing, is meant to influence a reading of women through their uniquely exceptional spiritual views.

The choice of Zora Neale Hurston, Richard Wright, and James Baldwin, as narrative case studies, relates to the fact that Hurston's novel is an important, early modern text on female subjectivity and voice, and also to the fact that the representation of an imagined community of secondary African American female singers is widespread in works of the mentioned writers,

two of which are male. An important basis for a historical and literary re-analysis of twentieth century African American literature is in large part due to the unified reproduction of Hurston's technique in Wright and Baldwin's most famously mentioned works, Native Son and Go Tell It on the Mountain, works which are often examined as in contestation amongst one another. Indeed, Hurston, Wright and Baldwin, as canonical vanguards of African American literature, are often altogether promoted and interpreted as pitted against one another in relation to the securing of African American writing and the relationship of writing to social and political uplift. These important writers are often recognized as ideologically separatist and of even antagonistically producing in the interests of their respective identities as a woman, a former communist, and as a gay man. The futility of characterizing Hurston, Wright, and Baldwin according to this famous pervasiveness of creative hostility also borrows from what these writers had to say about themselves and each other, respectfully. As recently as the January 2011 edition of The Chronicle Review, Glenda R. Carpio and Werner Sollors, both professors of English and African American Literature at Harvard University, co-published an article entitled, "The Newly Complicated Zora Neale Hurston." Throughout the article, both Carpio and Sollers privilege an important context of Hurston's literary reputation based on her famous rift with Wright:

> We were team-teaching a course on Richard Wright and Zora Neale Hurston, writers who represent opposing literary and political tendencies, intellectuals who disliked each other's work and said so in print. Wright found Hurston's prose in *Their Eyes Were Watching God* (1937) cloaked in "facile sensuality" and complained that she "*voluntarily* continues in her novel the tradition which was forced upon the Negro in theater, that is, the minstrel technique that makes the 'white folks' laugh.'" Hurston mocked Wright's collection *Uncle Tom's Children* (1938) as "a book about hatreds. Mr. Wright serves notice by his title that he speaks of people in revolt, and his stories are so grim that the Dismal Swamp of race hatred must be where they live. (B6)

Carpio and Sollers capitulate on the textual differences between Hurston and Wright as concomitant with their literal ideological differences, Wright as "the most popular African American literary ancestors of the radicals of the 1960's, and Hurston reclaimed as feminist foremother of the 1970's" (B7). The historically documented attitudes shared by both authors in their fictions and personal essays represent an approach to the African American literary canon as textually and contextually divided. Baldwin is also historicized within this intra-rift. In his literary text, Everybody's Protest Novel, referring to Wright's bestseller, Native Son, Baldwin claims that "the failure of the protest novel lies in its rejection of life, the human being, the denial of his beauty, dread, power, in its insistence that it is his characterization alone which is real and which cannot be transcended" (23). The notoriety of Baldwin's criticism of Wright's work, even though Wright was known to have mentored Baldwin in his early years, marks a formal characteristic of African American literature as clashingly divisive. The values and beliefs assigned to reading the literature, and its authors, work within this tradition of intra-artistic marginalization. The maintenance of this literary view, and its relation to a fact that the mentioned writers included a womanist, a Black Power proponent, and a gay man, is almost made to situate the literary divisions within African American artistic life as representative of the particular politics of each selected artist. While this history of debate materialized through the documented writers themselves, this prevailing singular history of literary dissidence amongst the very best African American writers is also reductive and misleading, mainly because it isolates one simple formula for reading the African American canon.

A point of departure from this traditionally accepted school of thought is the fully intertwined conscious or unconscious shared literary practice amongst the three of representing, although to different extents, one similarly unified rendering of an imagined community of

secondary African American female characters who sing. This common relationship and discourse on secondary characterization brings to bear an alternative unifying reading of the dynamic relationship amongst Hurston, Wright and Baldwin. Such a realization insists that in the construction of subjective beliefs, worldview and lived realities, these writers consciously or unconsciously participated, together, in one literary invention of African American women as also commonly bonded by singing as a basis for self-worth and personal identity. This common basis enhances an African American literary and literal regard for African American cultural unity as a critically real perspective, and lived reality. The deployment of literature as the instrument for producing an African American humanist tradition that recognizes the value of African American women, and a common theme of unity as a realized worldview or shared voice, fractures the idea that the history and reputation of African American writers, and writings, are to be read *solely* according to reductive or marginal theories. This newly shared literary standpoint creatively uplifts African American literature into a civilizing activity that produces a harmonious voice that is high in spiritual morality, values and beliefs. The most radical trend to emerge out of this creativity is a literary theory about African American female subjectivity as principled according to the quality of her singing voice or point of view. This harmonious attention to the value in African American women's voices, constructed in a minor or secondary role, re-presents the historical context of this particular 'minority' as primary and exceptionally valuable.

The common theme running through the three selected literary case studies is the way in which secondary female singers translate the conditions of their everyday lived realities through a uniquely specialized practice of vocal singing. The vocal form of this aesthetic of singing is represented as definitive of a female heritage of rendering voice as a motif for personal and

group identity. Hurston, Wright and Baldwin promote this critical singing practice as also forming out of African American women's epistemological everyday experiences. The importance of this narrative tradition, within the three most important literary works of each respective writer, all the more draws on a fact about the literary and historical drawing of attention to the importance of African American women's worldviews as a primary cultural practice within African American communal life. Whereas Hurston constructs the significance of a minor African American woman's visible performance or behavior of everyday singing as an extension of self-worth and social value in female subjectivity, Wright textualizes the interiority or home development of values as fundamental to women's striking and powerful personal system of 'creating' voice in the first place. Their Eyes Were Watching God positions the social environment as an important setting that provides women with opportunities and subject matter for representing their unique womanist perspectives. Native Son approaches minor female singing by emphasizing the importance of the disciplinary development of spiritual values and beliefs into personal boundaries that contextualize voice. Most importantly, the novel argues, the performance of singing is related to the values of self-worth and belief in the significance of self-expression as a personal and cultural practice that belies existence and survival. To sing, therefore, is to exist and to sustain this existence through views which project self-worth and autonomy. Go Tell It on the Mountain insists on the mentioned aesthetic and personal criteria as important to African American women's authorization of their female-centered spiritual worldviews. Baldwin's attention to the representation of African American women's singing is also rooted in a narrative defense for the institutionalization of women's practices, beliefs, customs, values, and perspectives. Throughout the novel, one important systemic site explored is the African American church. The African American female voice, as

an object of study, is discussed in relation to society's validating and encouraging of African American women's harmonious social and democratic sharing of their songs. All in all, this imagined African American female *culture*, throughout the three literary case studies, involves the imagined everyday practice of female singing in three important settings or social sites: (1) the social environment, (2) the domestic or subjective 'home,' and (3) the social institution.

Secondary African American female singers are constructed as socially minor but personally significant. This double consciousness is narratively delineated by a social worldview that supports a perception about female subjectivity as 'minor' and a personal worldview that is embedded with a meaningful perception about womanhood as valuable and 'primary.' When W. E. B. Du Bois describes the social experience of the overall African American cultural double consciousness as that of living behind a veil or shadow, in The Souls of Black Folk, he suggests that the cultural veil of racial oppression and stereotypes limit and distort the truth or 'light' about the African American personality. The social veil of female inferiority, in the same way, modeled according to patriarchal values, marginalizes the female identity. Such values also obstruct significance to African American women's individual worldviews or voices. The normalization of these principles corresponds with an orientation of society according to a patriarchal system of beliefs, and according to the institutionalization of racial segregation and oppression. These ideological constructions about African American women are made to appear natural or almost innate. Ordering life around distorted gendered perceptions is furthered by a tradition of perceptive hierarchies, and unequal privileging. Fundamental to this exercise of unequal privilege is the lived experience of reading all African American women as worthless and marginal on the basis of their gender and race. Another strategy includes the environmental experience of making African American women *feel* inferior. The unjust use of force in the form

of social mistreatment and exploitation also factors in as strategic practices for maintaining a certain perceptive orientation of women. The cruel categorization of all African American women as 'secondary,' which, more importantly, also implicates their voices, ensures the suppression of female autonomy and perceptive equality. Furthermore, marginalizing and silencing African American women's worldviews or perspectives subordinate female characterization and worth. The daily potential exists for African American women to also perceive their identities as marginal. Depictions of these minor characters as internalizing a patriarchal consciousness are validated by a common construction of African American women as living in social settings that privilege 'white' supremacy and 'male' power.

Minor African American singers are also personified with the double conscious gift of knowing and having at their disposal two worldviews (external and internal) for which to read and translate lived reality, and their female identities. One question that comes up in relation to the latter claim is: why are secondary female characters also constructed as singers? The answer to this question lies in the fact that female singers embody a power that gives value to a system of emotional self-knowledge and consciousness. Singing, to this effect, mediates African American women's personal consciousness, and performs the interior characteristics which constitute their belief in female self-worth. In an essay, "A Most Disagreeable Mirror": Race Consciousness as Double Consciousness," Lawrie Balfour explains Du Bois's definition of the African American double consciousness as a "second-sight, a way of seeing that which escapes notice by the White majority" (349. Balfour argues that African Americans are "[e]ndowed with an enlarged vision" (349). Throughout Black Feminist Thought, Patricia Hill-Collins also rectifies a re-construction of African American women according to their double consciousness, what she defines as women's "outsider-within" worldview (11). The author suggests that an

understanding of female subjectivity and lived reality, alongside those of "the dominant group's actions and ideologies" operate through "a unique women's standpoint" (11). Hill-Collins argues that this standpoint is a direct result of women's ability to give external value to their inner 'voices' or emotional belief systems. On some level, the significance of lived experience facilitates women's 'outsider' consciousness. On another level, the facilitation of self-values and self-esteem predisposes African American women's 'insider' understanding, and social positioning, of singing as a resource for self-representation. As Hill-Collins suggests, this "specialized knowledge" […] "lay at the heart of […] analyzing and creating imaginative responses to injustice" (12). African American women use singing to self-read and translate their social experiences and identities in meaningful ways. This female system of singing affects women's ability to resist, and overcome, values and perceptions which contradict their spiritual uplift and development. The outsider-insider perspective of singing also allows women to consciously see, feel, and understand social and personal perceptions about the natured and nurtured systems which mediate their identities. The role of experience is central to this understanding.

Narrative constructions of secondary African American women singers are also delineated according to a material/spiritual or secular/spiritual dialectic. Spiritual values are described by Du Bois as necessary for the social development of a healthy self-knowledge and consciousness. Edward J. Blum echoes Du Bois's emphasis on the spiritual significance of African American life in his essay, "The Spiritual Scholar: W. E. B. Du Bois." Mostly, Blum attributes Du Bois's analysis of "the spiritual elements" (74) in African American cultural life to a notion that African Americans are indeed a "sacred" people (74). Such an assertion gives value and significance to the philosophies and beliefs which orient African American

perspectives. Another way to read the material/spiritual dialectic is to read the physical body as a material property, and the interior system of emotions and beliefs, as spiritual properties. Evidence of the interdependence between both forms includes African American female singers who use the physical property of voice to communicate their internal, spiritual properties. Other examples of the African American women's spiritual/material reality lies in the literary construction of African American women that sing spiritually themed songs in secular settings, the narrative performance of religious songs in church settings, and the singing of specific blues music that draws as its inspiration valuable life myths and concepts. Paying attention to a dimension of African American life that is very much connected to a network of beliefs which are supported by nurturing and uplifting emotions, ideas, and behaviors, to say the least, or to consider or perceive African American female singers who perform their identities as worthy, reverent, and respectful, is to subscribe a new perception about minor African American women as spiritual and significant. The literary construction of African American women's singing of traditional blues music re-orients social reality as spiritual in nature. Women's voicing of the blues also locates spiritual significance in secular spaces and conventions. That churches double as institutional sites further codifies an image of the social environment as a location for spiritually meaningful behavior and discourses. African American women's singing of religious or traditional spirituals in the home space, or in a public setting, fashions spiritual living as inseparable from everyday social reality. The typical pairing of minor female characters that sing in social spaces, such as churches and the home, signals a narrative attitude about the spiritual/secular experience as one and the same. Patricia Hill-Collins quotes singer Alberta Hunter as explaining the value in blues music: "to me, the blues are almost religious … almost sacred" (105). Blues singing, in a traditional sense, has always informed African American

women's sense of identity. For working class women, in particular, Hill-Collins documents blues music as "a site of the expression of Black women's self-definitions. The blues singer strives to create an atmosphere in which analysis can take place" (106). In fact, historically, blues has mostly functioned largely as a gendered convention or "as expressions of ordinary Black women rearticulated through black oral traditions" (106). Blues offers women otherwise denied access to institutional spaces a climate for self-authorization and significance. These spiritual values are part and parcel the reason why blues, although secular in form and presentation, can be seen as spiritual in nature. Baraka further historicizes blues music as originating from African American spiritual or religious music: "The Negro's religious music was his original creation, and the spirituals themselves were probably the first completely *native American* music the slaves made" (42). That this genre is thematically conceptualized from spirituals positions the convention, formally, as embodying pseudo-religious concepts and discourses. Two other important points Baraka makes throughout Blues People are one, his documentation of primitive blues as completely vocal, without instrument or sound, and two, that out of the blues form developed the "professional Negro female entertainer" (93). The vocal nature of blues music, in modern times, is proof that African American oral beliefs and philosophies continue to survive and exist. A transformation in name only, and in approach and presentation, also indicates the extent to which spiritual music has remained constant, even as it continues to evolve. African American women's hegemonic use of blues music to address social oppression, and to also create employment for professional women singers, exemplifies the power and significance of voice to gendered autonomy and liberation. Women's deliberate choice of blues music, as a platform for communicating their unique realities as 'Women' and as 'African American' institutionalizes and traditionalizes modern African American women's

singing as a spiritual experience that operates within a secular discourse of blues singing. One modern history of African American women's experiences with private and public self-expression begins with the spiritual voicing of the blues.

One narrative setting where minor female singers acquire and sing their worldviews is in the social environment. Lived experience, as a form of everyday education, is narratively constructed as determining the musical worldviews of African American women. It is in the social environment that these characters also become conscious about their dual significance as marginal and valuable. Carter G. Woodson, in The Mis-Education of the Negro, documents that lessons from lived experience mold the mental attitudes of African Americans in such a way as to enslave their minds to ideas which facilitate self-rejection, and through lived conditions, the justification of formal or systemic self-destructive worldviews. Woodson demonstrates in his research that, often times, environment 'mis-educates' African Americans through reproduced and reinforced oppressive and self-destructive patriarchal and racial systems. The values within such a lived reality are mostly developed around perceptions which render African American worldviews and identities as inferior:

> When you control a man's thinking you do not have to worry about his actions. You do not have to tell him not to stand here or go yonder. He will find his "proper place" and will stay in it. You do not need to send him to the back door. He will go without being told. In fact, if there is no back door, he will cut one for his special benefit. His education makes it necessary. (preface; 12-13)

Woodson codifies everyday living as a form of education that mentally enslaves African Americans into becoming inferior and docile. Woodson notes that these values indoctrinate African Americans into believing that their own cultural values and philosophies are inherently marginal. One systemic practice that reinforces everyday African American inferiority is the 'primary' teaching of European worldviews: "[i]n geography, the races were described in

conformity with the program of the usual propaganda to Furthermore, "[f]rom the teaching of science the Negro was likewise eliminated" (18), and, "[i]n the study of language in school pupils were made to scoff at the Negro dialect as some peculiar possession of the Negro which they should despise rather than be directed to study" (19). Woodson also documents that "[f]rom literature the African was excluded altogether. He was not supposed to have expressed any thought worth knowing" (19), "[i]n medical schools Negroes were likewise convinced of their inferiority in being reminded of their role as germ carriers" (20), "[n]o thought was given to the history of African except so far as it had been a field of exploitation for the Caucasian" (21). The author, in sum, catalogs lived experience as a system of social "education" that reinforces distortive patriarchal and racial ideas about the African Americans as "inferior" (22). To be an African American woman, then, is to live and assume by force, and/or through subtle accommodation, social 'lessons' which emphasize the skills of submission and inferiority. African American women are taught to depend on other sources, besides themselves, for self-knowledge and worth. Racial and gendered emphasis on dependency further suppresses a standard of identity-formation that is internally pursued or self-determined. Not having any social significance then, African American women sometimes assume, at the expense of aborting their individualized beliefs, social values which project them as inferior. It is this lesson in lived 'mis-education' that Woodson documents as validating racial and gendered inferiority.

Lived reality with patriarchal and racial beliefs and values also mediates African American women's musical questioning and contesting of lived experiences with facts and information which perceive them as marginal. These gendered realities with oppressive values further foster self-definitions and values which counter oppressive belief systems. The spiritual pragmatism that influences these realities, namely, women's development of social perseverance

and patience, along with simply choosing to resist deviant behaviors, reveals the inherent fictions and contradictions in social stereotypes on African American female subjectivity. In "Black Women, Carter G. Woodson, and the Association for the Study of Negro Life and History, 1915-1950," Pero Gaglo Dagbovie claims that Woodson envisioned, for African American women, new female values and principles based on a reading of women as "female heroine role models" (22). Throughout Woodson's own work on African American womanhood, "The Negro Washerwoman, A Vanishing Figure," African American women are represented as everyday social 'leaders' who perform a "level of […] philanthropic spirit […] unselfish service" (24). Woodson documents these uplifting perceptions about African American women as role models, rather than as submissive and inferior, and as primary figures whose behaviors and lives prove to be exemplary and worthy of emulation. Woodson historicizes a social lesson about female subjectivity according to the characteristics of leadership, self-esteem, and autonomy, and adds to these readings factual examples of "key black women historical figures**,** such as Phillis Wheatley, Harriett Tubman, Marie Louise Bitard, Frances Ellen Watkins Harper" (22). The fact that the author could glean from social histories proof of African American women that emulated the aforementioned personalities further solidified his social revision of African American women as personally and socially valuable.

The spiritual use of vocal music as an everyday activity is also used to challenge environmental enslavement and to also project, within a hostile society, women's respective consciousness in meaningful and significant ways. Dedicating a chapter to this musical convention, entitled, "The Sorrow Songs," W. E. B. Du Bois defines African American singing as possessing emotional and spiritual formulas which specialize in representing and translating lived reality: "They that walked in darkness […] sang songs in the olden days—Sorrow Songs—

for they were weary at heart" (758). Daily singing in an open, public space functions for African Americans as an important resource for translating personal understanding, and spiritual interpretations, about life. Central to the social significance of spiritual singing is an African American desire to resolve emotional distress within a cruelly oppressive environment. Spiritual singing also provides African Americans with the inner strength and fortitude to survive and overcome social oppression. This common resolve to survive, in spite of feeling mentally and physically exhausted and dissatisfied, is documented by Du Bois as testament to the spiritual essence in singing as an everyday function that develops subjective wellbeing and inner peace. Vocal performance, for Du Bois, functions as "a haunting echo […] in which the souls of the black slave spoke to men" (758) or as the "articulate message of the slave to the world" (760). The author, in particular, defines singing as a creative expression that makes clear the facts related African American attitudes and worldviews. Du Bois documents that this African American belief in communicating through song "has been neglected, it has been, and is, half-despised, and above all it has been persistently mistaken and misunderstood; but notwithstanding, it still remains as the singular spiritual heritage of the nation and the greatest gift of the Negro people" (758). As James R. Hackney writes in his review to "Derrick Bell's Re-Sounding: W. E. B. Du Bois, Modernism, and Critical Race Scholarship," African American vocal music addresses cultural issues which deal with race and racial oppression, and is an important model for transforming both the "social policy and spirit" (152) of the African American community. Mostly because oral representation challenges 'primary' social perceptions that posit visual representation as the epistemology for self-worth and value, singing has always posed the potential of not being taken seriously, of being given little attention or respect, or of being disliked and scorned. Still, Du Bois suggests, the ability to assume personal

significance and autonomy outweighs social misunderstanding. Here, the value of self-consciousness, despite a cultural unwillingness to understand or recognize the significance of vocal self-authorization, attributes African American subjective significance and value to singing. Singing, here, serves as the primary medium in which to express or articulate a point of view. That these songs were classified and signified as spirituals also suggests that fundamental to voice is a standard of communication or behavior that posits identity and expression as ideologically dependent on meaningful and sacred values and belief systems.

