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IN MEDIAS RES, TEMPORAL DOUBLE-CONSCIOUSNESS AND RESISTANCE IN OCTAVIA BUTLER'S *KINDRED*

by

ROSLYN NICOLE SMITH

Under the Direction of Dr. Elizabeth West

ABSTRACT

Dana, the Black female protagonist in Octavia Butler's novel *Kindred* (1979), finds herself literally and figuratively *in medias res* as she sporadically travels between her present day life in 1976 and her ancestral plantation of 1815 – two time periods that represent two converse concepts of her identity as a Black woman. As a result, her time travel experiences cause her to revise her racial and gendered identity from a historically fragmented Black woman, who defines herself solely on her contemporary experiences, to a Black woman who defines herself based on her present life and her personal and ancestral history of experiencing and overcoming racial and gendered oppression. Using Black feminist theory scholarship, this thesis examines Dana's movement out of *in medias res*, through temporal double-consciousness, into a historically integrated identity or interstitial consciousness.

INDEX WORDS: Identity, *In Medias Res*, *Kindred*, Octavia Butler, Slavery, Black Feminist Theory, Neo Slave Narrative, Science Fiction, Fantasy, Double-Consciousness

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Georgia State University

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Dedication

I dedicate this thesis to my grandmother, Lillie Joe Greer, who planted so many seeds of survival and self love that their roots, vines and blossoms grow and weave themselves around me even when I am not looking. I also dedicate this thesis to my mother, Dr. Roslyn Goode Smith, who always shows me how to dance and sing through life's ups and downs and to always be in bloom.

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Chapter One - Introduction: Dana *In Medias Res*

In medias res is a Latin phrase that means "into the middle of things" (Cuddon 420). A novel or narrative that begins *in medias res* opens at a critical point in the middle of the plot and establishes the key components of the story -- characters, setting and conflict -- in a sequence of flashbacks (420). As such, the protagonist generally describes the story's origin and resolution by moving back and forth between related incidents in the text (420).

The first time the reader meets Dana, the protagonist of Octavia Butler's 1979 novel *Kindred*, most of her body, except a part of her arm, has returned to 1976. The rest of Dana's arm is stuck somewhere in the middle of her bedroom wall and in 1815 on the Weylin plantation. In the opening scene of the novel, Butler introduces Dana in the middle of the action of the novel, *in medias res*. Dana moves between incidents amid the twentieth and nineteenth centuries and establishes the origin and resolution of *Kindred*'s plot. More importantly, she simultaneously determines her own origin as she resolves her historically fragmented identity. She accomplishes this task by establishing connections to her ancestors and discovering a personal connection to a history of racial and gendered oppression. To mend her disjointed self, Dana must move out of the realm of *in medias res*. It is through temporal double-consciousness and resistance that Dana evolves from a fragmented identity *in medias res*, towards a whole identity that considers the experiences of her past and of her present.

Butler's application of *in medias res* in *Kindred* provides a framework to analyze Dana's journey back to self and examine how her experiences shape her identity. The reader finds Dana *in medias res* from both literal and figurative standpoints. The literal perspective of Dana *in medias res* is evident in *Kindred*'s prologue wherein Dana relates how she lost her arm on her final trip back to the nineteenth century. The figurative view of Dana *in medias res* is visible in

her twentieth-century life. As Dana relates her first time travel experience to the reader, she describes how she is literally pulled out of the middle of the action of her present life. Dana explains, "The house, the books, everything vanished. Suddenly, I was outdoors kneeling on the ground beneath trees. I was in a green place" (Butler 13). In the opening scene of the chapter following the prologue, Dana and her husband Kevin, who are newlyweds, are unpacking books in their new house when she is initially pulled from these twentieth-century milestone moments into the nineteenth century.

Once her time travels begin, Dana makes a determination to quickly resolve three points: (1) her time travel destination, (2) the reason for her time travel and (3) her approach to surviving during her stays on the plantation. Dana's ability to determine these three pieces of information will resolve her literal and figurative existence *in medias res*. During her second time travel experience, Dana learns where she is traveling and why she travels. She deduces that she only travels to the Weylin plantation, in the nineteenth century, when the life of Rufus Weylin, Dana's great-grandfather and heir to the Weylin plantation, is in mortal danger. Dana also reasons that she must continue to save Rufus's life until Hagar Weylin, her grandmother, is born. Hagar's birth will in turn secure the propagation of Dana's maternal line and secure Dana's own birth. This revelation is highlighted in a question and answer monologue by Dana: "Was that why I was here? Not only to insure the survival of one accident-prone small boy, but to insure my family's survival, my own birth" (29).