Another primary narrative setting where minor female singers acquire their singing voices is the domestic home space. These domestic actors, characterized as mothers in everyday home life, learn and subscribe to 'native' or personal attitudes which regulate their sense of being in the world. Throughout "The Task of Negro Womanhood," from the Alain Locke edited anthology, The New Negro, Elise Johnson McDougald links the symbolic significance of the domestic space as an institution that African American mothers use to 'birth' or foster positive and valuable educational values about their female identities. McDougald argues that the domestic or interior authorization of a woman's worldview, in the symbolic 'home' space, determines her personal uplift. This uplift is tantamount to a woman's ability to communicate and question "grosser forms of sex and race subjugation" (369). McDougald frames one point of view on the role of the African American mother as an identity that addresses and redresses the social inequality and oppression of African American women. This maternal pedagogy addresses the following womanist concerns: "What are her difficulties?" and, "How is she solving them?" (369). These questions formalize a central role of motherhood as that of 'birthing' a woman's "general attitude of mind" (369) in order that she may study and critically tackle values and ideas relevant to her lived experiences. Giving value to the literal conditions of

African American motherhood is also a way, the author contends, to address "the twilight of self-doubt and a sense of personal inferiority" (370) that positions mothers, within a patriarchal society, as invisible and minor social actors. New perceptions on mothering, consequently, are positioned according to the domestic development of self-worth and autonomy. The author re-constructs motherhood into an important social role that many African American women assume "against great odds [in order to] educate and care for one group of the country's children" (371). African American mothers, as society's primary teachers, are recognized as an important group whose lessons and values prove crucial to the development and progress of community life. The spiritual transposition of positive values about women, to children, facilitates a gendered culture of social equality and significance.

African American narratives represent vocal singing as a musical convention that gives value to the 'home' or personal philosophies and beliefs of 'minor' African American mothers and women. The materiality of value to the maternal performance of singing offers an interpretation of singing as an approach that offers both domestic and social benefits. A social investment in African American mothers who sing is connected with the discovery of information which reflects a key tenet of community uplift and civilization. African American mothers who sing use voice to develop, for a 'society' of children, practical and theoretical perceptions and attitudes about the life journey, and about identity-formation. As a new pedagogical vision, maternal singing informs one "common sense" approach, defined by Woodson, to the regenerating of valuable knowledge and ideals. Singing is also useful for examining the domestic conditions which comprise the lived realities of African American mothers. The development of maternal singing suggests the importance of a mother's self-reliance on the internal 'voice' of emotions to read and perceive the significance and value of her

role. Value and significance to singing, as a characteristic of motherhood, corresponds with a belief in the development of personal worth and autonomy as synonymous with the female 'birthing' of meaningful beliefs and behaviors. Woodson calls the self-determined domestic 'creation' of self-knowledge "moral courage" (96) rather than "moral surrender" (96). Woodson declares, in this way, that African Americans "must be taught to think and develop something for themselves" (159). The ability for African American mothers to emotionally think and sing "something" for themselves transgresses domestic isolation, and subverts theories which objectify women's social value as marginal. This revised construction of motherhood, constituted through singing, revises a notion of the home as an internally private site. Conversely, motherhood is reformed as a personal institution that also develops and regenerates self-esteem and value in African American women, and their respective societies of children.

A third narrative setting where the voices of secondary female singers are oriented is the institutional church space. This social setting is narratively represented as a site that conditions African American women's subordination, but also as a safe haven where African American women sing and discourse with their perspectives. Churches are defined as "institutional sites where black women construct independent self-definitions [which] reflect the dialectical nature of oppression and activism" (101). Patricia Hill-Collins's observation conceptualizes an argument about the spiritual possibilities of converting institutions of oppression into havens for healing and transformation. The author mentions that these women "have traditionally used […] black community institutions as sites for countering […] images" (101). Women, in spite of the fact that "many of these same institutions of Black civil society have also perpetuated racist, sexist, elitist, and homophobic ideologies" (101), are narratively constructed as using the church space to musically develop, foster, and institutionalize their voices. In this site, these women,

portrayed as both spiritual and political leaders, use the gift of singing to physically and spiritually emancipate themselves from the external forces of oppression. The fact that these churches were built primarily for African American congregations, run by African American members themselves, and that one predominant African American theological principle centers on a 'black liberation perspective' explains African American women's choice to join and participate in church life. The desires for freedom and justice also inform the blueprint of African American women's own unique liberation theology.

The theories in this chapter provide an important context for the reading of narrative representations of secondary African American women who are characterized as 'minor' and as singers. These views support an epistemological discourse about singing as one important female custom that 'minor' African American women use to read and respond to patriarchal perceptions. African American women's emphasis on singing, as a personal context for female visibility and worth, gives value to a cosmic and a psychic belief in the power of singing as a convention that mediates female justice. This female vision, of course, lends itself to African American women's conscious or unconscious desire to communicate a level of significance and seriousness to the songs which challenge everyday social expectations about them as insignificant.

Finally, the unified literary identity, amongst Hurston, Wright and Baldwin, as sharing and representing a common African American female cultural practice of self-expressing identity through sing re-historicizes a formalist criticism that prevails in literary studies prior to *now*. Whereas prior theories maintain a principle of division as concomitant with the African American culture, this new literary perspective debunks the reading and interpreting of intra-division conflict as *the* central thought of African American cultural expression. Instead, this

dissertation articulates a new reading of unity as central to the production of African American creative and cultural texts. An important motif or symbol of this unified literary vision and consciousness is the modeling of harmony through the shared ethical treatment of the text of African American female subjectivity as an imagined representative community whose standpoint serves as a pertinent model for lived reality.

Bibliography

Baldwin, James. Notes of a Native Son. Boston: Beacon Press, 1955.

Balfour, Lawrie. "A Most Disagreeable Mirror": Race Consciousness as Double Consciousness." Political Theory. 26.3 (June 1998): 346-369.

Baraka, Amiri. Blues People: The Negro Experience in White America and the Music That Developed From It. New York: William Morrow and Company, 1963.

Berger, Gwen. "Who is That Masked Woman? Or, the Role of Gender in Fanon's Black Skin, White Masks." PMLA. 110.1 (January 1995): 75-88.

Blum, Edward J. "The Spiritual Scholar: W. E. B. Bu Bois." The Journal of Blacks in Higher Education. No. 57 (Autumn 2007): 73-79.

Bobo, Lawrence D. "Reclaiming a Du Boisian Perspective on Racial Attitudes." The Study of African American Problems: W. E. B. Du Bois's Agenda, Then and Now. Annals of the American Academy of Political and Social Science." Vol. 568. (Mar. 2000): 186-202.

Carpio Glenda R. and Werner Sollors. "The Newly Complicated Zora Neale Hurston." The Chronicle Review. 57. 18 (January 2011). B6-B10.

Christian, Barbara. Black Women Novelists: The Development of a Tradition, 1892-1976. Connecticut: Greenwood P, 1980.

Dagbovie, Pero Gaglo. "Black Women, Carter G. Woodson, and the Association for the Study of Negro Life and History, 1915-1950." The Journal of African American History. 81.1 (Winter 2003): 21-41.

Du Bois, W.E.B. The Souls of Black Folk. The Norton Anthology of African American Literature. Eds. Henry Louis Gates, Jr. and Nellie McKay. New York: W.W. Norton & Company, 2004: 692-766.

Fanon, Frantz. Black Skin, White Masks. Translated from the French by Richard Philcox. New York: Grove Press, 2008 [1952].

Fuss, Diana. "Interior Colonies: Frantz Fanon and the Politics of Identification." Diacritics. 24.2/3 (Summer Autumn 1994): 19-42.

Hackney, James. "Review: Derrick Bell's Re-Sounding: W. E. B. Du Bois, Modernism, and Critical Race Scholarship." Law and Social Inquiry. 23.1 (Winter 1998): 141-164.

Hill-Collins, Patricia. Black Feminist Thought: Knowledge, Consciousness, and the Politics of Empowerment. 2nd Edition. New York: Routledge, 2000.

hooks, bell. "Reflections on Race and Sex." Yearnings: race, gender, and cultural politics. Boston: South End Press, 1990.

Mazrui, Alamin. "Language and the Quest for Liberation in Africa: The Legacy of Frantz Fanon." Third World Quarterly. 14.2 (1993): 351-363.

McDougald Elise Johnson. "The Task of Negro Womanhood." The New Negro. Ed: Alain Locke. New York: Altheneum P, 1968 [1925].

Woodson, Carter G. The Mis-Education of the Negro. Trenton: Africa World Press, 1990 [1933].

CHAPTER THREE

The Singing of Female Visibility and Worth in Zora Neale Hurston's Their Eyes Were Watching God

"and Mrs. Bogle's alto *burst* out"
Zora Neale Hurston
-Their Eyes Were Watching God

Zora Neale Hurston's modern representation of a secondary female character who sings subtly reflects a documented fact about the author's anthropological training. Indeed, Hurston's training as an anthropologist culminated in her interest in African American women's human behaviors and cultures. Such a lifelong focus on the anthropology of African American women was a phenomenon in its own right. After all, very few people at the time referred to African American women as important objects of research, methodology, and archeological worth. Conversely, Hurston associated her identity as a writer to the preservation and excavation of what she judged to be important female artifacts and traditions. As a participant-observer in her own right, Hurston gave particular attention to the myths, symbols, and rituals which defined African American women's worldviews. In exploring African American women's societies, Hurston eventually represented one modern form of an ancient African American womanist practice of using voice as a symbol for the African American female identity. Hurston's literary construction was also conditioned by her anthropological research on African American women's everyday experiences with singing. This modern musical representation of the daily communication of voice further espouses a reading of African American women's worldviews as originating from lived and felt realities. The evolutionary and traditional influences which organize this gendered society were employed by the author in a literary system of knowledge and facts which represented lived reality as an epistemological text. Housed in this reality is a

set of ‘disciplines’ and ‘conventions’ which theorize and interpret the universal question of the African American female human existence. This context for Hurston’s representation of female singing also explains her narrative construction of one aspect of the African American female identity as borrowing heavily from everyday oral processes. Hurston’s anthropological commitment to the everyday activities of African American women also emphasizes a fact about lived experience as an important teacher of female facts and beliefs. This female ritualization of information and beliefs traces the human existence of the African American female singer to a landscape of the everyday as an epistemology for personal and cultural worth.

Hurston’s classic novel, Their Eyes Were Watching God (1937), is one of the earliest to characterize an African American woman in the secondary or minor role of singer. Their Eyes is therefore an important textual domain for theorizing one modern manifestation of African American womanhood. To a certain degree, Hurston’s characterization of a minor singing character resembles nineteenth century African American women’s personification of voice as concomitant with identity and value. Other similarities between the two periods include African American women’s public communication of a worldview as constitutive with social worth, the strategic use of voice as a political resource for resisting racial and gendered marginality, and the privileging of voice as a spiritual standpoint for uniting women’s interior epistemological systems, namely spirituality and emotional impressions, with their social behaviors or conduct. The novel departs from its past predecessors in the vehicle or conventional discourse for the authorization of the female voice, along with a shift in perceptive or reading value about the significance of women’s employment of voice as a motif or symbol for a point of view.

The literary representation of a minor female voice, through the genre of singing, represents a ‘reality’ about singing as an everyday structure that African American women rely

on to communicate experience. This modern musical practice also regenerates an African American heritage of singing as a creative structure for signifying personal identity. This haunting heritage regards the past as a readily available framework for understanding and reading the present. Connecting with this past is narratively attributed to the achievement of female consciousness, subjectivity, and freedom. It is nearly impossible, the novel seems to insist, for women to recognize or claim an understanding of their identities without engaging and making associations with this past heritage. Hurston's modern manifestations of womanhood, true to this past, are represented as a woman's ability to access and vocally communicate her personal beliefs and philosophies. The nature of this modernity lies not in the female use of singing as a convention for self-expression, nor in the use of voice as a visible sign of female worth. What signals the context of this literary representation as modern is the fact that an African American female singing is characterized as *exceptional*, and that, beginning in Their Eyes, this female identity is constructed as read as 'secondary' or *marginal*. The literary theme of female marginality is foundational for examining modern perceptions of African American women as inferior and invisible, for exploring the values and information which under-develop women's historical place as a social group, and for understanding the ways in which African American women move from signifying significance and visibility to occupying spaces of marginality. African American women's singing also explains the subversive use of voice, and also to the ways in which the coping mechanism of singing mediates female survival. More important than this, perhaps, are the ways in which Hurston's novel emphasizes a literary fact about African American female subjectivity through a "minor" female character that, through voice, transforms into an exceptionally all-powerful, spiritually rectified African American cultural leader.

The literary construction of a secondary African American female character whose function is that of a singer occurs right at the beginning of the novel. Not much is written about this minor actor except the following lines: "and Mrs. Bogle's alto burst out in" (46). Mrs. Bogle's personal identity, highlighted by the public expression of singing in a visible, public setting, and intonated by an alto tone, is determined by two worldviews on African American women as (a) personally significant and (b) socially marginal. Mrs. Bogle, constructed through these two perceptive beliefs, is literally and symbolically conjured in relation to her ability to musically self-express worth to her subjectivity, and also through a social reading of this characteristic as minor. The former experience presents a modern image of Mrs. Bogle's identity as correlative with the latter's powerful ability to vocally "burst out" (46). The association of voice and tone to power and visibility defines personal worth in female subjectivity as the external personification of interior systems of beliefs and values. Recognizing the African American female identity according to this vocal paradigm all the more relates to the everyday female singing as a symbol for human presence. This gendered practice, which stresses the vocal importance of character, is buttressed by a frame that signifies the value of human identity as the ability to sing a given perspective. This modern philosophy on womanhood problematizes a dogma on female subjectivity long dominated by gendered silence and marginalization. The modern singing voice, instead, informs a new ideology that equates the value of a woman according to her musical point of view. This literary construction, in large part, reflects a new modern text on womanhood that links the politics of self-expression to the convention of public singing. This critical approach also marries the text of female subjectivity with its context v: the spiritual communication of voice. The political effects of this approach to womanhood suggest that a link exists between self-expression and female justice. Their Eyes also gives value to the

public performance of a perspective as symbolic of female power. Mrs. Bogle's character gives significance to the musical performance voice as formulaic of womanhood.

The narrative's reductive construction of Mrs. Bogle as minor represents the ways in which this womanist practice has been, and still is, socially and ideologically subordinated by a patriarchal culture. This representation, both narratively and culturally, is symbolic of long-standing social beliefs of African American women as inferior. This construction is also meant to interrogate reading practices which give primary value to racist and sexist beliefs about African American women. These beliefs read as lesser than the characteristics which explain minor African American female characters, while privileging a distorted visual standard that refers to surface features as proof of both the identity and nature of a certain type of human character. A challenge to reading solely for the surface lies in the fact that Their Eyes omits visual references to what Mrs. Bogle actually looks like. Readers only get to 'see' an African American woman in the act of her singing a perspective that is profoundly spiritual and political. This minor character's 'visible' trait is her *voice*. This interior worldview serves as the primary text on Mrs. Bogle's identity, and contributes a reading of value to an African American woman based on her attitude. Mrs. Bogle's construction as a singer lies at the heart of the narrative's attitude about voice as also synonymous with female worth and visibility.

Minimal attention to Mrs. Bogle also serves as a useful starting point for examining and also analyzing literary and social perceptions of African American women. To begin with, how does one read a minor character with just seven lines? Should Mrs. Bogle be read at all? What is the significance of her characterization? Does it matter that this 'secondary' character is also an African American and a Woman? In "The Human Context," W. J. Harvey suggests that the categorization of characters into primary and secondary mediates a narrative's "perspectives of

depth" (247). By this Harvey refers to a "structure of relationships" (247) which contains, as a literary aesthetic, a rule that "any one character will involve consideration of the aesthetic strength of other characters with whom he is brought into relation" (248). Meaning, the narrative constitution of a secondary character that takes up so little page space of any magnitude functions mainly to influence *focus* to a primary character, or to the one who receives a predominant amount of narrative space. A narrative cannot simply construct a protagonist without relationally representing a character of minor status. This shared recognition operates as "a web of relationships; the characters do not develop along single and linear roads of destiny but are, so to speak, human cross-roads. It is within this pattern, this meshing together of individualities, that they preserve their autonomy" (248). There is another good reason for constructing Mrs. Bogle as secondary in relation to Janie Crawford, the novel's protagonist and main heroine. According to Harvey, the literary representation of focus is a narrative device that co-opts a practice and social worldview that regards superior and inferior as objective and natural. The dialectical nature of primary and secondary characters, in this way, reflects the general process of characterization as a construction. As an essential narrative technique, the conditions and values which go into the construction of a primary and a secondary character operate within a context of authorial intention. Consequently, social and personal values work their way into the intentioned construction of literary characters. What is assumed to be a seemingly objective and natural ordering of characters is represented as preferentially and intentionally represented. Here, narrative fiction serves as an important discipline for reading and examining the very approaches that inform hierarchies relative to value typically attached to the female identity. This literary rule of characterization further demonstrates that 'fictions'

assign ‘primary’ and ‘secondary’ reading value to human characters. To this end, fictional beliefs are also relational to the constructed production of character value.

Mrs. Bogle’s identity as a minor singer that is exceptionally seen and heard only once also successfully represents her womanhood as unique and individualistic. Jennifer Jordan defends Zora Neale Hurston’s exploration of African American individualism in “Feminist Fantasies: Zora Neale Hurston’s Their Eyes Were Watching God.” Jordan claims that “one of the major issues in the redefinition of black womanhood is the role of individualism in a minority literature that has from its inception emphasized group development and salvation” (107). To have Mrs. Bogle’s individuality mimic or imitate Janie’s identity is to undermine the authenticity of Mrs. Bogle’s personhood. This falsely represents a fiction about identity based on erroneous concepts of imitation as synonymous with worth. The novel’s effort to portray the personal identity of an African American woman as a secondary character is inseparable, as Harvey claims, from “the meshing together of individualities” (248). Mrs. Bogle cannot be like Janie because only Janie can be herself. The narrative makes clear, then, that the value of characterizing Mrs. Bogle as a minor singer and Janie as the protagonist relates to a narrative desire to accurately portray the unique identities of each woman. The argument for narrative equality based on Mrs. Bogle’s imitation of Janie’s worldview and values risks suppressing Mrs. Bogle’s individuality. Assimilating Mrs. Bogle into the image of Janie, inevitably, also misrepresents the complexities of both characters by rendering both stock-like. The practice of constructing Janie as primary and Mrs. Bogle as minor is also the narrative achievement of character authentication. In other words, the implication of Mrs. Bogle in a minor role does not necessarily indicate or demonstrate her narrative value as lesser than. Mainly, the placing of characterizing Mrs. Bogle as minor makes clearer her individuality.

Entitled attention and/or numerical dominance emanate as primary formulas for reading a character as significant or insignificant. This reading practice also reflects a social context that refers to visual epistemologies for knowledge. Subsequently, Hurston represents a secondary character with such exceptionality that is typically perceived as antithetical to the written, visual text. The dramatic impact of the literary sub-genre of vocal music, which is uncommon as a literary technique, and the representation of a minor character in such few lines, also gives important value to a reading of the exceptional or "minor" as also significant. As Harvey suggests:

> *Exceptional* can here mean one of two things. The experience may be remote from the reader because it is beyond the range of his normal experience […]. Alternatively, the experience may be within the range of the reader but beyond his depth. That is, the reader may discover analogues for the experience within himself, but it may still be exceptional by reason of its extreme intensity and purity. (243)

On the one hand, the exceptionality of Mrs. Bogle's characterization runs the risk of being read distortedly, or of not being read altogether. One direct consequence of perceiving Mrs. Bogle is this way is that she is overlooked, or is valued as inferior. On the other hand, the point of such a radical shift in character construction succeeds in re-determining and revising perceptions related to reading values. These attitudes are narratively set up as in conflict with traditional ideas of primary as naturally or objectively dominant and visually evidenced. Mrs. Bogle's exceptional singing, at the least, determines her equality alongside Janie even though they represent distinctive worldviews. The non-visual exceptional and vocal context of Mrs. Bogle's worth and 'visibility' challenges visual reading practices which describe and interpret her as marginal and as invisible. The paying of attention to exceptionality gives significance to a new reading practice that assigns value based on character content and also based on the subjective the achievement of voice.

Mrs. Bogle's public *bursting* out conscious or unconsciously regenerates an African American practice of engaging the public communication of voice with individual and cultural signification. In "Of the Sorrow Songs," from The Souls of Black Folk, W.E.B. Du Bois documents this musical heritage as "*bursts* of wonderful melody […] voices of my brothers and sisters, full of the voices of the past" (265; emphasis mine). This pre-modern, historical *bursting out* of vocal singing is explained as a social reality that was synonymous with African American processes of everyday identity-formation. Singing, "morning, noon, and night" (265), also contradicted dominant systemic conditions which attempted to dehumanize and silence African American identities and cultural worldviews. Given its heritage as an African American epistemology for representation, the incorporation of vocal performance within Their Eyes works itself as a familiar terrain that African Americans used to morally and politically reproduce cultural philosophies and rituals. Singing, as Du Bois notes, was an important everyday practice that African Americans signified at all times. The basis of this every day practice was a cultural desire to maintain an oral worldview within a system that visually opposed and marginalized vocally philosophical standpoints. Mrs. Bogle, true to this heritage, *bursts out* her identity according to a tradition that directly reflects her ancestral past. Mrs. Bogle's *burst*, thematically, also resembles an African American *longing* or desire, what Du Bois calls the "unvoiced longing toward a truer world, of misty wanderings and hidden ways" (267). Mrs. Bogle, by thematically embodying an emotional desire that is rooted in a past African American discourse of spiritual longing and facts, communicates a general emotion within African American life that dialectically haunts her modern present. The social conditions which mediate the minor character's song type and subject matter are narratively constructed as reflectively similar to the realities which produced the vocal music of her past. This music, Du Bois makes clear, echoes

the perspectives of "an unhappy people, of the children of disappointment […] death and suffering" (267). The modern African American female experience, in a similar fashion, challenges, through song, the social beliefs which regenerate social subordination and enslavement. The death and suffering that are indicative of this systemic reality, likewise, are narratively situated as a cross-generational patriarchal ideology that justifies its power and significance through African American female enslavement, suffering, and silence. Moreover Mrs. Bogle's affective *longing* reflects an ancestral desire to access personal freedom through the human performance of self-expression. The timelessness of this longing reinforces a narrative perspective on the African American female experience as symbolic of an African American reality that is hauntingly underlined by pain, suffering and death. As Patricia Hill-Collins suggests, this female experience objectifies "Black women as animals" (139) rather than as "people" (139). The foundation of African American female enslavement, according to Hill-Collins, rests on this reading of the latter group as non-human. Patriarchy and 'white' supremacy, relatively speaking, dominate the institutions and social networks which relegate African American female subjectivity to a status as outside of the human scale of worth. This haunting drives Mrs. Bogle to publicly sing. Her song, therefore, is "of undoubted Negro origin and wide popular currency, and […] peculiarly characteristic of the slave" (268). Du Bois's sociology is productive to a literary analysis of Mrs. Bogle's minor singing. This important personification of a modern female subject according to singing reveals the birthing or creation of Mrs. Bogle's humanity according to musical self-expression. Mrs. Bogle, to this extent, communicates her identity as 'traditionally' enslaved by systemic values and realities which read her subjectivity as 'minor' or inferior. The moment of 'modernity' is denoted by a perceptual shift in the way that Mrs. Bogle self-defines a new reading of her female identity. The

transpiring of this modern reading is also the very basis for the latter's musical authorization of her personal worth. The latter's preference of singing also retreats from traditional practices of defining gender according to the sexual objectification of the physical body. Whereas traditional subjectivity is connoted by this external (visual and material) objectification, one identity of modern womanhood is connoted by the internal personification and external liberation of a woman's voice. Du Bois documents that this motive for singing, "is always clear: that sometime, somewhere, men will judge men by their souls and not by their skins" (274). The meshing of this philosophical belief into ideas, images, and literal behavior explains Mrs. Bogle's everyday practice of singing.

Public singing institutionalizes African American women's gendered beliefs and perspectives. The social environment is narratively represented as an institution that circulates and discourses with ideological values, beliefs, practices and systems. Mrs. Bogle's fashioning of her worldview in a public setting advances African American women's value through public visibility. Throughout "Voice and Interiority in Zora Neale Hurston's Their Eyes Were Watching God," Maria J. Racine notes that the public performance of an internal voice "refers to the author's relatively full and non-judgmental rendering of the internal consciousness of a character. Hurston, as an informing narrative consciousness, uses interiority in *Their Eyes* to characterize those who are silent and lack their own voices, as well as to add dimension to those with voices" (283). As such, Mrs. Bogle augments the *bursting* power of voice in such a way as to earn the stipulation of social presence, and of rendering for other African American women an example of their true *longing* to achieve spiritual, autonomous, valuable self-worth and personal freedom. This factual configuration of Bogle's inner voice into an external social space authorizes and archives information about her that may otherwise have not been known or

experienced before. Mrs. Bogle's position as a singer who performs in a public setting, more importantly, socially substitutes a female identity long determined by of Eurocentric patriarchy with a modern worldview that is philosophically womanist.

Mrs. Bogle's social singing fashions a new belief about the African American female identity as significant and spiritually valuable. The basis for this new womanhood exercises power not according to the physical ability to control the will and bodies of others but according to the ability to spatially and temporally sing out loud in a visible, public setting:

> *We'll walk in de light, de beautiful light*
> *Come where the dew drops of mercy shine bright*
> *Shine all around us by day and by night*
> *Jesus, the light of the world. (46)*

Mrs. Bogle's singing that "*we'll walk in de light, de beautiful light*" (line 1) justifies the life journey according to a female worldview that principally embodies "light" and beauty. This gendered conception of life ties lived experience to the daily performance of truth or honesty. As a metaphor, to live in "light" insinuates an entering into or a forward journeying towards "de" truth. The events and actions associated with coming into light speaks not to a seeking out of a literal technology of visibility, but to a conditioning of experience that associates the nature of living to the searching for and representation of truths or facts. This life journey also mandates to the subject his/her responsibility of reflecting or exemplifying "de light." Mrs. Bogle's episteme for light is brought to bear through the singing character of her personal conduct. The nexus of character, in particular, deduces the life journey as an experience of gathering and communicating information that can or will amass "light." Such a concept makes clear the parameters of life, and subjectivity, as an internal, spiritual journey of discovering and self-authorizing the fundamental truths of life, more or less the self-determined ability to freely and beautifully conduct personal identity in meaningful and virtuous ways. Self-enlightenment, as a

mode of power, fashions honesty as a suitable worldview for analyzing and understanding personal identity. Forms which mediate truth, such as integrity, virtuous attitudes, and moral courage, define personal enlightenment as an internal subjective attitude that externally materializes through physical or "walking" actions. The parameters of this light insist on principles with regards to knowing, understanding and expressing spiritual values. The details of darkness, according to Mrs. Bogle's conjecture, secure a fact about lived experiences premised on dishonesty or lies as consciously or unconsciously condoning imprisonment. The character of enslavement, at its most extreme, further codifies silence as a dark experience that leads to self-destruction and death. The singing of facts, conversely, is signified as concomitant with enlightenment and human purpose.

The vernacular or 'slang' transcription of "de" with "light" represents an African American linguistic system that phonetically substitutes the Standard English word "the" with a "d" sounding intonation. In Blues People: The Negro Experience in White America and the Music that Developed from It, Amiri Baraka documents that "[a]side from the actual transfer or survival of African words in the songs and speech of early slaves, there was also some kind of syntactical as well as rhythmical transfer since Africans and their descendants tended to speak their new languages in the same manner as they spoke their West African dialects" (21-22). The (African) American transcription of "de light" (line 1), and the Eurocentric transcription of "the light" (line four), points out the universality of Enlightenment, respectively, within the African American and European American worldviews. In some ways, this shared worldview on enlightenment augments the lived journey as universally conditioned by the values of honesty and spiritual beliefs. What belies the latter concept is a textual detail about living as equally authorized by a common discourse of truth. The equality of this narrative fact renders all

cultures as unreservedly equal, especially in relation to a life purpose. Hurston's choice to mesh both languages together, interestingly enough, also proves beneficial when the combination of "de" and "light" translates into "delight." Epistemologically, the emotional foundation of honesty produces personal and social pleasure and enjoyment. The incorporation of the aforementioned emotional beliefs into everyday "walks" of life devolves the power of honesty to individual and communal wellbeing and uplift. Such a "walk" or behavior conceptualizes personal character as principally invisible but visibly expressed. Applying the vocal performance of "de light" to Mrs. Bogle's worldview of living in "de" light, female singing, and its characteristic implication, is indeed a gendered recognition of some of the rewards of living an honest, spiritual life. If not more, the elementary sounding out of meaningful linguistic codes reinforces the spiritual power, "day and by night" (line 3), that corresponds with everyday female conduct. This "light," materially, generates itself into all kinds of everyday functions, including, for example, writing, and singing. Narrative representations of this power, perhaps, along with its literary vocal performance, condition the material characteristics of spiritual truth as producing and reinforcing itself through subjective (objective) instruments, for example, a book or a human person. Authorship, and authorization, here, are appropriated from a spiritual domain that aesthetically or principally reflects truthful values, beliefs and moral ideals. The choice to live an honest, spiritual life, then, mediates the level to which one is given access to social and spiritual facts and information. This gift of insight is narratively theorized as spiritually promulgated by a worldview that is intrinsically propounded by "light."

A new aesthetic of female beauty is defined as a consequence of modeling personal character and behavior in spiritual and honest ways. A reading of beauty, according to Mrs. Bogle's proclamation that "we'll walk in de light, *de beautiful light*" (line 1; emphasis mine),

forgoes privileging external, physical characteristics such as skin color, hair, or the physical body. Rather, female beauty is defined as the spiritual performance of living. To be beautiful is to *live* an honest, spiritual life. Mrs. Bogle's aesthetics regards beauty as an internal benefit that manifests visually through spiritual behaviors or conduct. This radical definition of beauty, as a non-visual aesthetic, aims to show that, on the one hand, beauty is a universal quality, and, on the other hand, that beauty is an attribute that can be claimed and owned by anyone. Beauty, conceptually, is narratively projected as anti-exclusionary and anti-hierarchal. Baraka echoes this principle when he refers to singing as "*Expression* issued from life [that] *was* beauty" (29). Implied in this worldview is an observation about dishonesty and a lack of spiritual values as constitutive of ugliness. The performance of dishonest values and beliefs, for example, beauty as a physical quality to be inhabited, undermines a dishonest exterior text about beauty and transmutes it into a factual discourse of ugliness. A 'picture' or visual image of ugliness, the qualities that make a person unpleasant to look at, operates according to the subjective performance of character, rather than according to visual encounters. Emphasis on character and morality, as embodiments of a beautiful person, implicates everyone as capable of perceptively being or of becoming beautiful. The possibility of this aesthetic belief is persuasively exampled by Mrs. Bogle's *beautiful* singing. In this way, Mrs. Bogle's African American female identity as personally constructed as intrinsically beautiful. The symbol of beauty in Their Eyes, as represented by an African American woman, traces the spiritual voice as a methodology for reading African American women as aesthetically beautiful and valuable. The novel's interest in constructing African American womanhood as beautiful seems to also speak to its desire to re-imagine social myths and customs which traditionally perceive the latter as ugly into beliefs which affirm and validate, due to the beautiful characteristic of their singing, African American

women with natural, attractive qualities. This belief in African American women as beautiful further connects the context of honest self-expression to the beautiful development of self-esteem and self-worth. Associating and tracing an aesthetic of beauty to the interior parameters which synthesize Mrs. Bogle's identity also generates a new perception about beauty as a natural or innate quality that is externally visualized by behavior. This narrative approach to beauty breaks with a traditional positing of beauty as externally originating from conditions which are material and ideological. Mrs. Bogle poses beauty as a self-regulating attitude that is subjectively possessed and regulated. Communicating this discourse, then, connects beauty to a moral epoch of practicing beauty and of appearing beautiful by fashioning, in public, visual images which confidently foster characteristics reflective of "de light." Beauty, for this reason, is dialectically supported by a nexus of voice that is propertied as the communication of self-worth.

Mrs. Bogle's modern identity is also characterized as a sacred and spiritual female text. Sigrid King describes in "Naming and Power in Zora Neale Hurston's Their Eyes Were Watching God," that "[n]aming has always been an important issue in the Afro-American tradition because of its link to the exercise of power" (683). As King points out, "[t]o have a name is to have a means of locating, extending, and preserving oneself in the human community, so as to be able to answer the question 'who?' with reference to ancestry, current status, and particular bearing" (683). In the performed song's final line, "Jesus, the light of the world," the myth of Jesus is personally embraced by Mrs. Bogle as a religious leader who dies for the sins of man. The figure of Jesus is directly attributed to a supernatural, divine deity who sends the 'Son of God' to preach to the world a gospel of truth and salvation. The conduct and personality of Jesus is documented in the sacred text of the King James Bible. Throughout this sacred text, Jesus preaches to the masses the phenomenological and spiritual wonders of his supernatural

power. Jesus lays bare, through his voice, ideas and information which celebrate and champion a spiritual lifestyle. The importance of this worldview is exampled by guidelines on living: "'Love the Lord your God with all of your heart and with all of your soul and with all of your mind' […] 'Love your neighbor as yourself'" (Saint Matthew 22: 34-39), and on the true worth of the human subject, "he who is least among you all—he is the greatest" (Saint Matthew 22: 48). Constructed as a symbol of the 'Word' or Truth, "in the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God" (Saint John 1:1), the sacred text of Jesus emerges as a representative narrative on the nature of "light" and God. Demonstrating God's power and Word, Jesus performs his character according to spiritual interests. Jesus attributes his worldview to a perspective that is candidly regulated by a deistic notion of "Walking in the Light": "God is light; in him there is no darkness at all. If we claim to have fellowship with him yet walk in darkness, we lie and do not live by the truth. But if we walk in the light, as he is in the light, we have fellowship with one another" (Saint John 1: 5-7). Ideologically ordered by a discourse of truth, Jesus poses the purpose and parameters of the lived experience as philosophically driven by real facts and/or events. These factual assumptions illuminate in the popular belief that Jesus did in fact live to perform miracles. Jesus is transnationally perceived with sacred and divine value. The message of "walking in the light," regenerated by Hurston's minor singer, narratively projects a myth about an African American woman, similarly to Jesus, as *the* spiritual representative of the 'Word,' and therefore of God. Mrs. Bogle's appropriation of a biblical beatitude into the pantheon of her song functions as evidence of her sacred nature. The *Eyes* that were watching *God*, taken from the title of Hurston's novel, speaks to the narrative moment when the exceptionality and phenomenological significance of Mrs. Bogle's spiritual singing becomes narratively attributed to the ubiquitous status of an African American woman,

similarly to Jesus, as a (visible) symbol of the (invisible) Word or God. The community's witnessing or 'eying' of Mrs. Bogle's performance is also their visible 'watching' of God take the modern form of an African Ameirican woman through spiritual singing. The sheer enormity of Mrs. Bogle, however simple and exceptional her behavior, defines and conceptualizes an African American woman as the symbolic 'Jesus' or messiah figure within African American culture. Just as Jesus was named or selected to inform the world on how to "walk in the light," Mrs. Bogle is narratively named as having been divinely selected to serve as a spiritual instrument who expresses knowledge and information about spiritual conduct and personality. Singing, for Mrs. Bogle, resembles Jesus's use of voice to preach the gospel. This reading perhaps explains the narrative's characterization of Mrs. Bogle as spiritually appearing out of nowhere, or, within a context of representation that defies conventional norms, what Baraka suggests to be the phenomenological workings of "spirit possession" (41). Such a marvel, in living flesh, for African American women, ties their genealogy to a female messiah leader. Re-presenting the social and moral history of African American women to Mrs. Bogle, at the same time, challenges past myths which typically construct African American women as genealogy originating from 'slaves.' The emergence of a new myth on African American female subjectivity, tied to a messiah mythology, gives birth to a modern African American humanistic tradition that celebrates and represents the significance and sacredness of African American women according to a point of view that presents the latter group as spiritual descendants from a supernatural deity, and as materially appraised by a modern day 'Daughter of God.' The internal conjecture of spiritual values and perceptions, in a similar fashion, defines Mrs. Bogle's 'religion' as a personal system of referentiality that is structured by theological, political, historical and mythical sources. Whether Hurston's singer believes or disbelieves the myth of

Jesus is not as important as her internal processing of didactic sources that self-fashion her identity and voice into a sacred text that reflects spiritually meaningful assumptions. Mrs. Bogle, to achieve a sense of self-esteem and self-worth, imaginatively produces a discourse of myths which shapes her identity as meaningful and valuable. Proof, in this sense, does not imply visual examples or markers. Instead, proof of the factuality or honesty in Mrs. Bogle's choice of sources operates in relation to a notion of whether or not the myths work, at their best, by leading to personal uplift and spiritual betterment.