When Dana discovers her destination and the reason for her time travel, she concurrently comes to terms with her third resolution, or the method she must use to survive her time travels. She determines that she will have to adopt the mannerisms of a slave and participate as an active member of the slave community. As Dana travels back to the Weylin plantation and connects to

the experiences of her enslaved ancestors from the viewpoint of a victim of slavery, rather than as an observer, she begins to develop a temporal conflict between her twentieth and nineteenth-century identities. The resolution of this figurative temporal aspect of *in medias res* for Dana, then, lies in her ability to reconnect with her personal history and evolve her identity from one that is mainly rooted in the present to one that consists of her past and present.

Once Dana decides to take these approaches towards her survival, her constant trips back to the nineteenth century become not only a journey she must survive, but also a journey to become a Black woman who considers how the racial and gender oppressions of her antebellum, ancestral past may have informed her present identity. Butler illustrates Dana's journey by employing conventions of two seemingly contrasting genres: the neo-slave narrative and science fiction/fantasy. Each genre offers key motifs that showcase the complexities entailed in Dana's movement out of *in medias res* towards a whole self.

During Dana's experiences on the Weylin plantation, she recounts her harrowing journey back and forth through time using a first-person narrative. It is through her autobiographical voice that she describes her stories of physical violence at the hands of the plantation master, Tom Weylin, and Rufus, his son. Dana also shares the story of Rufus's attempt at sexual violence against her. Additionally, Dana describes her attempted escape from the Weylin plantation and later, a successful, simultaneous escape from both the literal plantation and her temporal enslavement. Butler's choice to convey Dana's story through autobiographical narrative, as well as Dana's recollections of violence and escape, are three of the many conventions of the nineteenth-century slave narrative employed by some twentieth-century fiction writers to explore Black people's contemporary relationship to their antebellum history as slaves. These texts are referred to as neo-slave narratives.

In Elizabeth Ann Beaulieu's book, *Black Women Writers and the American Neo-Slave Narrative: Femininity Unfettered* (1999), she cites the search for identity as an important catalyst for many of the neo-slave narratives written by Black authors such as Octavia Butler. Of the novels she examines in her text, Beaulieu writes that their respective authors:

> …explore American slavery through the lens of gender, both to interrogate the myth that enslaved women, denied the privilege of having a gender identity by the institution of slavery, were in fact genderless, and to celebrate the acts of resistance that enabled women to mother in the fullest sense of the term. (xv)

Dana's search for identity originates as she is pulled to a time period and place that destabilizes her twentieth-century identity. In this sense, time acts not only as a kidnapper, but also as a reflective medium that shows Dana the fracture points in her twentieth-century identity. Similar to the resisting women Beaulieu describes, Dana heals these fracture points as she begins to learn how enslaved Black women survived slavery while resisting the erasure of their identity. Viewing Dana as a character who overcomes adversity through time travel suggests also viewing her as a science fiction/fantasy heroine.

Dana can be considered a science fiction/fantasy heroine primarily because she time travels to the Weylin plantation. When considered outside of the primary historical context, the Weylin plantation is a strikingly different world from Dana's twentieth-century environment and, as such, it is alien to her. Butler's use of time travel provides the vehicle for Dana to examine her modern notion of herself within this alien environment and examine her identity in an environment that defines her in a contrasting light to her modern sense of who she is. In science fiction/fantasy texts, this plot strategy is often interwoven with a bildungsroman trope.

In "Types of Feminist Fantasy and Science Fiction," Kathleen Cioffi writes that during

the late 1960s and late 1970s many female writers began to create stories that can be classified into three categories, the "Amazon" story; the "more radical feminist type of story" called the "'world without men'" story; and the third and most common type of story which employs the use of the literary trope, bildungsroman (83). As bildungsroman applies to science fiction and fantasy heroines penned by female authors, Cioffi describes this genre as one wherein "the main character…goes through an identity search that takes her through various traumatic experiences that finally result in her becoming a whole and committed person" (83). Dana's traumatic experiences and identity search are facilitated through time travel, a literary tool that allows the author the opportunity to "examine modern, liberated women in an often hostile and certainly more circumscribed…environment" (Friend 50).