The enlightened theme in Mrs. Bogle's modern text on life, and female identity, treats 'blackness' as a motif for invisibility and attributes darkened invisibility to the enlightened achievement of spiritual success. The genesis of female enlightenment is demarcated at dusk: "[b]y five o'clock the town was full of every kind of a vehicle and swarming with people. They wanted to see that lamp lit at dusk" (45). The blackness of dusk is foregrounded by the invisibility of darkness as a hermetic system of signs which are temporally linked to non-visual practices. This system conceptualizes the latter discourses as experiences of 'seeing' or of becoming enlightened to the truth. The invisibility of blackness, through these very conditions, operates as an especial transversal space for exerting 'light' and beauty. In this nexus of meaning, traditional western perceptions of blackness as devoid of any real significance or worth are paradoxically re-fashioned into a genealogy of signs which posit 'black' according to metaphors or symbols of enlightenment and value. The cultural term, 'Black is beautiful,' partners the internal dimensions of 'light' or truth with the social or secular experience of walking as a performance that relationally affirms a beautifully spiritual worldview. Enlightenment, in this case, is explicitly represented as the dusk lighting or non-seeing development of individuality, and community life, according to the politics of honesty and

meaningful, spiritual standpoints. Alain Locke, in his anthology, The New Negro, also supports a recognition of 'black' people as culturally enlightened: "[w]ith this renewed self-respect and self-dependence, the life of the Negro community is bound to enter a new dynamic phase, the buoyancy from within compensating for whatever pressure there may be of conditions from without" (4). Mrs. Bogle, as a symbolic 'New Negro 'Woman,' embodies what Locke documents as the "life attitudes and self-expression of the […] Negro, in his poetry, his art, his education and his new outlook" (4-5). The interests and power of this creative consciousness reflect in a dominant African American longing to be viewed and treated with dignity and respect. As Locke suggests, however, the validation of personhood is a process that must be subjectively authorized and claimed. Self-consciousness also develops the personal power to cope, survive, challenge, and change systems of oppression and dehumanization. Locke determines that out of this modern outlook awaits "the promise and warrant of a new leadership" (5). The individual agency in this philosophical belief, a key tenet of the Harlem Renaissance literary movement, is narratively underlined by the literary representation of an African American female singer who self-authorizes her social role as a modern spiritual leader in community life. Mrs. Bogle also musically encourages her community to embrace this important philosophy, which, they willing do: "they, all of them, all of the people took it up and sung it over and over until it was wrung dry, and no further innovations of tone and tempo were conceivable. Then they hushed and ate barbeque" (45-46). Cultural unity within community life, here, is socially mediated by Mrs. Bogle's public singing. The community's choice to sing Mrs. Bogle's song conceptualizes a basic belief in singing as a convention that specializes in community uplift and harmony. The parameters of the mentioned criteria support the call-and-response implied in singing as a standard that comes with the characteristic traits of love and

bonding. African American singing is thus epistemologically associated with a vested interest in the bringing together, for the sake of survival and support, all African Americans into shared harmony. One justification of this belief lies in a fact that Mrs. Bogle's African American community shares a common lived experience with racial oppression. This same reality also validates Mrs. Bogle's methodological approach to singing. Membership as a subordinate group gives credence to Mrs. Bogle's musical desire for shared unity. The contour for this unity is idealized by a common, collective consensus about Mrs. Bogle's felt worldview. This consensus does not treat unity as a practice of looking uniformly alike or according to nexuses which govern external characteristics. Unity, rather, locates a shared mode of spiritual principles as recognition of connectedness. This relationship is represented as a dialogue between the community and Mrs. Bogle. Social justice, here, is democratically punctuated by the choice or free will of the community, through call and response, to validate and reproduce the significance and perspective of its most 'minor' social member. The narrative unity of this modern African American community deconstructs a traditional approach to American democracy that systematizes racial and gendered lived experience through violent physical force and mind control. The African American discourse of call and response, between singer and group, points out the significance and value of African American cultural rituals within American democratic life. Undoubtedly African in origin and scope, the democratic participation between the African American community and its African American female leader is, as Baraka mentions, "the most salient characteristic of African, or at least West African, music […], a type of song in which there is a leader and a chorus; the leading lines of the song sung by a single voice, the leader's, alternating with a refrain sung by the chorus" (intro; 6). The continuity of this Africanist tradition, along with "the patois-type languages and the other half-African languages,"

characteristics of “those various laments, chants, stories, etc,” (intro; 6), patterns the development and integration of African American vocal music into mainstream society as African-influenced. The heritage and attitudes invoked by Mrs. Bogle’s song hauntingly reaches back to an African worldview that claims an epistemology on civilization as informed by communal harmony and democracy.

The spiritual views expressed by Mrs. Bogle reflect a tradition that derives from an oral philosophy on life. This epistemological pan-African standard of communication and representation is narratively framed as everyday singing. Explicitly, singing was a common practice among the first group of Africans in the New World. The modern textuality of Mrs. Bogle’s singing lies in the fact that at the turn of the twentieth century, the period during which this narrative is set, what was an otherwise common everyday practice is re-presented as culturally exceptional, and perceptively ‘minor.’ The near extinction of this oral worldview, and the very marginalization of singing within African American social life into a specialist, isolated standpoint, reveals the ways in which African American understanding and regenerative use of cultural beliefs and value systems run the risk of becoming ‘minor’ and extinct. Cross-generational enslavement and systemic oppression are represented as bearing remarkable responsibility for the modern alienation or estrangement of African Americans from their own cultural rituals. The partiality of alienation also serves as a narrative context for the modern African American lived experience as an experience that disconnects or alienates African Americans from knowing and using personal (cultural) systems of representation and signification. Mrs. Bogle’s role as singer symbolizes the Africanist-inflected worldviews of African Americans, within a western context, and its reproduction by the most minor or marginal African American cultural member. The doubling of this claim underscores the potential

extinctive status of both culture and cultural member as dialectically relational. Together, this dual significance highlights a narrative perspective on the destruction of culture and subject as detrimental to overall community life. This narrative position, by definition, points out a modern reality of all African Americans, especially women, in a context of extinction or annihilation. The novel attributes the social significance of African American women to community sustainability while the dominant ordering of patriarchy, and racism, is narratively linked to the destruction of African American life and culture. Mrs. Bogle's modern womanhood, more importantly, seeks to expose a methodology for African American women's singing as a creative basis for cultural survival and regeneration.

The ability of a woman to communicate her worldview is represented as essential to the future of cultural life. Mrs. Bogle's characterization in the exceptional role of cultural leader, along with the significance of her singing as cross-generationally concomitant with cultural justice, is written into the narrative as an important spiritual belief that projects social justice as a reflection of self-expression. Tracing Mrs. Bogle's epistemological rupture with traditional, unjust visual depictions of her female identity, and the latter's self-determined formulation of identity through the phenomenological power and mastery of singing, fashions notions of social justice as a personal practice that emerges through the everyday lived experience of exceptional conduct. This is evident in Mrs. Bogle's subversion of traditional social practices through the very fact that she exceptionally expresses and conducts herself in ways which break from 'normative' depictions. The shift is seen in Mrs. Bogle's courage to communicate her perspective in a setting that structures and regulates her value through codes of silence and invisibility. Mrs. Bogle's further construction of social behaviors which model a system of well-defined values and principles also operate as personal acts of non-violent resistance against

conceptions of African American women as sexual objects. The latter's actions mark a crucial strategy for female justice as emerging from one woman at a time. This modern attitude challenges a loosely defined rhetoric on the success of social justice movements as a determinant of a dominant, collective unit. Their Eyes, instead, projects a modern construction of social movements as everyday cultural activities that emerge on an individual basis. This argument insists on everyday spiritual expressions and conduct as indicating political change. Mrs. Bogle, as representative of African American womanhood, signals her resistance to social oppression and marginality by conditioning her lived reality in exceptional ways which shift gendered merits of value. The further development of a conscious or unconscious critical system of singing to socially present her self-worth and ideals indicates the level to which literal change emerges by first voicing it.

Finally, the choice to sing is wielded by Hurston's 'minor' character as a moral weapon of subversion. It is this exceptional phenomenon, indeed outside of normative signs and systems for representing African American women, that influences the drawing of attention to the contradictions and fictions which belie female representation. Individual exceptionality, here, proves to be an immensely powerful political determinant of change, and of possibilities. Mrs. Bogle's modern singing and conduct transform the African American female lived experience. This exceptionality gives value to Mrs. Bogle's achievement of social justice whereas her view prescribes the limits of her patriarchal culture while at the same time exemplifying a position that is *in medias res* represented as a change of choice, and lifestyle. Moreover, Mrs. Bogle's exceptional behavior distinguishes her as a female 'leader' who communicates a modern worldview on female subjectivity that is tasked by spiritual singing in a public space. The virtues of this individuality are narratively traced to an ethics of delightful and beautiful female values.

The genealogy of exceptionality, as opposed to sameness, predicates the justice of personal power and self-worth as in conflict with the injustice of self-hatred and weakness. The achievement of equality, and freedom, is made evident by a personal will to power that operates on distinction. The root of this distinction is simultaneously the self-mastery of fair personal treatment, and mastery over cultural opposition. To self-regulate personal rules and practices which share in common assumptions about the self as possessing worth, and which mediates a state of interior equality, is to signify the true subjective character of "light." Insofar as Mrs. Bogle traces her gendered value to the character of "light," this minor literary moment of vocal singing codifies a new standard reading on the female identity. This everyday emergent discourse manifests in the specific form of the African American woman.

Bibliography

Baraka, Amiri. Blues People: The Negro Experience in White America and the Music That Developed From It. New York: William Morrow and Company, 1963.

Clarke, Deborah. "The Porch Couldn't Talk for Looking": Voice and Vision in Their Eyes Were Watching God." African American Review. 35.4 (Winter 2001): 599-613.

Du Bois, W. E.B. The Souls of Black Folk. Signet: New York, 1995 [1903].

Hill-Collins, Patricia. Black Feminist Thought: Knowledge, Consciousness, and the Politics of Empowerment. 2nd Edition. New York: Routledge, 2000.

Harvey, W. J. "The Human Context." Character and the Novel. New York: Cornel UP, 1965.

Hurston, Zora Neale. Their Eyes Were Watching God. Perennial: New York, 1998 [1937].

Jordan, Jennifer. "Feminist Fantasies: Zora Neale Hurston's Their Eyes Were Watching God." Tulsa Studies in Women's Literature. 7.1 (Spring 1988): 105-117.

King, Sigrid. "Naming and Power in Zora Neale Hurston's Their Eyes Were Watching God." Black American Literature Forum. 24.4 (Winter 1990): 683-96.

Leveeq, Christine. "You Heard Her, You Ain't Blind": Subversive Shifts in Zora Neale Hurston's Their Eyes Were Watching God." Tulsa Studies in Women's Literature. 13.1 (Spring 1994): 87-111.

Locke, Alain. The New Negro. Antheneum: New York, 1968 [1925].

McCredie, Wendy J. "Authority and Authorization in Their Eyes Were Watching God." Black American Literature Forum. 16.1 (Spring 1982): 25-28.

The Holy Bible: King James Version. Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1973.

Racine, Maria J. "Voice and Interiority on Zora Neale Hurston's Their Eyes Were Watching God." African American Review. 28.2 (Summer 1994): 283-292.

CHAPTER FOUR

'Native' African American (Female) Singing in Native Son

Life is like a mountain railroad
With an engineer that's brave
We must make the run successful
From the cradle to the grave….
Richard Wright
-Native Son

The primary 'Native Son' of Richard Wright's novel of the same name is a violent African American male whose antagonistic raping and murdering of women lead to incarceration and death. Bigger Thomas, the main character, is made manifest by his choice of violence as a response to life crisis, and by his internal psycho-emotional state, one that throughout the novel moves from hopelessness to despair. In the introduction to the Library of America's restored edition, Arnold Rampersad addresses the publication of Native Son as an important psychoanalytical text: "from Wright's sense of the pulsing instability of Bigger's thoughts and emotions—now flaring with rage and desire, now chilly and brackish with despair and impotence—he fashioned the peculiar prose rhythms that dominate the book and make us feel, as readers, that we are sharing in Bigger's moods and thoughts" (intro; 19). Rampersad makes several critical comments about the novel's general concern with psychological frames and the extent to which emotional or mental attitudes (voices) inform the modern African American cultural identity. In the general framing of the novel, the teenage African American male psyche stands in as the primary worldview of the African American culture. The novel's patriarchal motif is both historical and didactic. By defining the main (male) character according to the parameters of physical and sexual violence, the novel presents Bigger Thomas as a 'Native

Son' of Eurocentric patriarchy. This perspective encourages Bigger to respond violently to his life experiences, to rape and kill women, and to forcefully take what does not belong to him. Bigger's African American masculine identity, to this end, comes to fatally signify the self-destructive effects of the African American culture's internalization and performance of Eurocentric perceptions or voices.

This chapter seeks to provide a different gendered reading of Native Son, Richard Wright's national best-seller and the first African American novel to make Book-of-the Month selection, by examining the circulation of everyday home singing and its relationship to the existential survival of the African American 'Native Mother.' The chapter's approach, in the context of focusing on a minor, African American maternal character, is underpinned by a narrative perspective on the African American mother as *a* primary cultural nurturer of the African American 'Native Son.' The politicization of the home space as an institution for the female 'birthing' of social and spiritual values is also reinforced through African American singing. That an African American mother is constructed in such a light narratively contradicts a historical perception about the African American mother as a reproductive breeder. Patricia Hill-Collins, in Black Feminist Thought, claims that the cultural role of the African American mother, as a bi-product of female enslavement, was typified by "efforts to harness Black women's sexuality and fertility to a system of capitalist exploitation" (50). Hill-Collins documents that "slaveowners controlled Black women's labor and commodified Black women's bodies as units of capital" (51). This traditional cultural characterization of motherhood is presented as analogous to Wright's modern adaptation of singing as a 'native' characteristic of the African American mother. Wright's novel constructs a modern perspective on the African American female identity through the character of Bigger's primary parent, Mrs. Thomas. Mrs. Thomas's

occupation of narrative marginality allegorically reveals, to a certain extent, a social stereotype that perceives both womanhood and motherhood as culturally insignificant. The novel subverts this grand narrative by producing a minor African American mother who signifies her significance and maternal identity within the context of singing. Through singing, Mrs. Thomas transmits to her son creative and meaningful principles on succeeding and surviving in an environment that is constructed to exploit and dehumanize all African Americans. These sung values, or emotional attitudes, establish the significance of voice as an identity of motherhood within African American cultural life. This aspect of value to voice, correlative with the private, domestic home space, incorporates a modern reading of home life as an important site for the African American mother's socialization with her children, and more markedly, for the African American woman's socialization with her 'native' or personal beliefs and principles.

The home, viewed by the novel as a space that 'births' and regenerates society and the native female voice, is represented as a personal institution that conditions the African American mother into an everyday primary leader of African American cultural life. This representation of mothering contradicts notions about the insignificance of motherhood to statehood. Larissa Lomnitz argues in "Urban Women's work in Three Social Strata: The Informal Economy of Social Networks and Social Capital" that "the household within this stratum represents not only a unit of consumption, but also a unit of production and internal cooperation ensuring security and survival" (63). Essentially, Lomnitz notes, the significance of motherhood is asserted by the fact that the identity of mothering translates into "social capital" (62). The significance of motherhood as an African American female culture for wielding power and influence further illustrates the many ways in which African American women wield "social capital" or value in the domestic setting. This maternal home capital also uncovers an impetus for female value and

identity as experiences that develop within the subjective interiority. The novel characterizes the authorization of female power and worth through this domestic allegory. Presenting subjectivity as an internal process that visibly justifies itself through self-expression also ties an allegory of female domesticity to a woman's sung development of values and perspectives. Throughout Native Son, this 'home' recognition of the female identity polices its values and attitudes through the creative exercise of singing.

A 'foreign,' patriarchal *speaking* cultural system is represented as in conflict with Mrs. Thomas's 'native' *singing*. The double consciousness of negotiating foreign speech with home or personal singing is the most important context for understanding Mrs. Thomas's female identity. Mrs. Thomas's homely security, for example, is regarded as troubled by the alarming encroachment of personal insecurity (hence the title of the first section: "Fear") and material modernity. Mrs. Thomas's encounters with racist and sexist visual markers also marginalize her imaginative and felt experiences with non-visual systems, such as spiritual beliefs, and emotions relative to self-worth. Moreover, the double conscious binary between modern materialism and the traditional text of spiritual values accounts for the novel's symbolic representation of Mrs. Thomas as a primary/minor character who struggles between the choice of internalizing a 'foreign' worldview that is styled and theorized according to emotional fear, materiality, and female inferiority, or, to maintain, despite its exceptional but marginal status, a 'native' worldview that employs spiritual, singing principles as tantamount to cultural survival and female empowerment. The figuration of Mrs. Thomas's battle with this binary double consciousness explains the ways in which she organizes and operates in her domestic setting.

Mrs. Thomas's primary conscious or unconscious privileging of speaking is narratively signified through her performing of harsh or demeaning speech. In "The Black Woman and

Family Roles," Carrie Allen McCray provides an interpretation of Bigger's mother as imitative of one of two antagonistic narrative roles. McCray claims that "Black women have either been depicted as the dominating, castrating female under whose hand the Black family and the Black community are falling apart, or as the romanticized, strong, self-sufficient female responsible for the survival of the Black family and Black people" (67). McCray also suggests that as "the mother of Bigger Thomas, the most celebrated antihero in Black American fiction" (91) "is a severe voice awakening her children to the bleak realities of their lives, and [that] throughout the novel her voice remains severe […] stern, cold, distant, and unsympathetic" (91). Taken together, Mrs. Thomas's characterization is clichéd as either dominating, as McCray explains, or as romantically self-sufficient. These angles, McCray suggests, lie at the heart of the novel's production of Bigger's mother. That Mrs. Thomas is a severe mother is narratively clear. Right at the beginning, the narrator describes several instances that attend to a traditional reading of Bigger's mother's personality as impatiently cruel: "*Brrrrrrriiiiiiiiiiiiiiiinng*! An alarm clock clanged in the dark and silent room. A bed spring creaked. A woman's voice sang out impatiently: "Bigger, shut that thing off!" (3); "Turn your heads so I can dress" (3); and "Vera! Get up from there!" (3). Speaking most of her severity to Bigger, Mrs. Thomas is also typified by the emotions of anger and fear: "And mark my word, some of these days you going to set down and cry" (9); "You'll regret how you living some day" (9); and "Lord, I get so tired on this I don't know what to do" (9). When she performs speech, Mrs. Thomas is verbally violent and devoid of maternal love towards her children. In constructing Mrs. Thomas's primary personality as severe, the novel materializes one perspective about Mrs. Thomas's double consciousness as a condition of her environment, and social status. Modernity, in particular, symbolized through the impatient ringing of an alarm clock, is constructed as conditioning the

impatient atmosphere of Mrs. Thomas's personality and behavior. The ideological underpinning of the clock, constructed as acquiring power and significance through violent force, determines the construction of Mrs. Thomas's internalization of cultural values which are ideologically tied to a temporal positing of behavior that maintains order through a forceful deterministic notion of speed. The actions and thoughts of Bigger's mother, here, are best understood as products of the ideological processes and forces which mediate cultural modernity. An examining of the relationship between this modern present and Mrs. Thomas's identity constructs one characteristic her personal discourse as fearfully cruel. The conditions of Mrs. Thomas's inferior environment also demarcate her severe encounters with her children. The latter's place of residence in a segregated section of Chicago, Illinois, circa 1930's, further indicates the extent to which real, marginalizing divisions between African American mothers and their children promulgate segregated or unequal feelings of love and affection from one to the other. The implications of this modern phenomenon are painfully pronounced in the fact that while no literal walls actually separate Bigger and his siblings from their mother, value becomes attached to Mrs. Thomas's command that they "turn their heads" (3) or distance themselves from her. The sternness of this command to "turn" serves as the only experience that binds the relationship between the latter and former. As all indications admit, the socioeconomic poverty of urban, welfare life fashions natural boundaries into unnatural lived realities. Mrs. Thomas's spoken hostility is projected, at best, as part of an informal economy of impatience and an inferiority complex which reflects in her choice to use the power of forcefulness. As Richard Wright describes in his essay, "How Bigger Was Born": "the environment supplies the instrumentalities through which the organism expresses itself, and if that environment is warped or tranquil, the mode and manner of behavior will be affected toward deadlocking tensions or orderly fulfillment

and satisfaction" (442). Mrs. Thomas, a product of her modern environment, subjects the domestic space to an ordering that reflects the environmental atmosphere of her day. The meaning and significance of her cruel, speaking voice, and impatient behaviors, are patterned according a social setting that associates speed and fearful force as concomitant with power and value.

The modern, social forces of patriarchy, racism, and economic poverty undermine Mrs. Thomas's subjective integrity, and encroach on the latter's ability to nurture and empower her female identity, and her children. The persistence of these cultural forces allegorically materializes through the sounding of the alarm, to open the novel, and in the infamous rat scene, where the forced terror of a foreign power reinforces the ideological imposition of a foreign worldview into the domestic or home life of the African American mother, and community. The alarm clock and rat, as symbols of society's encroachment into the 'home' character of Mrs. Thomas, produce a reading of the modern African American mother as a highly idealized product of her social environment. The privatization of objects, and social symbols, orient the ways in which Mrs. Thomas is forced to internalize the ideological interests of her dominant patriarchal system. It is this everyday interaction with social beliefs and practices which influences Mrs. Thomas's speaking voice into a severe and impatient instrument. In addition, these influences effect inferior divisions between Mrs. Thomas and her children, and, in general, an atmosphere that is at best hostile and intolerable. These conditions work their way into how Mrs. Thomas comes to perceive herself, and her 'native son.' The outcome of this constructed home 'invasion' is the internalization of a speaking pattern that signifies value to materialism, power through force, and a belief in racial/gendered inferiority. Mrs. Thomas, inevitably, by consciously or unconsciously internalizing the latter, is re-invented into a modern, minor social

subject who possesses very little public and personal value. The symbolic domestication of Mrs. Thomas also implicates the invisible endowment of inferiority and silence to her womanist principles and beliefs. The criminal imprisonment of Bigger configures the relationship between Eurocentrism and African American 'native' subjectivity. When dissected, Bigger's narrative status as psychologically enslaved depends on the mentioned mother-child relationship. The African American mother, in this light, is represented as minor or inferior due to her internalization of cultural patriarchy.

Mrs. Thomas also occupies center stage due to her lived experience with everyday 'native' or personal singing. The actions and ideas posited by female singing are signified by the narrative as an African American cultural worldview. The implicit result of this lived experience draws on a concept of mothering as a woman's ability to vocally birth meaningful beliefs and practices to her offspring. One primary relationship between Mrs. Thomas and Bigger is determined by this daily reality of female singing about African American cultural principles and emotional ideals which contain a range of beliefs on how to survive within an environment that is ideologically racist and dehumanizing. A fundamental context for Mrs. Thomas's everyday singing also extends to her spiritual use of vocal music, specifically spiritual and gospel songs, to examine and challenge the 'foreign' processes and forces which psychologically undermine her 'native' autonomy. This modern female experience is recognition of Mrs. Thomas's everyday singing as an emotional reality that gives meaning and value to female systems of beliefs. The novel's concentration on the spiritual and emotional experiences which mediate Mrs. Thomas's singing draws attention to the 'native' systems which mediate the modern African American female subjectivity. Mrs. Thomas's identity as a mother, perhaps, shapes the narrative's didactic representation of the creative 'birthing' of female subjectivity as an internal journey that is then

externally signified through oral communication. Singing, as an African American traditional convention for self-expression and representation, functions as *the* primary narrative motif for Mrs. Thomas's visual signification of her invisible 'native' systems.

African American women's everyday modern singing ties its genesis to the historical formation of the professional female entertainer. The modern ordering of the female identity around a symbol of the professional African American female entertainer is analogous to the primary symbol that is constitutive of patriarchy: the phallic sexual organ. The professional female singer is constitutive of the matriarchal symbol for womanhood. Amiri Baraka documents this womanist heritage on singing throughout Blues People: The Negro Experience in White America and the Music that Developed From It:

> Singers like Gertrude "Ma" Rainey were responsible for creating the classic blues style. She was one of the most imitated and influential classic blues singers […]. Madame Rainey, as she was sometimes known, toured the South for years with a company called the Rabbit Foot Minstrels and became widely known in Negro communities everywhere in America. It was she who taught Bessie Smith, perhaps the most famous of all the classic blues singers. Both these women, along with such performers as Clara Smith, Trixie Cox, Ida Cox, Sarah Martin, Chippie Hill, Sippie Wallace, brought professionalism and theatrical polish to blues that it had never had before. (89)

The genealogy of classical blues, and its modern manifestations, is documented by Baraka as originating and "sung from the point of view of woman […] upwards of seventy-five percent of the songs are written from the woman's point of view" (91). These professional women, the author also mentions, were noteworthy due to the fact that many, if not most, "either sang in the church (they were always consistent in their churchgoing) or sang their own personal sadness over brown wood tubs" (91). The further imbued religious or church context of female singing, and its everyday use "over brown wood tubs" (91), explains the practices and forces which influence Mrs. Thomas's own daily singing. This modern phenomenon is characterized as

fundamental to the African American female lived reality. The emergence of female entertainers, from amongst the rank and file of women like a Mrs. Thomas, plays out in terms of the enormous popularity of mainstream African American singing, and the choice of singing as a modern way for African American women to earn employment outside of domestic work and prostitution. This female orientation towards everyday and professional singing developed and materialized according to a modern assumption that the public and/or private performance of vocal music signified female visibility and worth.

In addition, Mrs. Thomas's singing is constructed as always *in medias res* overheard by an audience. Bigger, and readers, operate as Mrs. Thomas's 'overhearing' audience: "He sat at the table. The odor of frying bacon and boiling coffee drifted to him from beyond the curtain. His mother's voice floated to him in song […]. The song irked him and he was glad when she stopped" (10). When Mrs. Thomas sings for a second time, Bigger is again spontaneously narrated as overhearing her: "Noiselessly, he went up the steps and inserted his key in the lock; the door swung in silently and he heard his mother singing behind the curtain" (35). These narrative accounts point to a view about singing as an experience that is concomitantly private and public. The further position of Mrs. Thomas's singing as an action that unifies an emotional, spiritual belief system with an external, visible, performance asserts a characteristic of voice, and therefore subjectivity, as mutually constituted by invisible and visible symbols and signs. Wright also discusses the formation of a novel as "at once something private and public by its nature and texture" (433). Wright defines the writing of a narrative as a process that merges the mentioned "two extremes" (433). Singing follows a similar literary pattern by merging interior (private) processes, for example, emotions and beliefs, into visible, surface textures including physical performance and audience listening experiences. What also makes Mrs. Thomas's singing

exceptional and powerful, perhaps, is a fact about her vocal performance as spontaneous. This reinforcement of spontaneity embeds Bigger's mother with a striking power to generate presence and inspiration in ways which defy notions of rationality, control and cultural value. Bigger, although frustrated and clearly uninterested in his mother's music, cannot help but to overhear what his mother has to say. This phenomenological insistence, despite reactions which may show disinterest, supports a notion of singing as a powerful episteme that has a profound influence on the will of people and/or imagined audiences.

Mrs. Thomas's powerful singing determines one important female view about life as a modern journey that entails struggles of all kinds, but one in which singing proves useful for re-channeling pessimistic concerns into a spiritually empowering and courageous standpoint. In her first song, Mrs. Thomas expresses the following to her children:

> *Life is like a mountain railroad*
> *With an engineer that's brave*
> *We must make the run successful*
> *From the cradle to the grave….* (10)

Mrs. Thomas maternally communicates to her children, Bigger included, a female perspective on life as an experience that depends on the courageous attitude of an imagined "engineer" (line 2) to overcome pain, danger and uncertainties. The realities which constitute this reading of life as both a natural (internal) and an industrial (external) social experience, mediated by a mountain and its railroad, are coupled together by an engineer's desired *longing* to be "successful" (line 3). Bigger's mother makes simile references to the natural life as a mountain or natural experience that stretches down and up, curves even, into a peak. This reference is juxtaposed to an image of a railroad as symbolic of modern technology and industrial materialism, and also of African American blues music. As a vehicle or an object for movement or migration, the modern railroad signifies three respective attitudes about lived reality as operating through a common

philosophical approach. These worldviews allegorically represent reality as a natural, cosmic experience that is mediated by human beliefs, values, and felt impressions. These invisible discourses, which materialize as a visible image of a mountain, explain a fact about human existence as a spiritual journey that leads up to a realm that is anticipated as a heavenly transcendent space or site of salvation. The complex structure of a railroad, similarly, symbolizes the institutions and physical behaviors which drive human conduct. The railroad, as a modern invention, also approximates life as an experience that inscribes modern reality according to technological practices. The conventional and symbolic status of the railroad as a stand-in for African American blues music, what Baraka documents as both "leisure and movement" (64), also defines the lived or journeyed experience as a musical experience of singing or expressing voice. This musical apparatus on living, as a perspective that depends on a subject's internal or "mountain" beliefs, covertly authorizes a rudimentary assumption about living as a profoundly psychological and emotional myriad of lived realities. Baraka reinforces the former singing view about life by noting, in terms of blues music, that "each phase of the Negro's music issued directly from the dictates of his *social* and *psychological* environment […], and that in each grouping of songs a certain frequency of reference could pretty well determine his social, economic, and *psychological* states" (65; emphasis mine). The combined social and psychological vested interest in life, musically signified by the "mountain railroad"(line 3) is buttressed by Mrs. Thomas in order that she may underscore her personal belief about the spiritual and secular lived experience, that is, internal and external systems and practices, as connected by a common worldview. The practice of conduct, or behavior, is musically explained to Bigger as reflective of a person's emotional and spiritual characteristics. Mrs. Thomas deciphers the social performance of behavior as an encounter that cannot be separated or

alienated from 'native' or 'home' conditions. These conditions orchestrate the success of a subject or "engineer" (line 2) as someone who 'births' (invents) solutions and progressive innovations. Mrs. Thomas's linking of successful living to the workings of a courageous engineer suggests that, as Baraka indicates, "blues is formed out of the same social and musical fabric that the spiritual issued from, but with the blues the social emphasis becomes more personal, the "Jordan" of the song much more intensely a *human* accomplishment (63). Mrs. Thomas's perspective about her social and personal role as a symbolic engineer infuses into her pantheon of beliefs the subjective position of self-determination as a clever approach to living. Mrs. Thomas's emphasis on the importance of self-determination, and emotional courage, as important concepts for living gives meaning and significance to the subjective engineer as an identity is interwoven with an ability to "make the run successful" (line 3), or, with the development or destruction of civilization. From this standpoint, the values and perspectives of the subjective heart and mind have a direct effect on human and cultural existence.

Bigger's mother, in communicating an attitude about her female identity as an engineer whose interpretive frameworks and approaches, validates her 'native' *belief* in personal success as an internal journey of developing emotional and moral courage. The exertion of moral and social survival is also formulated according to Mrs. Thomas's exceptional belief in her worth and right to exist. An important basis for Mrs. Thomas's indictment of her will to exist is ordered on the basis of her singing of this personally *felt* belief. This native belief is justified by Mrs. Thomas's attitude about life as an experience of "making the run successful" (line 3). In discussing reality as an important African American female epistemology of facts and information, the narrative emphasizes the power of personal belief as sometimes in conflict with social or external expectations. Such a position is also represented as sometimes

phenomenological or exceptionally defiant of traditional human expectations. Still, the very existence of Mrs. Thomas's 'minor' belief in her female worth is enough to give value to the contents of her *emotional* belief. This belief is valued as categorically factual on the basis that what Mrs. Thomas *feels,* consciously or unconsciously, is enough to support her cultural survival and spiritual living.

The historical appropriation of American religious rhetoric constitutes an important reason for the novel's choice to construct Mrs. Thomas as singing real songs. The song lyrics of the first song, "Railway to Heaven," are documented as written by a Mormon woman named Eliza R. Snow. Snow, an important figure in the nineteenth century Latter Day Saints religion, and a European American woman, is known mostly as one of the plural wives of the founder, Joseph Smith, Jr, and to also one of its chief leaders, Brigham Young. The contribution of Snow's worldview into Mrs. Thomas's own standpoint can be better explained as having more to do with a universal female felt *longing*, regardless of race, for female uplift. As Baraka also documents, "Christianity's sole purpose was to propose a metaphysical resolution for the slave's natural yearnings for freedom, and as such, it literally made life easier for him" (39). Mrs. Thomas's singing of a western song forges a link between Eurocentric American women and African American women around a common basis for living. The shared worldview on life frames and reaffirms common attitudes as perhaps key to the reconciliation of racial and gendered conflicts. If, then, "making the run successful/from the cradle to the grave" (lines 3-4) hinges upon a particular philosophical belief, the dissemination of Mrs. Thomas's social oppression is constructed as requiring spiritual and attitudinal unity about the lived journey as an experience that depends on making real an imaginative "We" (line 3) vision as an important worldview for individual and society's success. The marginality or suppression of African

American women, demarcated by realities affronted by divisions, exclusion, segregation, and un-equality, consciously or unconsciously influences, to a degree, Mrs. Thomas's choice to sing a shared belief in success. In her second song, Mrs. Thomas shares her felt *desire* to *be* like "a Christian":

> *Lord, I want to be a Christian,*
> *In my heart, in my heart,*
> *Lord, I want to be a Christian,*
> *In my heart, in my heart…* (35)

To be a Christian is interpreted by Mrs. Thomas as to develop a subjective character that is organized by spiritual standards and healthy self-values. The adjective use of Christian acknowledges Bigger's mother's *longing* to live a noble and morally fulfilling lifestyle. The latter's desired nobility insists on conditioning her character according to conduct that is high in ranking, honorable, and personally magnificent. The external conduct of nobility occurs in the context of empowering subjectivity in the "heart" (line 1). Mrs. Thomas's desire symbolically explains one 'native' reason for African American women's singing as an experience that is mediated by an emotional desire to perform behaviors which can best be described as divine, high in ranking and spiritually outstanding. The use of Christian motifs, as an epistemological frame for existence, and social purpose, further speaks to Mrs. Thomas's personal principle about the text of life as an intrinsically spiritual condition. Mrs. Thomas's desire for empowerment and self-esteem operates within a pantheon of beliefs which tie subjectivity and the life-cycle to a network of emotional and spiritual goals and approaches. The subsequent performance of a gospel song gives validity to Mrs. Thomas's heart-felt philosophy. <u>In Protest & Praise: Sacred Music of Black Religion</u>, Jon Michael Spencer points out that, as far as the modern rise of gospel music is concerned, "if the message of spirituals is endurance of the trails of this life with the reward of life after death, that of gospel songs is more immediate" (199).

The most significant element of the gospel song, perhaps, is their offering of "a real basis for a study of social redemption expressed in song […], it will serve not only to express, but to cultivate both the deepest religious feelings and the noblest social aspiration" (77). Mrs. Thomas's conventional use of gospel singing gives credence to a notion about social justice as somewhat interwoven with Christian-like moral logic and information. Fundamental to this female worldview is a psychological context for social justice as grounded in personal religion or spirituality. Whereas injustice is exemplified by African American women's experiences with marginality and enslavement, the achievement of social justice, conversely, is signified by an African American woman's exceptional ability to sing and to conduct her identity in ways which are Christian-like. Mrs. Thomas, in also singing about wanting to re-create her African American female identity as a Christian, challenges traditional perceptions about African American women as lacking moral value. This long-standing patriarchal logic is undermined by a womanist perspective that politicizes, at the same time, the relationship between her social status and her moral religiosity. This gendered commitment to defining and determining her personal identity supports an epistemology about subjective worth as an internal perception that becomes externally performed or communicated. The human text of subjectivity, here, is supplemented as a niche that is privately positioned from within. Through these emotional and spiritual ideological frameworks, one example of the modern African American female identity is characterized according to a model of social virtue and personal nobility. These female assumptions challenge patriarchal concepts about womanhood according to material or object relationships. An important reading of Mrs. Thomas's identity as a welfare mom, systemically augmented by monetary value, is structured according to general subordination and oppression to the mother-group due to a fact that cultural beliefs frame all African American women as

valueless and therefore market-driven by a system of political economy that economically disenfranchises women in general. The use of singing to re-orient the exchange economy between an African American woman and her relationship with the state offers, as a new basis for value, the 'business' of spiritual or moral materiality as reasons for cultural support and protection. Mrs. Thomas's desire, then, to be a Christian is directly connected to her lack of social support and respect, which also includes healthy living standards, and the security of a safe, humane environment.

Mrs. Thomas's choice to embody values which are antithetical to her environment is mostly the working of value to her 'native' voice, a personal structure that the novel seems to also insist doubles as a moral guide. The externalization of this 'inner' voice is treated by Mrs. Thomas as a practice that endeavors to guide the human will in in negative or positive ways. Singing, specifically, is fashioned as a felt impression that shapes itself through a voice that guides Christian-like attitudes into a formula for free will. The central factor that influences value to Mrs. Thomas's inner voice is her ability to listen to, sing, and perform her native voice in ways that prove productive to her existence. As a basis of listening to the inner voice or emotional intuition, free will is represented as exerting an enormous amount of moral and behavioral leverage. This emotional nurturing of voice, in a social environment that is saturated with counter-productive and destructive norms, traces a notion of exceptionality and power to the intuitive force of singing. Even though Wright positions environment as having a dominant role in both the construction and controlling of subjective identities, he also, in the interest of individual responsibility, insists on a reading of singing as an internal force that mediates subjective free will. Personal choice influences whether Mrs. Thomas chooses to succumb to environmental fatalism, as does Bigger, or whether she chooses to operate according to an

alternative, although minor, musical worldview that improvises mantras based on perceptions of self-dignity, empowerment, and social justice. Here, the novel attributes a perspective about the modern environment as having a limited amount of real power in the spiritual and psychological enslavement of social members. Mrs. Thomas is instead characterized according to her exercising of free will into a source of real, physical power that determines her philosophical and lived fashioning of life. While there is recognition of real threats to Mrs. Thomas's life, including debilitating poverty and physical oppression, the whole result of personal will power, and therefore social behavior, is attributed to Mrs. Thomas's *choice* to give value to her native or personal voice. The performance of singing makes visibly real this invisible, emotional will. Bigger, to his detriment, chooses to glorify a patriarchal 'foreign' voice that condones violence and material economic exchange as modes which falsely inform power and personal significance.

Mrs. Thomas's singing of her native beliefs communicates a different reading of motherhood as an identity that regenerates educational and spiritual values and rituals within community life. Mrs. Thomas delineates singing as relational to her natural, creative role as a mother. These mothering responsibilities are theorized according to a woman's ability to vocally nurture her culture or 'children' with tools, skills, and principles for navigating lived experience and personal identity. Singing operates in doubly empowering ways, for, on the one hand, voice signifies value to a woman's native voice and therefore personal identity. This translates into Christian-like conduct. As a creative or birthing structure that regenerates values and beliefs, on the other hand, singing codifies African American women as primary social leaders. While Mrs. Thomas's identity is conditioned according to a double conscious context that operates as primary and authoritative within African American community life, but as minor or secondary

within the mainstream culture, still, Mrs. Thomas makes unstable her social category as marginal by self-determining and singing her native identity as having significance and worth. Here, womanhood is self-defined as a personal institution that authorizes both power and value according to the native female perceptions and felt views.

Visible and invisible forces and symbols are demarcated throughout Native Son as systems where everyday reality, and personal identity, are characterized and developed. A visible symbol of womanhood, throughout the novel, is the domestic home setting. Some invisible forces, including temporal speed as a force that regulates personal power, and state policies, alongside the forces which affect the singing voice, point to a narrative theme about everyday reality and subjectivity as complex processes which render meaning and significance through visual and non-visual realities. The narrative construction of invisible forces, perhaps, contextualizes subjective and cultural formations according to a *belief* in an existing cosmic ordering that becomes *identified* or *known* through subjective readings and/or listening practices. This *known* cosmic force, in some ways, represents free will or choice according to a binary positive or negative relational power dynamics. It is possible to read Native Son as a novel of cosmic proportion due to its insistence on characterizing the human condition, and society, according to a pre-existing cosmic system of invisible forces. Furthermore, the novel constructs a theory about the practice of reading as an experience that lends itself to visual and non-visual symbols and signs as useful for translating or interpreting information about life and the human identity. Mrs. Thomas, as a *visible* symbol for motherhood and womanhood, uses the *invisible* system of emotional singing to construct and read her native subjectivity. The *invisible* belief or force behind singing is made *visibly* manifest through the physical property of Mrs. Thomas's human voice.

Throughout the novel, another important episteme of singing is characterized by a relationship of visual and non-visual unity between emotional spiritual beliefs and its externalized conduct or performance. Narrative notions about free will and choice gives resonance to the novel's attitude about internal/external vocal alliance as central to a discussion about the unity between voice and purpose. The invisible practice of reading by listening is also explained as compatible with the very nature of visible human performance. External conduct, in the form of creative expression, is treated as inseparable from the interior or the native parameters which construct, chiefly, subjective beliefs, knowledge, and consciousness. The identity of silence, subsequently, results in a split or division between the internal and external signifiers of voice. A circumstantial irony of voice, here, also lies in the fact that it cannot represent itself. Instead, the felt episteme of voice depends on a vehicle or instrument that must be aurally heard, or witnessed, in order to earn meaning and significance. Mrs. Thomas's African American female identity, while dependent on an internal journey of reading and feeling out female rituals and beliefs, is also contingent on the uniting of this worldview or attitude with external conduct or behaviors. A 'minor' theme here is that singing earns its power through the 'birthing' act of symbolic or literal representation. Singing also ensures creative or 'birthing' value and meaning to native or internal realities.