One may further assert that while the environment and people on the Weylin plantation were alien to Dana, the slaves and the slave culture offered the most similarities to Dana in terms of race and shared experiences with racial and gendered oppression. Therefore, she aligned herself with this community. According to Lisa Yaszek, many science fiction women writers use the notion of the "alien other" to depict their concerns about political subjects such as racism and patriarchy (1061). Yaszek quotes Marleen Barr who writes, "'Women -- especially black women -- who are alien to patriarchal society, alter fiction's portrayal of the alien [or other]…These female characters, who are themselves the Other, do not oppose the Other'" (1061). In fact, these characters often align themselves with the alien other because these beings represent a marginalized group who strive to create a truthful existence for themselves outside of the hegemony of biased historical representations from the dominant society (1061). On the plantation, this group was the slave community. It is the social behavior of the slave community, behavior that is alien to Dana that she has to mimic in order to survive in the larger alien

antebellum south. Her need to align with this society for survival in the nineteenth century, however, soon morphs into a greater lesson, particularly from the enslaved women, of how to survive racial and gender oppression across the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. The importance of this lesson to Dana's movement out of *in medias res* is that she is able to carry this legacy of survival with her across time periods. It is this legacy that begins to heal her historically fragmented identity.

In her essay "Saving the Life That is Your Own" Alice Walker highlights the importance of models, such as those with whom Dana interacted. Walker writes, "The absence of models, in literature as in life…is an occupational hazard for the artist, simply because models in art, in behavior, in growth of spirit and intellect -- even if rejected -- enrich and enlarge one's view of existence" (4). Walker's discovery of her model began with a desire to write a short story titled "The Revenge of Hannah Kemhuff." She writes that her inspirations for this story were based on, "my mother's experiences during the Depression, and on Zora Hurston's folklore collection of the 1920s, and on my own response to both out of a contemporary existence" (12-13). It was her mother's stories that lead her to conduct research that helped Walker to discover her model, Zora Neale Huston – anthropologist and writer.

It is important to note here the combination of acquired academic knowledge from research, and wisdom, or cultural knowledge, from Walker's mother that provided the foundation for her academic studies of Black folklore. In Walker's short story, there is no tension between theoretical and experiential knowledge. She used the two types of information to create a whole body of knowledge comprised of contemporary and historical information that completed her view of Black women's historical identity as well as her own. Walker writes, "In that story I gathered up the historical and psychological threads of the life my ancestors lived,

and in the writing I felt a joy and strength and my own continuity" (13). Similarly, Octavia Butler's protagonist Dana has to learn to build a complimentary bond between her twentieth-century knowledge of slavery and the experiential knowledge of slavery she gains through her time travel experience. However, this feeling of continuity does not come easily because her transition from twentieth-century observer to nineteenth-century participant in the slave community is initially filled with reluctance to seemingly capitulate to a slave holder's social expectation of paternal authority. As a result, Dana's first view of the members of the slave community, in comparison to herself, is with a twentieth-century gaze. This initial, ill-informed gaze begins the fragmented sense of herself and creates for Dana a temporal double-consciousness, reminiscent of W.E.B. Du Bois's concept of double-consciousnesses.

W.E.B. Du Bois wrote in his 1903 book *Souls of Black Folk* of a double-consciousness that informs black life. According to DuBois, Black people often feel their "two-ness, -- an American, a Negro, two souls, two thoughts, two unrecognized strivings…" (364). Du Bois also wrote that Black people "live in a world which yields" them "no true-self consciousness" and that they always have a sense of viewing themselves through others' eyes, or being othered or alienated by these sets of eyes. This gaze, in turn, seemingly views Blacks' souls in "amused contempt and pity" (364). Franz Fanon addresses this conflict of multiple selves within a post-colonial context in much of his text *Black Skin, White Masks* (1967). For Fanon identity fragmentation occurs in the searing, painful moment when he -- as a Black person who was born and educated in the French colony of Martinique, and who considers himself part of the French culture/country -- is fragmented into multiple pieces of his identity with one word, "Nigger." Similarly, in *Kindred*, when Dana learns the casual manner in which young Rufus and his parents use the word "nigger" to refer to the slaves and herself, Dana becomes immediately

aware that on the plantation, all of the elements that comprise her twentieth-century identity as a Black woman are distilled to one word, slave. In this moment, her twentieth-century identity feels erased and she realizes that the price of not mimicking the mannerisms of a slave could manifest itself in a variety of violent punishments, including death. These writings by Fanon and Du Bois suggest that it can be destructive for a person to choose one of his selves, even historical, as a representation of his complete self. This effort constitutes an erasure of one's identity. As such, this act of choosing is arguably a form of death and is at the root of the fragmented consciousness Fanon and Du Bois describe. Scholars such as Gloria Anzaldúa, Chela Sandoval and Audre Lorde argue that one has to resist the perceived need to engage in this Sisyphean act and live in the center of multifaceted components of one's identity.

In her book, *Borderlands: La Frontera The New Mestiza* (1987), Gloria Anzaldúa discusses the complexity of this multifarious notion of one's identity from a gendered standpoint. She describes the difficulty of finding one's *self* within the context of being a woman who is Mexican and Indian, and argues through essays and poems that it is illogical that one should have to choose an allegiance to one part of one's self as sanctioned by an oppressing, dominant culture. The person who believes that she faces such a decision can feel pressed into the position of denying or muting some aspect of herself. Anzaldúa chooses not to claim any one part of her identity to represent her entire identity. Examples of this solution in action are evident in Anzaldúa's own self description:

> I am a border woman. I grew up between two cultures, the Mexican (with a heavy Indian influence) and the Anglo (as a member of a colonized people in our own territory)….Living on borders and in margins, keeping intact one's shifting and multiple identity and integrity, is like trying to swim in a new element, an

> 'alien' element….And yes, the 'alien' element has become familiar -- never comfortable, not with society's clamor to uphold the old, to rejoin the flock, to go with the herd. No not comfortable but home. (Preface)

Similarly, Dana lives in the margins of time and place as she tries to find the resolution between nineteenth-century and twentieth-century identities that lead to her re-conceptualized personhood. Dana soon learns that she can survive only as Anzaldúa suggests, living in the center of her present and past selves, rather than existing only in the present or only in the past.

Dana learns to live in the center of her past and present selves through her resistive acts in the nineteenth century. These acts operate as Dana's own personal social movement; a dynamic described by Chela Sandoval in *Methodology of the Oppressed* (2000). Sandoval applies theorist Hayen White's notion of the relationship between a third middle of the voice [sic] verb that works through a "'metatransitive relationship between an agent, an act and an effect,'" to a subjugated person who resists the oppressive environment where he lives while still existing in that oppressive environment (qtd. in Sandoval 154.5). Sandoval writes that the application of this metatransitive relationship in the "differential form of social movement is also designed to act upon social reality while at the same time transforming the practitioner's relation to it" (154.6). The middle voice of the verb represents a place between the borders of one's "multiple identity" as it relates to groups that have grappled with oppression (153). This notion does not describe a third awareness of one's self, but rather a contemplation of one's self as constantly moving, evolving and becoming, in between the borders of cultural, political and historical marginality and hegemonic cultural status quo.

Sandoval writes that a consideration of one's self as a middle voice of the verb is a "mode of consciousness that does not have to choose between the active and the passive in order

to be expressed" (154.5). Sandoval also notes that the import of this theory for "subjugated people" is that they do not have to choose between a dominant culture and their native culture (154). As a result, one is able to move from the binary position of double-consciousness -- sometimes as a member of the dominant group, sometimes as a member of the marginalized group -- to the integrated position of considering one's identity in terms of a variety of facets that include cultural, social and political expectations of both the dominant and marginalized groups (154.6). It is this interstitial consciousness that prevents fragmentation and the erasure of one's identity.