The novel situates an important final literary fact about the extraordinary significance of the modern African American woman to notions of cultural and spiritual survival. Mrs. Thomas, throughout, is symbolically characterized as *the* person who is given the charge of communicating certain cosmic signs and conventions which are narratively constructed as the truths or facts about identity-formation and the lived journey. Namely, that subjectivity is a profoundly spiritual and internal journey of characterizing voice and conduct in "Christian-like"

ways and that the life experience is a “mountain railroad” that must imperatively end successfully “from the cradle to the grave.” Women’s access and participation in modern society, and their vested interest in its wellbeing and future, affect whether or not society progresses in meaningful ways, or whether or not society leans on stupefying ideals, vis-a-vis Bigger, which are geared towards the annihilation of civilization. This minor symbolic emphasis on African American womanhood, thus, supports an overarching theory about the overall conservation and primary significance of African American maternal singers to the regenerative success of civilization. Mrs. Thomas’s singing provides a narrative body of knowledge on the text of living, and therefore survival, as an exceptional exercise on what it means to live successfully, to attain spiritual wealth, and on how to position self-worth and information which mediate Christian behavior and existence. Mrs. Thomas’s success as a social survivor is indeed proof of this favorable outcome. This is all the more clear in Mrs. Thomas’s contradicting of racist and patriarchal ideologies and institutions which directly threaten the very existence of African American livelihood and culture. In a real sense, Mrs. Thomas represents the most successful character in Native Son for it is she who communicates her ‘native’ belief in her worth and right to exist. This personal context on existence emerges as the most important process within the text of the life journey. Although prevailing conflicts such as material obsession and gendered subordination undercut Mrs. Thomas’s vocal worldview, these contexts are represented as overpowering Bigger’s very existence, yet, Mrs. Thomas, by singing the interior values of moral courage and conduct, insures the survival of her spiritual attitude and cultural identity. This disposition to live is worked out into an impulse-like medium of self-expression that takes as its form singing. Singing enables Mrs. Thomas to understand the functional components of her lived reality as an epistemology that measures success according to

the materiality of existence. The material richness of living is further imagined as the everyday performance of spiritual or meaningful beliefs and values. The African American woman, in this way, is philosophized as a cultural treasure whose singing views, and biological phenomenon as birthing children, determine an objective epistemological knowing about African American female subjectivity as the most significant and powerful cultural member within a 'native' home or society. After all, it is the representative Mrs. Thomas figure who overcomes all social and personal struggles with impressive abandon. The living and laboring of the African American mother asserts a modern attitude about the experience of womanhood as a reality of conquering all obstacles, of regenerating society with social members, and above all, of living. Mrs. Thomas owes her latter honor to her continued existence, her present-ness or *here-ness*, as an everyday African American female text of civilization. This exemplary example serves as a narrative theme on singing as an allegory about the potentialities that come with everyday 'creative' power. Female power takes the shape of an everyday recognition and communication of personal worth. Although the center of Mrs. Thomas's power is represented as cosmically invisible, this power, as a bastion for security and survival, supplies Bigger's mother with the fortitude and structures to cope with and overcome social oppression. In a way, the novel's depression-era systemic setting, as a motif for the 'native' American worldview as scarcely indistinguishable from the novel's atmospheric rendering of social patriarchy as manically miserable, unhappy, and hopelessly far below the heights of Mrs. Thomas's "mountain railroad," is offset by a female point of view that insists on the ineluctability of an overarching cosmic force as disciplining the everyday belief in living into an epistemology that justifies personal and social success through existence. The text on existence, here, categorizes the thematic expression of survival and healthy living as factual embodiments of the true excellence in

African American women. Singing, as a context, transmutes this personal belief into lived reality.

Bibliography

Baraka, Amiri. Blues People: The Negro Experience in White America and the Music That Developed From It. New York: William Morrow and Company, 1963.

Brivic, Sheldon. "Conflict of Values: Richard Wright's "Native Son." NOVEL: A Forum on Fiction. 7.3 (Spring 1974): 231-245.

Butler, Robert James. "The Function of Violence in Richard Wright's Native Son. Black American Literature Forum. 20.1/2 (Spring-Summer 1986): 9-25.

Hill-Collins, Patricia. Black Feminist Thought: Knowledge, Consciousness, and the Politics of Empowerment. 2nd Edition. New York: Routledge, 2000.

Keady, Sylvia H. "Richard Wright's Women Characters and Inequality." Black American Literature Forum. 10.4 (Winter 1976): 124-128.

Miller, Eugene E. "Review: Authority, Gender, and Fiction." African American Review. 27.4 (Winter 1993): 687-691.

Rampersad, Arnold. "Introduction." Native Son. Perennial Classics: New York, 1998 [1940].

Singh, Raman K. "Christian Heroes and Anti-Heroes in Richard Wright's Fiction." Negro American Literature Forum. 6.4 (Winter 1972): 99-104.

Snow, Eliza. Wikipedia. 19 Aug. 2011. < en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Eliza_R._Snow>

Spencer, Jon Michael. Protest & Praise: Sacred Music of Black Religion. Fortress P: Minneapolis, 1990.

Wright, Richard. "How Bigger Was Born." Native Son. Perennial Classics: New York, 1998 [1940].

Wright, Richard. Native Son. Perennial Classics: New York, 1998 [1940].

CHAPTER FIVE

Go Tell It on the Mountain: African American Women's Harmonious Singing of 'It'

"Must Jesus bear the cross alone,
And all the world go free?"
James Baldwin
-Go Tell It on the Mountain

"Go Tell It on the Mountain," the African American spiritual song compiled by John Wesley Work, Jr. which dates its origin to the mid nineteenth century, is typically celebrated as a Christmas carol. Work's compiling of the latter song into his book, New Jubilee Songs and Folk Songs of the American Negro, published in 1907, archives African American creative expression as an activity that reflects nativity or birthing. "Go Tell It" also calls attention to an important African American philosophy about the essence of expression, or the "telling" of "it," based on a long-standing cultural belief in a fact "that Jesus Christ is born." In "Come-to-Jesus Stuff in James Baldwin's Go Tell It on the Mountain and The Amen Corner," Barbara K. Olson identifies Baldwin's novel as "laden with black spirituals and biblical allusions" (295). Olson argues that Go Tell It on the Mountain "is a novel about Christian experiences and Christian values" (297). The theological and didactic references in the song point to a particular African American practice of merging spiritual values into secular or social forms of creative expression. The relationship between the anecdote of cultural expression and a shared spiritual understanding about the birth of Christ, more importantly, addresses a *known* belief within African American life relative to the fabric of African American cultural and spiritual formations. That the text of expression is tied to a message of religious and spiritual nativity calls attention to a generally accepted view about 'telling' as a creative endeavor that is similar to the spiritual birthing or creating of a perspective or point of view. This view is evident in Baldwin's reproduction of the

aforementioned spiritual song as the title of his first novel. Baldwin's novel speaks to a narrative point of view about writing, particularly African American creative writing, as a product of 'telling' a point of view. The author's construction of African American singing as the motif for his narrative's 'telling' voice represents the heritage of African American musical 'telling' of cultural values, customs, and philosophies as an ontological basis for all African American expression. The naming of Go Tell It after a song also consciously or unconsciously borrows from an African American worldview and practice of 'telling' through singing. African American writing is also ideologically regulated by a system of communication that points out the impetus for creativity as that of performing a spiritual standpoint. African American formal writing approaches the representation of spiritual subject matter as central to its discipline. The telling of "it," therefore, identifies expression as an intrinsically revelatory medium for connecting to or with a Higher Power or cosmic force. To communicate "it on the mountain" points out, at best, an African American spiritual *belief* in the experience of self-expression as a divinely important discourse that unites a subject or person with his or her God. This mountain, as a motif for the location of God, holds fast to a notion of disclosure as paramount to accessing a spiritually divine space. The grounds for self-expression, here, view the truthful airing of a perspective or point of view as important for fostering spiritual transcendence. Telling the truth also justifies the essence of expression as a practice that links a concept of communication to a condition of practicing honesty. This central thought posits the genre of African American fiction as a space for disclosing African American truths or facts. Such a framework is shaped by a historical context of African American life as a social experience that has been typically structured according to distorted or untruthful information and perceptions. Fiction writing is

delineated as constitutive of one important site for reclaiming and exploring facts or truths about African American life, and subjectivity.

The emergence of African American writing and singing promotes the interests and beliefs of the latter's heritage through a literary rhetoric that constructs a narrative with the intention of contesting worldviews which distort facts about African American life, and its people. Privileging the literary text as a space for interpreting and exploring cultural truths, Baldwin's novel registers the critical practice of writing as an imaginative force that impresses personal power and spiritual truth into a representative artist. The discipline of African American writing is also influenced by literary, historical, ideological, political, and spiritual discourses. The materiality of the former practice identifies a common basis for African American creative expression as supported by a spiritual worldview. Baldwin's novel also contextualizes a spiritually meaningful heritage as central to narrative characterization and analysis. This particular concept positions the novel as a sacred text, and as a songbook, on the basis that the very act of creation emanates from a cosmic source. The African American novel, in this light, refines a discussion about the spiritual factors and influences which intertwine with African American cultural life.

Go Tell It, as a sacred text on the African American experience, imaginatively represents the African American culture and worldview as a sacred civilization. Such a text validates readings of the African American cultural experience according to meaningful and valuable perspectives. Baldwin's aim in titling his work after a spiritual song, in some ways, constitutes an important definition of the African American novel as a space that rhetorically and spiritually authorizes African American voices into a formal discipline. This view, primarily, prompts a reading of the literary text as a symbolic voice that facilitates literary and spiritual African

American conventions and practices. Such a theory of the novel as ontologically organized around African American spiritual voices or philosophies fosters a point about African American creative expression as a middle passage between a subject and his/her "mountain." The nature of this literary knowledge traces the emergence of particular concepts and ideas to a supernatural, spiritual episteme. Situating musical singing in a similar fashion, Baldwin formulates the African American worldview as powerfully spiritual. A discussion of power, here, forges moral conduct and consciousness as connected to the production of artistic works and texts. The narrative construction of African Americans as a sacred people is also related to a literary position about the social strategy of spiritual transcendence as an effective coping mechanism for living in a society that is systemically dehumanizing. The imperviousness of the latter perspective accounts for a fact about African Americans as spiritually valuable and significant, while also suggesting that, as a goal, the institutional and discipline shaping of spiritual values are connected to *the* overall African American cultural purpose of achieving social justice.

The institutional purpose of developing and representing African American spiritual voices is also made clearer by the novel's representation of the pioneering African American church as a site where African Americans adapt the practice of singing into a primary structure for communicating and challenging cultural oppression. The church is constructed as one important institution that projects, as its mantras, freedom and social justice. As a cornerstone for justice, the African American church emerges as a specific African American system that approximates the healthy development of a spiritual cultural identity, while also serving as a frontier for social movements and political activism. This institutional aspiring perpetrates a belief about the essence of African American life as spiritually sustaining. Identifying the African American culture according to a spiritual identity that is then systematized into a literal

system of church worship clarifies the latter group's universal and moral condition in a manner that demonstrates the text of African American life, and cultural membership, as drawing on a civilizing mission of spiritual sensibility. The juncture between spiritual values and the text of African American life reinforces a worldview of cosmic nobility, and majestic hybrid identities, as philosophies which condition the basis for power and living. It is important to remember that W.E.B. Du Bois, concerning this topic, begins The Souls of Black Folk, his examination of African American life, with a chapter entitled, "Of Our Spiritual Strivings." Invoking an African American standard for living, Du Bois frames the lived experience according to a standpoint that suggests, at best, that African Americans are soulfully equipped with a spiritual episteme that adheres to some deeply accepted and ritualized beliefs. The African American tradition, suggests Du Bois, is a spiritual tradition that encompasses diverse internally manifested characteristics and principles. Du Bois fashions this distinguishably soulful cultural experience as an experience of trying to "attain self-conscious manhood" (45). Through the "innate love of harmony that set the ruder souls of his people *a-dancing and a-singing*" (46; emphasis mine), Du Bois defines the African American heritage as distinctively stimulated and characterized by a spiritual vision on character and conduct. A common purpose binding African Americans to this spiritual worldview is, Du Bois documents, "Freedom, too, the long-sought, we still seek,--freedom of life and limb, the freedom to work and think, the freedom to love and aspire. Work, culture, liberty,--all these we need, not singly but together, not successively but together" (52). This legacy of spiritual core themes reveals a long-standing African American perspective on the life journey and identity-formation. The latter's pretense for existence and subjectivity determines the discourse of liberation as the main vantage-point about life. Actions, beliefs, and culture factor and determine the link between the processes of personal responsibility to the lived

mission of attaining cultural freedom. This African American spiritual worldview is inseparable from facets of history and culture relative to the group's social development. Du Bois's discursive analysis about the essence of African American life conceptualizes and traces the cultural appearances of "a-dancing" and "a-singing" (46) as proof of the objectivity and discursive idealism of an African American world order that justifies its discourse of power through a profoundly cosmic and socially civilizing mission. Du Bois traces the proliferation of singing, for example, to a cosmic force that, in social settings, grafts the spiritual principle of freedom into a symbolically expressive lived conduct.

In part, the institution of African American churches nurtures the conditions which frame and motivate African American spiritual identities. The lived experience of translating spiritual beliefs into secular behavior also responds to a stereotypical tension that is adopted by notions of the spiritual and secular life journey as separatist in nature. In contrast, the African American spiritual worldview, understood in a context of a politics of freedom and social justice, organizes and institutionalizes the social environment according to a spiritual standpoint. Throughout A Black Theology of Liberation, James Cone recognizes the dialogical relationship between an African American spiritualist philosophy and the religious arena as justifying a spiritually influenced nationalist ideology: "If the content of the gospel is liberation, human existence must be explained as "being in freedom," which means rebellion against every form of slavery, the suppression of everything creative" (87). Cone also regards the African American appropriation of Christianity as a practice that reflects a general truth about Christian theology as "a theology of liberation" (1). Cone points out that the "sole reason for its existence is to put into ordered speech the meaning of God's activity in the world, so that the community of the oppressed will recognize that its inner thrust for liberation is not only *consistent with* the gospel but *is* the gospel

of Jesus Christ" (1). The most pervasive influence between African American religiosity, according to Cone, and the institutions which foster the development of churches is the lived experience and environmental condition with social oppression. Characterizing the dialogical relationship between the two, Cone links African American practices and actions which are geared at resisting and challenging social oppression as religious in nature, and as the true conduct and consciousness in and of religion. African American resistance to racism, for example, is, as Cone stresses, an act of behaving religiously or Christian-like. In describing Christianity within a context of social justice, the author recognizes the African American struggle for freedom and justice as expressions which are thematically theological. This point of view connects personal and institutionalized religion as operating within a parameter of practices which empower oppressed groups, and as a standpoint that links the struggle for freedom as a behavior or conducts that is intrinsically spiritual. True religion, here, traces concepts and social practices which are genealogically defined by the moral principles of freedom, and rebellion against oppression, as etymologically synonymous with the terms 'theology' and 'Christianity.' Cone's compelling argument unpacks notions of religious experiences, and ideas, in a context of the African American tradition of social justice movements. The roots of the African American church, then, as a literal institution that organizes the mentioned precepts and ideals into a site that develops and fosters practices and knowledge which stand in defense of religious conviction, traces, as its dominant characteristic, an African American spiritual worldview that is augmented by a unified vision of individual and collective freedom. In The Mis-Education of the Negro, Carter G. Woodson further characterizes the African American church as "the only institution that the race controls. […]. In the church […] the Negro has had sufficient freedom to develop this institution in his own way" (57). Woodson suggests that "the Negro church, however,

although not a shadow of what it ought to be, is the great asset of the race" (52). Some of these "great assets" (57) as the author notes, include "the honest leadership of intelligent men and women. Social uplift, business, public welfare" (53). Most useful, in some ways, Woodson demonstrates that the African American church is a social institution that encourages solutions, and that fosters the development of healthy African American identities, including in roles as leaders, while contributing to the environmental wellbeing or uplift of the community through a perspective of spiritual connectedness. The ideological and political interests of the church adopt common themes and methods which are informed by a recognized need, with freedom as a solid base, to challenge oppression and to reinforce cultural unity and pride.

The church also reinforces a vision of female worth and freedom through powerful expression or conduct. In Righteous Discontent: The Women's Movement in the Black Baptist Church 1880-1920, Evelyn Brook Higginbotham engages with a school of thought on the African American church as an important and useful institutional space for validating African American cultural life: "the black church—open to both secular and religious groups in the community—came to signify public space. […] It held political rallies, clubwomen's conferences, and school graduations. It was the one space truly accessible to the black community" (7). Higginbotham also traces an important position of the church "as a discursive, critical arena—a public sphere in which values and issues were aired, debated, and disseminated throughout the larger black community" (7). Higginbotham describes and points out an important logic for African American women's embracing of the church as a way to advance female uplift. African American women's use of churches further speaks to a female longing for institutional support. Higginbotham documents that African American women historically "constituted two-thirds" of church life, and, as a result, had "a crucial role in the formation of

public sentiment and in the expression of a black collective will" (7). The validation of African American women's cultural traditions is traced by the author to the institutional church life.

As a social institution that establishes significance and value to African American women's voices, the church is constructed as an important facilitator of female unity and freedom. The church's further encouragement of female unity is also principally characterized through the convention of choir singing, and also through a musical context of call-and-response. These two practices trace the institutional emergence of African American female singers, prior to the modern existence of the African American female paid entertainer, to the theological practice of spiritual singing. Female singing is institutionally defined according to a spiritualist and unifying worldview. In this context, African American women's singing is related to a broad range of female–centered musical approaches to resisting and challenging social oppression and enslavement. The main platform for the advancement of African American women's social activism is the unified use of church singing as a behavior for working out female specific solutions to environmental patriarchy and racism. The theological basis for African American women's unity, moreover, defines 'Black Power' as philosophically oriented by shared values and conduct. This womanist definition of power based on shared commitments and values formulates female empowerment, freedom, and concepts of social justice as principally complicit with sisterhood.

African American women's shared commitment to singing, narratively symbolized through the singing identities of two minor female characters, supports a reading of African American female unity as synonymous with the achievement of social justice, equality, and freedom. Baldwin's literary singers, secondary characters named Florence and Elizabeth Grimes, are constructed in a context of modern experiences which ground their female identities

through a double consciousness of exiled silence and vocal belonging. The novel examines the theme of silence as an alienating condition that isolates and dehumanizes African American women. The paradigm of singing, conversely, is represented as mediating the group's shared unity with other African American women. The novel is set in Harlem during the Second World War and the context of war underscores women's double conscious conflict with shared singing and isolated silence due to the fact that both women live in a culture that is institutionally patriarchal. The climactic highpoint for these minor characters is connected with their initial rejection but later achievement of singing as an African American female practice that engages an honest interrogation of the double conscious conflicts or wars which relate not only to their physical and spiritual sickness, but also to their healing and survival. The former crisis of self-silence, also symbolic of African American women's blatant lack of belief in their identities and in a cosmic power, submits to a reading of voice as a personal structure that is directly influenced by the interior or home development of positivist ideals and values. The novel, here, also supposes singing as an activity that operates, for Florence and Elizabeth, as a stream of consciousness that frames emotions, memories, and experiences into a worldview that adopts, through singing, its rhetorical and 'visible' significance. The posture of singing stands as an event in experiential subjective representation. Concretely, then, Go Tell It represents the centrality of reading and interpreting the minor 'character' of voice as derivative of the true essence and value of subjectivity. Personifying voice also supports a narrative perspective about vocal music as a cosmically phenomenological force that surfaces specifically through African American women. This narrative *belief*, perhaps, broadly subscribes to a profoundly spiritual faith in a Higher Power as the source of all creative expression. A singer, like a writer, is rendered as a 'chosen' instrument for cosmic translation or interpretation. The appeal to this

logic suggests that systemic worldviews or practices which assure the censure or suppression of self-expression temper the spiritual relationship and involvement between a Higher Power and a human subject. The absence of spiritual input, according to the narrative, is akin to absolute suffering and death. Also noted throughout Go Tell It is a fact about the reductive characterization of Florence and Elizabeth as a point of view that is narratively organized as perceptive in nature. The efforts of both secondary characters are for the most part examined through their own sectioned chapters: *Part Two: The Prayers of the Saints: "Florence's Prayer," and then "Elizabeth's Prayer*." The literary prominence of the mentioned women deliberately opposes reading practices and perceptions which stock secondary narrative actors as having very little literary value or worth. By constructing the interests and experiences of Florence and Elizabeth into chapters, the novel invests in a notion of 'minor' status as both constructed and perceptive. As the doyens of the novel, the characters of John's aunt and mother are endowed with a considerate amount of principal space and attention. Such focus reinforces marginality as a subjective point of view rather than as intrinsic or innate. Finally, attention to the interests of African American female singers, as symbols for the African American cultural voice and spiritual worldview, espouses an important belief within African American cultural life based on a notion of social harmony. It is this spiritualist perspective that the narrative situates as in conflict with a society that is patriarchal and exclusory.