From the perspective of Black women in America, this interstitial consciousness is reflected in Audre Lorde's notion that oppressed peoples' identities are not comprised of parts loosely gathered in a box. Rather, they are a combination of characteristics fitted together that cannot be separated. In her essay, "Age, Race, Class and Sex," Audre Lorde argues for this conflation of characteristics of one's personality. She writes:

> As a black lesbian feminist comfortable with the many different ingredients of my own identity, and a woman committed to racial and sexual freedom from oppression, I find I am constantly being encouraged to pluck out some one aspect of myself and present this as the meaningful whole, eclipsing or denying the other parts of self. But this is a destructive and fragmenting way to live. My fullest concentration of energy is available to me only when I integrate all the parts of who I am, openly, allowing power from particular sources of my living to flow back and forth freely through all of my different selves, without the restrictions of externally imposed definitions. (120-121)

It is not inconsequential in this passage that there is no comma separation in the phrase, "black

lesbian feminist." Using this textual strategy, Lorde highlights her notion that there is no separation in how these adjectives describe her. While Lorde speaks to concerns of social struggle against a variety of oppressions that include gender, race and sexual orientation, she still maintains that a person who is a Black woman, a lesbian and a feminist cannot define herself with one of these characteristics without fragmenting who she is and risking the erasure of her whole personhood. Similarly, Dana cannot separate the historical context of being a Black woman in the United States from the present context of being a Black woman. Dana realizes by the end of *Kindred* that there is no separation of her history from her present self. Dana's assumed identity on the Weylin plantation as an enslaved Black woman and the sacrifices and choices she would have made/had to make for her survival connect her to a legacy of women who operate within an interstitial Black feminist consciousness.

The racial and gendered oppression addressed in *Kindred*, invites an examination of Dana *in medias res* within the context of Black feminist theory. Anchoring a literary analysis in other theories such as Freudian or Hegelian theories would offer a limited conversation that ignores the explicit race and gender based concerns of identity fragmentation in *Kindred*. The ideological foundation of Black Feminist theory is that, by virtue of their race and gender, Black women generally have had experiences with oppression specific to them (Hill Collins 22). How this theory is addressed in scholarly writings and applied to literary criticism depends on the Black feminist scholar's personal experiences with, interpretations of, and reactions to race and gender discrimination. Factors such as class, generation, and sexual orientation will affect how Black women experience racism and sexism (22-24). Black feminist theory, as a theory based in experience, offers a more precise paradigm to examine a Black female character's experiences with racial and gender oppression.

One thread of continuity that pervades these varying concepts of Black feminist theory is the notion that it is often difficult for Black women to develop and maintain a central identity in the face of racial and gender oppression. This is due in part to the double-consciousness Du Bois describes. For example, in opposition to Lorde's belief in the cohesion of the gender and race components of a Black woman's identity, a dominant gaze, or way in which an oppressing group views and then treats its perceived subject, presumes the ability to separate these elements and re-define its chosen subject within the social and cultural structure of the dominant culture. This gaze fragments or even erases the subject's identity within the context of the dominant culture. Toni Morrison's essay, "Unspeakable things Unspoken: The Afro-American Presence in American Literature," illustrates this dynamic. Morrison addresses the effect of the oppressive gaze in the literary context of nineteenth-century writers who are part of a "Young America" that presumes to be able to "write about" an "ancient race (whether Native American or African)" without any fear of them "'writing back'" (36). Morrison explains that the gaze of the oppressor "…could even observe them [the oppressed], hold them in a prolonged gaze, without encountering the risk of being observed, viewed, or judged in return" (36).

In her essay, "Reflections on the Black Woman's Role in the Community of Slaves" Angela Davis provides an example of one of the hazards of this dominant gaze for Black women in the context of North American slavery. Describing how slave communities were defined, she writes, "In the most fundamental sense, the slave system did not -- and could not -- engender and recognize a matriarchal family structure....It would have been exceedingly risky for the slaveholding class to openly acknowledge symbols of authority -- female symbols no less than male" (82). The risk Davis writes about is presumably the risk of a possible en masse self actualization amongst the slaves that would support an equally en masse and expedient end to

slavery. Davis's citation of a slave's personal account of the slave owner's general relationship with slaves highlights how slaveholders attempted to lessen this risk: "'The strong hand of the slave owner dominated the Negro family, which existed at his mercy and often his own personal instigation'" (83). Under such a gaze, the oppressed individual's identity seems to hold validity only in the social, political and economic context of the oppressor. Within the context of the slave woman, her identity is further fragmented into her labor potential, her reproduction potential, and her exploitive sexual potential. Her intellect, her personality, her family, even her spirituality are not valued under the slave owners' gaze, and are treated as inconsequential outside of the perception of the slave master. It is this infinite chipping away of one's individual rights that Dana, *in medias res*, experiences and struggles against during her journey back to her ancestral antebellum past and toward her reconnection with herself.

The origins, pitfalls and experiences of Dana's historical fragmentation is reflected in Toni Morrison's argument for the importance of these co-existing parts, the past and present, in her essay "Rootedness: The Ancestor as Foundation." Morrison describes these temporal components as the relationship between "the acceptance of the supernatural and a profound rootedness in the real world at the same time" that often exists in Black American culture (342). It is the acceptance of this intertwined existence that allows Dana and Kevin, and eventually members of the Weylin plantation community, to accept Dana's numerous appearances and disappearances on the plantation as she time travels. Additionally, Morrison writes that the "press toward upward mobility" has meant for many Black people that they move away from the supernatural or what Morrison calls another way of "knowing things" (342). It is this "knowing" that Dana moves away from in 1975 and that places her identity *in medias res*. An additional comparison can be drawn between Dana's experiences and "Rootedness" in Morrison's

argument about the importance of considering the ancestor in a writer's work: "When you kill the ancestor you kill yourself. I want to point out the dangers, to show that nice things don't always happen to the totally self-reliant if there is no conscious historical connection" (344). This last line strikes at the heart of Dana's twentieth-century historical fragmentation. She is in fact "totally self-reliant" in the twentieth century. However, this autonomy does not offer a complete identity because her existence does not appear to have any connection or rootedness to her ancestral or personal history. Dana's method of establishing this historical connection will be further examined in chapter two, "Flashbacks: Dana's Temporal Double Consciousness" and in chapter three, "Resolution: Dana's Interstitial Consciousness."

Chapter two explores the component of *in medias res* wherein Dana is discovering her historical origins while trying to gain a sense of her temporal, geographical and social setting. This element will be highlighted in three moments in *Kindred* when Dana's initial experiences with discovering, and then navigating between the nineteenth and twentieth centuries initiate her temporal double-consciousness. Chapter three focuses on how Dana's past and present converge into an interstitial consciousness through resistance. Resistance provides Dana with the space to re-conceptualize the past and present as equally important and co-existing parts of a whole identity, not parts of herself that she must forget or navigate between. However, this resistance comes at an ironic cost, the fragmentation of her body. This chapter will highlight three instances in *Kindred* when Dana resists the erasure of her twentieth-century identity amidst her nineteenth-century façade and endures punishments that leave physical scars which in turn map her journey of resistance on her body. Through these examinations of Dana's experiences within the framework of *in medias res*, I will illustrate how her life, lived only in the middle of the action in the present day context of her twentieth century life, is a historically fragmented life.

Chapter Two - Flashbacks: Dana's Temporal Double-Consciousness

Dana arrives in the nineteenth century with a strong sense of her twentieth-century identity. As a result, her look back to the past must begin with an understanding of how she is seen as a Black woman on a slave plantation. There are three poignant moments in *Kindred* when Dana's twentieth-century notion of her race and gender is challenged under the glare of this nineteenth-century, antebellum light: 1) when she realizes the time and place where she is time traveling, 2) when her husband Kevin travels back to the nineteenth century plantation with her and 3) when Dana sees Alice, her great grandmother, brought back to the plantation beaten and bloody from a whipping she received as punishment for accompanying a runaway slave on an attempted escape.

The first two moments display Dana's conceptual and emotional adjustment to the racial implications of being an enslaved Black person on a plantation. The second moment also marks the beginning of her gender identity concerns and concurrently leads to the third moment where Dana has to consider both the racial and gender implications of being an enslaved person during this time period. As I discuss these three key moments, I will specifically address the mental and emotional shifts that Dana must make during these three experiences. These mental and emotional shifts are the mechanisms that propel her towards accepting and navigating between a self perception defined heavily by her twentieth century identity, and a self perception burdened by the temporal double-consciousness that begins to develop regarding her present and past identities.