The initial haughty and disdainful pride that defines Florence's literary character is represented as non-cooperative with the rhetorical humility and powerful harmony in singing as a medium that determines cultural healing from social and self-inflicted malaise. Florence seeks to 'separate' singing from her life altogether, citing as her main reason a condescending disbelief in the power of the female voice. Florence's capitulation to proud silence and a denouncement

of singing for help is also conditioned by her indoctrination to a principle of isolated self-reliance as the answer to cultural practices which marginalize and oppress African American women. Adopting a common judgment of atheism in relation to this self-reliant determination, Florence further suppresses whatever spiritual connection she has with a supernatural or cosmic power. Two important lived experiences mark Florence's rejection of singing as a pipeline to spiritual healing and re-awakening. Steeped in a society that caters to the male identity and perpetuated by religious dogma and practices, Florence finds her aspirations for personal uplift compromised by efforts which style African American women as inferior and prime for violation. Bitter about this fact that the sexual malaise against African American women are institutionalized and encouraged by her own society, Florence comes to occupy a pessimistic and selfish vision of self-dependence as an ideal coping mechanism. Personally humiliated by 'white' supremacy propaganda that frustrates the healthy development of a spiritual, female identity, Florence is also witness, as a teenager, to the sexual violation of her peer, Deborah. Deborah is tragically used to reinforce the unequal power status between African Americans and European Americans, and also between men and women. Through the social practice of rape, the narrative positions European Americans as terrorizing African American cultural life into conforming to a socially accepted hegemony of 'white' male supremacy. The raping of Florence's girlfriend, to some extent, also reveals that the purveyors of systemic oppression and violence somehow perceive and fear African American women as possessing considerable weight in the cultural development of African American unity and democratic equality. Remembering that terrible night, Florence recalls:

> Trouble had taken place in town today. Their neighbor Deborah, who was sixteen, three years older than Florence, had been taken away into the fields the night before by many white men, where they did things to her to make her cry and bleed. Today, Deborah's father had gone to one of the

> white men's houses, and said that he would kill him and all the other white men he could find. They had beaten him and left him for dead. Now, everyone had shut their doors, praying and waiting, for it was said that the white folks would come tonight and set fire to all the houses, as they had done before. (69)

Decades earlier, within a southern climate of fear and repression, Florence remembers the social pressures which establishes, both in the boundaries of life and thought, an environmental mood and lifestyle of female oppression and violence as proselytizing the underdevelopment of African American women's autonomy and freedom. Florence's loss of self-worth, along with rape and systemic intimidation, is further condoned by her community's inability to seek redress and justice. In the aftermath of this collective witnessing of female violation, attempts to voice and demand the full enforcement of Deborah's civil rights lead to the beating of her father, and threats of expulsion by way of arson. Apologists for Deborah's cause are terrorized and murdered for acting in defiance. It becomes clear to Florence that the basic constitutional rights which belong to Deborah have absolutely no value within general society. The collective censuring of the African American town, and treatment of African American women, engenders Florence's bitter resignation to a fact that her social position and worth as an African American woman is structured by a patriarchal commitment to the cultural extinction of African American life. The critical needs and perspectives of women, in particular, become increasingly ignored under the everyday practice and threat of sexual violence. Florence's vision of developing an ethos and spirituality which reflects "a day when she would be released from her unrewarding round of labor, when she could think of her own future and go out to make it" (72) is also chastised by intra-communal members who, supporting an ideal of African American nationalism in religion and culture, politicize the freedom and uplift of the community through a newly dominant perspective of African American patriarchy. The intra-group struggle for

female equality is rejected and downplayed by an extremely nationalistic patriarchy that institutionalizes the African American male into a modern tradition of leadership and significance. This commitment, as Florence notes, translates as the community's affirmation of a patriarchal system that characterizes a general dogma of male privilege as necessary for uplift: "Gabriel was the apple of his mother's eye. With the birth of Gabriel, which occurred when she was five, her future was swallowed up. There was only one future in the house, and it was Gabriel's—to which, since Gabriel was a manchild, all else must be sacrificed" (72). The community's stunning integration of patriarchy as a perspective that parallels its dominant society's Eurocentric view is also a simultaneous rejection of the female principles which the novel espouses as important to African American cultural life. In a sort of double violation, the prosperity and significance of the community, by way of oppressing and subordinating African American women, is adapted to benefit African American men. All of these major tendencies influence Florence's later adoption of cosmic disbelief and a stance of arrogance towards African American men in particular. The African American community's failure to support and nurture Florence's vision and identity contributes to Florence's unwitting rejection of religious faith and sentimental adoption of haughty pride as strategies for survival. Florence gives up the gospel, so to speak, because the gospel refuses to secure her spiritual and social vision of mobility.

Overwhelmed by illness and victimized by a systemic campaign of oppression and segregation, Florence, by resorting to the female practice of singing, finally engages in a spiritual dialogue with a Higher Power. This later revival of Florence's spirit and singing voice occurs as a result of a vicious physical illness that facilitates her rapid deterioration. Florence's grievous intervention with a Higher Power, once in middle age, supports an important reading of socially institutionalized oppression and physical suffering as experiences that can potentially mediate a

shift towards a spiritual support system. This reading re-orients perceptions of practices which are created to destroy and humiliate as instead conditioning subjective religious or cosmic metamorphosis. Due to her society's patriarchal measures, and because of her daily experience with intra-group conflict and exploitation, Florence circumstantially resorts to a cosmic source for answers and healing. In performing "the only song she could remember that her mother used to sing" (65), the narrative also characterizes Florence as reclaiming a 'native' mode of expression that until now had remained culturally dormant. This insistence on singing a song from memory is Florence's embracing of a structure that is implied as always available and present for personal use. Re-recognizing her vocal power, Florence re-connects with the shared views, dogmas, beliefs and rituals which are tied to her female identity, and cultural heritage. The moment of remembrance, spelled out by her mother, polemicizes the singing of voice to an African American female-centered tradition. The external tensions of her warring atmosphere, as a reactionary approach to her diseased situation, also explain Florence's resorting to 'native' expressions and beliefs. The reinforcement of negative environmental values sets the tone for the latter character's use of cultural values to justify her right to live. Completing this evolution is Florence's faith in singing as a framework for redressing sickness and self-destruction. This singing, as a medium for communicating with a Higher Power or God, is constructed as intrinsically holistic:

> *It's me, it's me, it's me, oh, Lord,*
> *Standing in the need of prayer*. (65)

Florence relies on singing in order to establish an intimate connection with a Higher Power. The establishment of this connection is signified by the concomitant awakening of the conscious or unconscious performance of creative self-expression as a resource that spiritually engages a discussion and exchange with a cosmic force. This engagement is also constructed as influenced

by personal *belief*. As an agreement, then, tapping into a cosmic space is contingent on Florence's ability to believe in, and share, her voice. In this case, singing symbolizes Florence's worth and 'presence' in the shared presence of a Higher Power or God. The appearance of God, here, is evinced by the fact that Florence uses the medium of communication, or telling, as a means to commune with her mountain. The polemic of this view is centered on a belief in singing as a prayerful experience that ritually links a human subject to God. To tell, in this case, to sing, is to transcend the boundaries of the secular world and access a divine entity that becomes a spiritual meeting between God and a subject. The inspiration for Florence's "standing" (line 2) is further evinced by climatic pressures that leave her in "need" (line 2). Florence's humble recognition of this "need" for health is determined by patriarchal segregation. The deliberate pressures to keep African American women's voices separate and silent explain one reason why Florence initially refuses to engage with her voice. Singing secures Florence's healing based on her *belief* in the ritual practice of self-expression as contributing to overall subjective wellbeing. Florence's consensus for physical healing, moreover, is also characterized by her internal warring between the spiritual binary of belief/disbelief in a cosmic source greater than her. This struggle is eventually remedied in Florence's choice to reach into this African American spiritual tradition, regardless of whether or not she may or may not receive the results she needs, as part of her longing to be healed. It is this choice to sing, regardless of outcome, that redeems Florence's worth. Consequently, the spiritual and holistic character of singing, is due to the fact that the willingness and determination to share, through communication, is by design mobilized by a conduct of humility and a politics of honesty. Simultaneously placated as synonymous with voice, the quality of modest and respectful honesty engages the text of voice as theoretically grounded in a philosophical ideology of virtue that transcends subjective egotism.

To be vocally honest, in this way, *is* to be personally grounded in a conscience of self-worth. Florence's "need" is truthfully demonstrated in her singing desire to liberate her spiritual self-worth from social oppression and personal demons. In order to achieve this, the narrative suggests, Florence shares her song, honestly and with humility, as proof of belief that she will attain physical and spiritual health. The tranquility of honesty as a characteristic of voice prompts an important reading of truth as a political weapon that protests cultural hegemonies based on dishonesty or fictions. The personification of truth through a character of voice represents singing as a non-violent attitude that positions the resistance and protesting of social injustice through the honest politicization of voice. Adopting a stance of telling (singing) the truth is narrated as a powerful tool for grappling with realities of contradictions which are rooted in distorted facts and information. By being "in need of prayer" (line 2), Florence addresses the paradoxes which obscure her true identity, and as such, communicates a want of truth that is necessary for her healing, and for putting an end to her suffering. Appealing for prayer, Florence tempers the rapport of truth as a value that is central to redeeming belief in her identity, and in her God.

The oft emphasized "*it's me*" (x3) approaches the goal of personal and spiritual healing as modernly individualistic. Florence's song, as such, urges community reform, first, through individual metamorphosis. While the doings of community fellowship are emphasized as important to the general uplift of the community, Florence stages the journey towards this reconciliation according to a practice of personal responsibility. The novel then orients this personal campaign into a unifying movement:

> After a moment, the congregation and the piano joined her:
>
> *Not my father, not my mother,*
> *But it's me, oh, Lord*

Standing in the need of prayer. (65)

The democratic coalition of the church community, headed by a singing Florence, modestly begins through the individual example of an African American woman. This individuality gives equal significance and value to the individual as a primary actor in social change and transformation. Individual responsibility also insures that social participation amounts to a position that democratically proves beneficial for everyone. The significance of individuality also encourages the honest development of subjectivity as equally different and unique. Serious significance to individualism also eliminates the segregation of prestige within community life. Next, the church's democratic call-and-response to Florence's song defines the power of cultural unity as a matter of sharing a common perspective. While individual in character, perhaps, the conditions for unity are influenced by a unified reaction to a common struggle as African Americans in a patriarchal, capitalistic, racist society. Recognizing a shared "need of prayer" (line 2), the problem of intra-group division and conflict is resolved by a common consensus based on a desire for physical and spiritual healing. The success of this overwhelming harmony is established by the individual example of Florence's quest for truth and healing, followed by a communal rallying together under a common struggle and strategy of resistance. Invariably, the church members re-connect with a fact about the significance of women with cultural life, and the significance of this common belief to the successful uprooting of a racist pogrom waged by an American society against all members within the African American community. In this support for truth and justice, the community humbly accepts the basis for their uplift and freedom as harmoniously synonymous with the uplift and freedom of African American women.

Elizabeth Grimes, the other minor female singer, is represented throughout the novel as a depressed, silent character. Unlike Florence, her sister-in-law, who eventually develops and

exhibits her self-worth through singing, Elizabeth, the mother of the main character, John Grimes, reacts to her environmental struggles through sporadic moods of depression, isolation, and silence. Elizabeth is also constructed as a character whose self-worth is totally damaged by a society that imposes systemic oppression onto African American women, and, due to her own lack of self-esteem, an outlook that is explained as issuing from an emotionally insecure personal nature. In "Retreat from Experience: Despair and Suicide in James Baldwin's Novels," Sarah Beebe Fryer notes that, "the despairing living death Baldwin refers to throughout his works can manifest itself in a variety of ways: some violent […] others more passive—simply succumbing to the daily grind […]. For many of Baldwin's characters, despair appears inevitable, a simple fact of life" (24). The novel insists on a reading of Elizabeth's own feeling of inadequacy and personal self-rejection as inflaming the literal self-destruction of her female-oriented singing identity. As a matter of course, Elizabeth silences her perspective and deviates into a mental state of depression because she lacks the self-love to emotionally and physically resist and rise above her environmental chaos. Elizabeth's self-hate and lack of faith are linked to her silent despondency and social non-reactive stance. Such a philosophy portrays nihilistic behaviors, in relation to the self and community life, as emanating from personal perceptions of marginality. Elizabeth's personal abandonment of self-love is checked in her early childhood stages. For one, Elizabeth perceives her mother's judgment of her as an "unnatural" child" (174) to be a condition of her dark skin color: "Her mother did not, however, hold Elizabeth in her arms very often. Elizabeth quickly suspected that this was because she was very much darker than her mother, and not nearly, of course, so beautiful. When she faced her mother she was shy, downcast, sullen" (174). This quick and unwarranted suspicion issues out of Elizabeth's view of her skin color as having a direct impact on the absence of familial closeness between parent and

child. Further attributing the aesthetics of beauty to a politics of colorism, namely the lighter the skin the more beautiful, Elizabeth constantly interprets the basis of her self-worth through constructs which are unnatural and have no bearing on her reality, and identity. The harshness of self-imposing a standard of beauty that is unattainable renders Elizabeth's desire to become someone other than herself. Elizabeth's notion of a want for light skin as a replacement for her darker skin pits her needs and aspirations as a coveted or envious personal desire to attain qualities outside of her unique identity. Self-love and worth, in this way, are not represented as natural or innate qualities, as the novel insists, but rather as values which must be personally housed, developed, and nurtured. The fostering of institutions and support groups which encourage self-esteem and love are also basic to the novel's attitude on the reforming of Elizabeth's fatalistic self-hatred and worthlessness. That the institutions and social values of Elizabeth's environment encourage female marginalization and inferiority, through systemic oppression, also correlates with Elizabeth's rapid self-destruction. The absence of cultural opportunities and institutions for accommodating African American female self-esteem and philosophies ensures Elizabeth's silence and marginality. Policies relating to the nurturing of a female-centered inferiority complex, along with the pressures of nature, signify Elizabeth's female identity as a struggle with a double conscious nature vs. nurture complex. Elizabeth's private (interior) and public (exterior) systems account for her behaving inferiorly, and for her emotional battle with depression. Actual material conditions, "in the winter of 1920 as the year began, Elizabeth found herself in an ugly back room in Harlem" (185), along with the later witnessing of her boyfriend's run in with the police, false arrest, and later suicide, further signify Elizabeth's spiritual underdevelopment, and personal silence. Cultural beliefs also frame Elizabeth's female value according to a notion of sexual male desire as indicative of African

American female worth. The critical practice of identifying women through sexual definitions is also confounded by its relationship to a traditional practice that attributes the aesthetics of physical beauty as a demarcated zone for women's investment and value as sexual objects. Visually, this aesthetic defines a woman's successful attempts to excite male desire and physical pleasure as a rubric for female worth and value. This patriarchal worldview of signs reads female subjectivity entirely through visual frames. Based on the mentioned standards on physical beauty, and female-male sexual bonding, Elizabeth's identity is read as marginal or minor. Consciously or unconsciously giving in to these concessions, Elizabeth's personality is constructed as disempowered and enslaved by the institutionalization of lying as a worldview that is distortedly augmented as promoting the public health and moral wellbeing of women.

In the case of Elizabeth, whose personality is constructed as so vigorously haunted by guilt that she lacks the self-esteem or worth to position her perspective, the novel portrays a coalition of women, featured as a group choir, as transforming the silence that is indicative of the latter's isolated personality back into a subjectivity that is empowered by the shared force of singing. The crucial significance of female unity, here, emphasizes a culture of African American women's singing as paramount to the healing and uplift of intra-group cultural members who suffer under the duress of oppression and victimization:

> They were singing:
>
> *Must Jesus bear the cross alone,*
> *And all the world go free? (151)*

Elizabeth, fragmented and silenced, trail-blazes the issuing out of a theme by an imagined community of women who secure the latter's survival and recovery of voice through the juncture of female harmony. The community sings on behalf of Elizabeth in an attempt to share, *to* her, their shared *belief* in her value and worth as an African American woman. The choir of women,

in this way, is represented as united due to a similar struggle *and* also due to a common use of singing as a way to resist social and personal oppression. The unified politicization of singing, functions as a microcosm of the lived realities of African American women who live in a segregated, racist, male-centric society. This perspective positions female unity as central to any African American women's movement for liberation and equality, and dismisses intra-group division and conflict as in tandem with social uplift. The novel recognizes women's unified coming together in partnership and support *as* an achievement of social and spiritual justice. The singing revival of Elizabeth to a status of shared value and worth, provided she is also supported by a community of women, forthwith ensures all African American women's collective belonging and empowerment.