Dana's first step out of media res and into a historically complete self is to reconnect to a familial past that she has a tenuous connection to and for which she feels little to no responsibility. This attachment is arguably tenuous because Dana's link to her immediate past is not tangible. Her parents died in a car accident when she was a young girl and, as a result, she

was raised by her mother's brother and his wife (Butler 55). While she feels connected to her uncle and aunt as relatives who raised her, this link does not ultimately affect the decisions she makes in her life. This disconnect is evident in Dana's explanation of her decision to become a writer:

> They wanted me to be nurse, a secretary, or a teacher like my mother. At the very best, a teacher….My aunt and uncle said I could write in my spare time if I wanted to….Meanwhile, for the real future, I was to take something sensible if I expected them to support me….Finally, I got a job, moved away from home, and quit school. I still take extension classes at UCLA, though, when I can afford them. Writing classes. (55-56)

This passage illustrates Dana's initial attempts to acquiesce to her uncle and aunt's expectations and her eventual decision to follow the expectations *she* has for herself. This also reveals how important it is to Dana to make her own decisions independent of any seeming obligations to anyone else. This notion is further illustrated when Dana later reflects on her relationship with her aunt and uncle, "My memory of my aunt and uncle told me that even people who loved me could demand more of me than I could give -- and expect their demands to be met simply because I owed them" (109).

In a similar manner to her relationship with her uncle and aunt, Dana recognizes a tenuous connection to her mother's ancestors as a part of her familial history. When Dana realizes that she is traveling to the Weylin plantation -- her grandmother's maiden name -- she also begins to realize that she may be related to Rufus. She confirms this belief by piecing together her family history from her recollection of names, including her grandmother's, written in an ornate family Bible. As she attempts to remember these names, Dana expresses regret over her

disconnectedness to family members. In this instance the regret is that she may not be able to meet these relatives. Dana says of the familiar names she remembers from the family Bible:

> Grandmother Hagar. Hagar Weylin, born in 1831. Hers was the first name listed. And she had given her parents' names as Rufus Weylin and Alice Green-something Weylin….Hagar Weylin Blake [Hagar's married name] had died in 1880, long before the time of any member of my family that I had known….So many relatives that I had never known, would never know. Or would I? (28)

The last two sentences of this passage indicate a transformation from her initial disappointment of not knowing her Weylin ancestors into the hope that she might be able to meet them. It is this hope, along with Dana's general recognition of her ancestors' existence that ushers forward Dana's active acknowledgement that she is connected with her ancestors. She understands that she must continue to time travel whenever Rufus's life is in danger in order to thwart the threat of the erasure of her maternal family line (29). In her acknowledgement and decision, the reader immediately begins to see Dana's first movement out of *in medias res*. While her actions will ultimately ensure the existence of her own life, it is still important to note that she willingly chooses obligate herself to Rufus and repeatedly save his life so that he can grow to become her great grandfather. This action would then allow for the birth of her grandmother. She chooses this path even though she soon arrives at a second realization: to accomplish this task she will have to pretend to be a slave.

Dana realizes that she is time traveling to a slave plantation on her second trip to the 1800s to save Rufus's life. In this time travel occurrence, Dana is pulled back in time to extinguish a fire that Rufus was starting using the draperies in his bedroom as kindling. This fire

could have potentially burned down the entire house and killed him and his parents. While only a few hours have passed for Dana since her first visit to the past, three to four years have passed for Rufus who is now about six years old. After she extinguishes the fire, she learns in her subsequent conversation with Rufus about his parents' reaction to Dana the first time she time-traveled to save him from drowning. At one point during the conversation Rufus says to Dana:

> Mama said what you did after you got me out of the water was like the Second Book of Kings….Where Elisha breathed into the dead boy's mouth, and the boy came back to life. Mama said she tried to stop you when she saw you doing that to me because you were just some nigger she had never seen before. (24)

When Dana asks Rufus to repeat how his mother referred to her, he repeats the phrase "some nigger." Because Dana does not realize what time period she is in or her actual locale, she is initially incredulous that Rufus's mother would refer to her using this derogatory word after Dana had saved her son's life. She says of Rufus, "His air of innocent questioning confused me. Either he really didn't know what he was saying, or he had a career waiting in Hollywood. Whichever it was, he wasn't going to go on saying it to me" (25). She then says to Rufus, "I am a Black woman Rufe. If you have to call me something other than my name, that's it" (25). At this point Dana feels a need to stress two components of her identity, race *and* gender.