Elizabeth's rehabilitation is ensured by the vigorous singing of a choir of women whose mission it is to use their voices to liberate the most marginal amongst their own. The complete linearity of female progress begins with Florence's choice to sing as a powerful strategy for accessing a spiritual entity and for building up faith and self-esteem. Florence's individual conduct is later accepted and embraced by a community. Reactively, the community uses this common consensus to support and uplift other silenced members. Unrelenting in the maintenance of their way of life and culture, African American women's campaign for social justice accommodates the Americanist ideal of self-determination with an African Americanist front of collective unity into a successfully modern social movement for female freedom. This female community offers significance to each individual representative member as a fact about lived reality as an individual condition that is later framed by common experiences, ambitions, and expectations. Elizabeth, in this light, is characterized as a Christ-figure subject who suffers or bears a lonely "cross" (line 1). The lonely feeling that amplifies Elizabeth's personal

dissatisfaction, for very different reasons, centers the latter's perception of her 'innate' worthlessness as a mark that is isolated or specific to her identity as an African American woman. Elizabeth's loneliness, in general, forestalls her personal inferiority and social silence. The narrative's attending to the emotional worldview of Elizabeth as lonely points to a social investment in division or dissension as chiefly responsible for self-exile and the fostering of perceptions of worthlessness. The ordering of isolation and emotional loneliness is also represented as feeding the predilection of victimization into a perspective that dehumanizes human subjectivity. Connotations associated with Elizabeth's loneliness include her feeling self-pity, emptiness, and marginality. Elizabeth's struggle with her personal demon of not feeling connected, and its toleration by a climate of racial and gendered segregation, apathetically leads to self-rejection, and to her also feeling socially excluded. Similarly to the mood of the song, Elizabeth also renders her identity as comparably exclusory or absent of real meaning and significance. While some of this withdrawal can be associated with Elizabeth's experiencing of loss, i.e. the death of her mother, her father's abandonment, and the suicide of her boyfriend, her feeling lonely even in the company of others, illustrated through the church setting scene, also presents an existential reading of loneliness as characteristic of the universal human condition. This claim is followed by the group's consoling of Elizabeth, by their supporting her with a notion that she is not alone in her suffering, and also in their expressing, on her behalf, a worldview shared by other African American women:

No, there's a cross for everyone,
And there's a cross for me. (152)

The coming together of a coalition of women to sing a collective attitude about loneliness as a human condition opens up a space for a shared community. In performing this singular point of

view, collectively, the choir addresses the universality of their condition as a common conflict existentially shared by everyone, and also a shared value in self-expression as a common ritual for coping with loneliness. The specific cultural practice of singing, as *the* medium of African American self-expression, empowers Elizabeth to a fact about her lived reality, and emotional regard to this reality, as an experience that is culturally shared by other women. The community's recognition of African American women's significance and value, by now, is virtually signified in the community's singing back to Mrs. Bogle, i.e. Elizabeth, in an effort to deliberately engage the thematic of unity as an important proponent of community survival and female uplift. The responsibility of spiritually leading the community, as in the case of Elizabeth, requires group action and unity in the same way that the community's unified supporting of Elizabeth is recognized as contributing to her spiritual re-awakening, and also to her no longer feeling isolated and lonely. In this way, the African American consensus for female uplift, and the unity of African American women, is supported by a narrative attitude about the sharing of a heritage of African American nationalism, institutions, and cultural rituals as structures that operate best to resist and overcome the forces of racism and patriarchy. African American women's shared singing, more importantly, equate the institutionalization of cultural harmony as a theological worldview and political program which addresses the critical needs of all African American women.

Bibliography

Baldwin, James. Go Tell It on the Mountain. Dial: New York, 1963 [1952].

Balfour, Lawrie. "A Most Disagreeable Mirror": Race Consciousness as Double Consciousness." Political Theory. 26.3 (June 1998): 346-369).

Cone, James. A Black Theology of Liberation. Second Edition. New York: Orbis Books, 1986 [1970].

Fryer, Sarah Beebe. "Retreat from Experience: Despair and Suicide in James Baldwin's Novels." The Journal of the Midwest Modern Language Association. 19.1 (Spring 1986): 21-28

Giles, James R. "Religious Alienation and "Homosexual Consciousness" in City of Night and Go Tell It on the Mountain." College English. 36.3 (November 1974): 369-380.

"Go Tell It on the Mountain." Wikipedia. 19 Jul. 2011. < www.cyberhymnal.org/htm/g/o/ gotitotm.htm >

Higginbotham, Evelyn Brooks. Righteous Discontent: The Woman's Movement in the Black Baptist Church, 1880-1920. Cambridge: Harvard UP, 1993.

Nelson, Emmanuel S. "James Baldwin's Vision of Otherness and Community." MELUS. 10.2 (Summer 1983): 27-31.

Olson, Barbara K. "Come-to-Jesus Stuff" in James Baldwin's Go Tell it on the Mountain and The Amen Corner." African American Review. 31.2 (Summer 1997): 295-301.

Scruggs, Charles. "The Tale of Two Cities in James Baldwin's Go Tell it on the Mountain." American Literature. 52.1 (March 1980): 1-17.

Tate, Claudia. "Uncovering Female Cultures." The Women's Review of Books. 3.10 (July 1986): 17-18.

CONCLUSION

We'll walk in de light, de beautiful light
Zora Neale Hurston
-Their Eyes Were Watching God

In insisting on a new standard of reading value to African American women's musical voices, this dissertation emphasizes a female desire for justice, freedom, equality and unity. Despite traditional reading practices which define African American women as "minor" and insignificant, the analogous connection between singing and moral or virtuous interests recognizes African American women's singing as also their self-defining of female subjectivity as intrinsically possessing primary significance and worth. One direct consequence of this view, as Angela Davis suggests, is that patriarchal attitudes and standards which visually judge African American women according to the sexual degradation of the physical body influences a non-visual female felt *longing* or desire to "extract from the oppressive circumstances of their lives the strength they need to resist the daily dehumanization of slavery" (11) and a "confidence in their ability to struggle for themselves, their families and their people" (11). Due to a fact that the physical body is socially marked for violence and annihilation, and/or conditioned on external, destructive stereotypes and practices, African American women also rely on the affectively enlightening power in singing as recognition of personal value and power. In this way, singing is symbolic not only of African American female power, but also as a motif for the truth about African American women as morally and spiritually sustained. Self-determining affect into an internal power that cannot not be touched, seen, or marked, is tantamount to a validation of this alternative female-centered episteme. Patricia Hill Collins's illustration on the

workings of silence, along with the cultural practice of sexual violence and promiscuity, also supports value to a new female tradition of using the felt experience of singing to understand and overcome self and cultural marginalization. This dissertation claims that the internal power of affect, both as an experience and an ideal for the validation of an attitude, facilitates the self-development of an assertive, meaningful female identity.

In conclusion, this dissertation draws on the female use of singing as a mode for representing visibility and also as an activity that determines female worth. This dissertation also argues that singing fashions a principle about the true identity of womanhood as the everyday musical and emotional communication of a powerful voice. The dissertation re-orients female worth according to the internal and external unified characterization of a meaningful point of view. This new basis for womanhood also redraws a new praxis for representation and identity as personally defined and constructed. Female humanism, and female enlightenment, here, is defined as the constitutive choice and ability to construct personal identity free of restraint, prohibition, or fear of negative or dehumanizing ramifications. The significance of emotional fortitude, and its attachment to vocal power, debunks women's dependence on external forces for significance. The dissertation argues that singing re-defines female self-worth and freedom as personal experiences which are facilitated by the uninhibited interior and physical performance of an emotional, moral character. This modern reading of singing draws attention to the experience of vocal performance as an affective and cosmically exceptional experience that unifies the dual psychic power of a feeling with a supernatural deistic belief in a Higher Power as definitive of one true nature of *Being*.

Bibliography

Davis, Angela. Women, Race & Class. New York: Random, 1983 [1981].

Hill-Collins, Patricia. Black Feminist Thought: Knowledge, Consciousness, and the Politics of Empowerment. 2nd Edition. New York: Routledge, 2000.

LIST OF REFERENCES

Ahmed, Sara. The Cultural Politics of Emotion. New York: Routledge, 2004.

Baker, Houston. Blues, Ideology, and Afro-American Literature: A Vernacular Theory. Chicago: U of Chicago P, 1984.

Baldwin, James. Go Tell It on the Mountain. New York: Dial Press, 1966 [1952].

Baldwin, James. Notes of a Native Son. Boston: Beacon Press, 1955.

Baldwin, James. "Sonny's Blues." The Norton Anthology of Short Fiction. Seventh Edition. Eds: Richard Bausch and R.V. Cassill. New York: W.W. Norton & Co, Inc., 2006 [1978]. 37-59.

Balfour, Lawrie. "A Most Disagreeable Mirror": Race Consciousness as Double Consciousness." Political Theory. 26.3 (June 1998): 346-369.

Baraka, Amiri. Blues People: The Negro Experience in White America and the Music That Developed From It. New York: William Morrow and Company, 1963.

Berger, Gwen. "Who is That Masked Woman? Or, the Role of Gender in Fanon's Black Skin, White Masks." PMLA. 110.1 (January 1995): 75-88.

Blum, Edward J. "The Spiritual Scholar: W. E. B. Bu Bois." The Journal of Blacks in Higher Education. No. 57 (Autumn 2007): 73-79.

Bobo, Lawrence D. "Reclaiming a Du Boisian Perspective on Racial Attitudes." The Study of African American Problems: W. E. B. Du Bois's Agenda, Then and Now. Annals of the American Academy of Political and Social Science." Vol. 568. (Mar. 2000): 186-202.

Boutry, Katherine. "Black and Blue: The Female Body of Blues Writing in Jean Toomer, Toni Morrison, and Gayl Jones." Black Orpheus: Music in African American Fiction from the

Harlem Renaissance to Toni Morrison. Ed: Saadi A. Simawe. New York: Garland Publishing, 2000. 91-118.

Brivic, Sheldon. "Conflict of Values: Richard Wright's "Native Son." NOVEL: A Forum on Fiction. 7.3 (Spring 1974): 231-245.

Brown, Julie. "Introduction. Music, History, Trauma: Western Music and Race, 1883-1933." Western Music and Race. Ed: Julie Brown. Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 2007. 14-20.

Butler, Judith. The Psychic Life of Power: Theories in Subjection. California: Stanford UP, 1997.

Butler, Robert James. "The Function of Violence in Richard Wright's Native Son. Black American Literature Forum. 20.1/2 (Spring-Summer 1986): 9-25.

Carby, Hazel. "In Body and Spirit: Representing Black Women Musicians." Black Music Research Journal. 11.2 (Autumn 1991). 177-192.

Carpio Glenda R. and Werner Sollors. "The Newly Complicated Zora Neale Hurston." The Chronicle Review. 57. 18 (January 2011): B6-B10.

Christian, Barbara. Black Women Novelists: the Development of a Tradition, 1892-1976. Connecticut: Greenwood P, 1980.

Clarke, Deborah. "The Porch Couldn't Talk for Looking": Voice and Vision in Their Eyes Were Watching God." African American Review. 35.4 (Winter 2001): 599-613.

Cone, James. A Black Theology of Liberation. Second Edition. New York: Orbis Books, 1986 [1970].

Cooper, Anna J. A Voice from the South: By a Black Woman of the South. New York: Negro UP, 1969 [1852].

Dagbovie, Pero Gaglo. "Black Women, Carter G. Woodson, and the Association for the Study of Negro Life and History, 1915-1950." The Journal of African American History. 81.1 (Winter 2003): 21-41.

Davis, Angela. Women, Race & Class. New York: Random, 1983 [1981].

Denerstein, Joel. Swinging the Machine: Modernity, Technology & African American Culture Between the World Wars. Amherst: U of Massachusetts P, 2003.

Douglass, Frederick. Narrative of the Life of Frederick Douglass, An American Slave. Delaware: Prestwick House, 2004 [1845].

Drake, Kimberly. "Rewriting the American Self-Race, Gender, and Identity in the Autobiographies of Frederick Douglass and Harriet Jacobs." MELUS. 22.4 (Winter 1997): 91-108.

Du Bois, W.E.B. The Souls of Black Folk. New York: Signet, 1995 [1903].

Du Bois, W.E.B. The Souls of Black Folk. The Norton Anthology of African American Literature. Eds. Henry Louis Gates, Jr. and Nellie McKay. New York: W.W. Norton & Company, 2004. 692-766.

Fanon, Frantz. Black Skin, White Masks. Translated from the French by Richard Philcox. New York: Grove Press, 2008 [1952].

Fryer, Sarah Beebe. "Retreat from Experience: Despair and Suicide in James Baldwin's Novels." The Journal of the Midwest Modern Language Association. 19.1 (Spring 1986): 21-28

Fuss, Diana. "Interior Colonies: Frantz Fanon and the Politics of Identification." Diacritics. 24.2/3 (Summer Autumn 1994): 19-42.

Garvey, Johanna X. K. "That Old Black Magic? Gender and Music in Ann Petry's Fiction." Black Orpheus: Music in African American Fiction from the Harlem Renaissance to Toni Morrison. Ed: Saadi A. Simawe. New York: Garland Publishing, 2000. 119-152.

Gates, Jr. Henry Louis. Figures in Black: Words, Signs, and the "Racial" Self. New York: Oxford UP, 1987.

Giles, James R. "Religious Alienation and "Homosexual Consciousness" in City of Night and Go Tell It on the Mountain." College English. 36.3 (November 1974): 369-380.

"Go Tell It on the Mountain." Wikipedia. 19 Jul. 2011. < www.cyberhymnal.org/htm/g/o/ gotitotm.htm >

Gordon, Avery. Ghostly Matters: Haunting and the Sociological Imagination. Minneapolis: U of Minnesota P, 1997.

Hackney, James. "Review: Derrick Bell's Re-Sounding: W. E. B. Du Bois, Modernism, and Critical Race Scholarship." Law and Social Inquiry. 23.1 (Winter 1998): 141-164.

Harvey, W. J. "The Human Context." Character and the Novel. New York: Cornel UP, 1965.

Higginbotham, Evelyn Brooks. Righteous Discontent: The Woman's Movement in the Black Baptist Church, 1880-1920. Cambridge: Harvard UP, 1993.

Hill-Collins, Patricia. Black Feminist Thought: Knowledge, Consciousness, and the Politics of Empowerment. 2nd Edition. New York: Routledge, 2000.

hooks, bell. A'int I a Woman? Black women and feminism. Boston: South End Press, 1981.

hooks, bell. "Reflections on Race and Sex." Yearnings: race, gender, and cultural politics. Boston: South End Press, 1990.

Hume, David. An Enquiry Concerning the Principles of Morals. Ed: J. B. Schneewind. Indianapolis: Hackett Publishing Company, 1983.

Hunter, Tera. "Sexual Pantomimes," the Blues Aesthetic, and Black Women in the New South." Music and the Racial Imagination. Eds: Ronald Radano and Philip V. Bohlman. Chicago: The U of Chicago P, 2000. 145-167.

Hurston, Zora Neale. Their Eyes Were Watching God. Philadelphia: J.B. Lippincott Co., 1937.

Jacobs, Harriet. "Incidents in the Life of a Slave Girl." The Norton Anthology of African American Literature. Eds. Henry Louis Gates, Jr. and Nellie McKay. New York: W.W. Norton & Company, 2004, 280-315.

Jimoh, A. Yemisi. Spirituals, Blues, and Jazz People in African American Fiction: Living in Paradox. Knoxville: U of Tennessee P, 2002.

Jordan, Jennifer. "Feminist Fantasies: Zora Neale Hurston's Their Eyes Were Watching God." Tulsa Studies in Women's Literature. 7.1 (Spring 1988): 105-117.

Keady, Sylvia H. "Richard Wright's Women Characters and Inequality." Black American Literature Forum. 10.4 (Winter 1976): 124-128.

King, Sigrid. "Naming and Power in Zora Neale Hurston's Their Eyes Were Watching God." Black American Literature Forum. 24.4 (Winter 1990): 683-96.

Leveeq, Christine. "You Heard Her, You Ain't Blind": Subversive Shifts in Zora Neale Hurston's Their Eyes Were Watching God." Tulsa Studies in Women's Literature. 13.1 (Spring 1994): 87-111.

Locke, Alain. The New Negro. New York: Atheneum, 1992 [1925].

Lorde, Audre. "Poetry is not a Luxury." Sister Outsider: Essays and Speeches. California: The Crossing Press, 1984. 36-39.

Mazrui, Alamin. "Language and the Quest for Liberation in Africa: The Legacy of Frantz Fanon." Third World Quarterly. 14.2 (1993): 351-363.

McCredie, Wendy J. "Authority and Authorization in Their Eyes Were Watching God." Black American Literature Forum. 16.1 (Spring 1982): 25-28.

McDougald Elise Johnson. "The Task of Negro Womanhood." The New Negro. Ed: Alain Locke. New York: Altheneum P, 1968 [1925].

Miller, Eugene E. "Review: Authority, Gender, and Fiction." African American Review. 27.4 (Winter 1993): 687-691.

Morrison, Toni. The Bluest Eye. New York: Random House, 1970.

Nelson, Emmanuel S. "James Baldwin's Vision of Otherness and Community." MELUS. 10.2 (Summer 1983): 27-31.

Nudelman, Franny. "Harriet Jacobs and the Sentimental Politics of Female Suffering." ELH. 59.4. (Winter 1992): 939-964.

Olson, Barbara K. "Come-to-Jesus Stuff" in James Baldwin's Go Tell It on the Mountain and The Amen Corner." African American Review. 31.2 (Summer 1997): 295-301.

Painter, Nell Irving. "Representing Truth: Sojourner Truth's Knowing and Becoming Known." The Journal of American History. 81.2 (September 1994): 461-492.

Petry, Ann. The Street. Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1991 [1946.

Racine, Maria J. "Voice and Interiority on Zora Neale Hurston's Their Eyes Were Watching God." African American Review. 28.2 (Summer 1994): 283-292.

Radano, Ronald. "Denoting Difference: The Writing of the Slave Spirituals." Critical Inquiry 22 (Spring 1996): 506-544.

Radano, Ronald. Lying up a Nation: Race and Black Music. Chicago: The U of Chicago P, 2003.

Ramsey, Jr. Guthrie. "Secrets, lies and transcriptions: revisions on race, black music and culture." Western Music and Race. Ed: Julie Brown. Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 2007. 24.37.

Rampersad, Arnold. "Introduction." Native Son. Perennial Classics: New York, 1998 [1940].

Randle, Gloria T. "Between the Rock and the Hard Place: Mediating Spaces in Harriet Jacobs's Incidents in the Life of a Slave Girl." African American Review. 33.1 (Spring 1999): 43-56.

Sanchez-Eppler, Karen. "Ain't I a Symbol?" American Quarterly. 50.1 (March 1998): 149-157.

Scruggs, Charles. "The Tale of Two Cities in James Baldwin's Go Tell it on the Mountain." American Literature. 52.1 (March 1980): 1-17.

Simawe, Saadi A. "Introduction: The Agency of Sound in African American Fiction." Black Orpheus: Music in African American Fiction from the Harlem Renaissance to Toni Morrison. Ed: Saadi A. Simawe. New York: Garland Publishing, 2000. 19-25.

Singh, Raman K. "Christian Heroes and Anti-Heroes in Richard Wright's Fiction." Negro American Literature Forum. 6.4 (Winter 1972): 99-104.

Smith, Mark M. How Race is Made: Slavery, Segregation, and the Senses. Chapel Hill: U of North Carolina P, 2006.

Snow, Eliza. Wikipedia. 19 Aug. 2011. < en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Eliza_R._Snow>

Spencer, Jon Michael. Protest & Praise: Sacred Music of Black Religion. Fortress P: Minneapolis, 1990.

Stevenson, Robert. "America's First Black Music Historian." Journal of American Musicological Society. 26.3 (Autumn 1973): 383-404.

Stewart, Maria. "An Address Delivered Before The Afric-American Female Intelligence Society of America." Maria Stewart: America's First Black Woman Political Writer, Essays and Speeches. Ed: Marilyn Richardson. Bloomington: Indiana UP, 1987. 50-55.

Stuckley, Sterling P. "Afterword: Frederick Douglass and W. E. B. Du Bois on the Consciousness of the Enslaved." The Journal of African American History. 91.4 (Autumn 2006): 451-458.

Tate, Claudia. "Uncovering Female Cultures." The Women's Review of Books. 3.10 (July 1986): 17-18.

Taves, Ann. "Spiritual Purity and Sexual Shame: Religious Themes in the Writings of Harriet Jacobs." Church History. 56.1 (March 1987): 59-72.

The Holy Bible: King James Version. Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1973.

Truth, Sojourner, "Ar'n't I AWoman?" The Norton Anthology of African American Literature. Eds. Henry Louis Gates, Jr. and Nellie McKay. New York: W.W. Norton & Company, 2004, 245-246.

Walker, Alice. In Search of Our Mother's Garden's: Womanist Prose. New York: Harcourt, Brace, Jovanovich, 1983 [1967].

Walker, Alice. The Color Purple. New York: Harcourt, 2003 [1982].

Wells-Barnett, Ida. "The Black and White of It." Selected Works of Ida. B. Wells-Barnett. Complied by Trudier Harris. New York: Oxford UP, 1991.

Woodson, Carter G. The Mis-Education of the Negro. Trenton: Africa World Press, 1990 [1933].

Wright, Richard. "How Bigger Was Born." Native Son. Perennial Classics: New York, 1998 [1940].

Wright, Richard. Native Son. New York: Harper Perennial, 2005 [1940].