Later in the conversation, as a young Rufus describes how his father brutally punished him when he tried to burn down the stable, he employs the word again, this time unwittingly placing slaves in the same category as the animals on the plantation. He tells Dana that his father whipped him with the kind of whip he whips "… niggers and horses with" (26). Here again, Dana affirms her identity and corrects Rufus, admonishing him to "Say Blacks anyway" (26). She then asks, "But…your father whips Black people?" (26). It is at this moment that Dana

develops an unmistakable awareness as to how the Weylins would define her identity if they saw her again. In later conversations with Rufus, she also learns she is in 1815 on the Weylin Plantation. Rufus's father is in fact Tom Weylin, also called Weylin, owner of the plantation. She asks, "What was I going to do...This could turn out to be such a deadly place for me if I had to stay in it much longer" (27).

Through this dialogue with Rufus Dana becomes painfully aware of her potential position on the plantation, based on race, as the fragmented representation of a slave. She also understands what she is going to do -- pretend to be a slave. This façade is her best chance to survive on the plantation until Hagar is born. Her decision marks the next phase of her movement out of media res -- beginning to tangibly connect with not only her ancestral history, but also her racial and gendered history as a descendant of enslaved Black women. While it is true that in either century Dana is a Black woman, it is also true that the implication of this term in the nineteenth century on a plantation versus the connotation of the term in the twentieth century in her own home is vastly different. As a result, she has to begin to re-conceptualize the term *Black woman* in an antebellum nineteenth-century context. She only understands this, however, from a twentieth-century perspective of having control over her choices. One can see evidence of her initially limited perspective in a comparison of how she viewed her employment, in the twentieth century, at a labor agency.

Dana refers to the casual labor agency that employed her in 1975, before her time travels began, as a "slave market" (Butler 52). There are indeed elements of the work that are akin to slavery. The laborers arrive to work at an appointed time and perform whatever task the supervisors have assigned them. The employers also consider the workers to be mindless (53). There is a moment, however, when Dana acknowledges one of the differences. She says,

"Actually, it was just the opposite of slavery. The people who ran it couldn't have cared less whether or not you showed up to do the work they offered" (52). However, the conflicting considerations of what it means to be a slave, the very notion that one can choose how to define themselves as a slave, points to Dana's overall twentieth-century consideration of the term and institution.

As a result of these differing temporal perspectives on slavery, Dana has to initially make a concerted effort to don the mask of a slave. For Dana this effort would begin with her understanding that there were certain social expectations that the slave-owning population would have of her. For instance, she would be expected to exhibit deferential body language, such as not establishing prolonged eye contact. This mental and emotional shift was not easy. She recalls that once when Rufus's father, Tom Weylin, is staring at her she has to remember her new status as a slave. She says: "After a moment, I realized that Weylin was looking at me -- staring hard at me….At first, I stared back. Then I looked away, remembering that I was supposed to be a slave. Slaves lowered their eyes respectfully" (66).

Dana decides to conduct research, between her time travels, on the lives of antebellum slaves so she can be as accurate as possible in enacting these social expectations. For example, on one of her trips home to the twentieth century, Dana tries to read every resource in her house in an effort to learn more about slavery and garner strategies on how she, as a twentieth-century Black woman, could cope with the treatment of slaves. One of the texts she reads is half of Margaret Mitchell's antebellum novel, *Gone With the Wind*. As she reads she finds it full of pastoral images of "happy darkies in tender loving bondage" (116). Through time travel Dana knows that this depiction of slaves is erroneous and ill-informed. Dana instead finds more similarities to her experiences in stories about the Jewish Holocaust because of the more honest depictions of

trauma (Yazek 1061). Dana concluded that "Like the Nazis, ante bellum [sic]whites had known quite a bit about torture -- quite a bit more than I ever wanted to learn" (Butler 117).

Because Dana's resources lacked accurate historical information about slaves, they also lacked a frame of reference on navigating the day-to-day realities of slaves' lives, including her varying emotional reactions to the constant infringements on her twentieth-century identity. These reactions ranged from the incredulousness of being called a "nigger" to the numbness of complacency with the oppressive life condition of slavery. The inadequacies of her resources causes Dana to receive the equivalent of on the job training on the Weylin plantation from ancestral models such as Sarah, the cook, and Alice, Dana's great-grandmother. Lisa Yasek describes this method of learning from the examples of one's ancestors as "a mode of historical memory more appropriate to the experiences of African-American women" (1061). As it applies to Dana, Yasek also writes that the character has to "shift to new modes of memory and a new relation to the other" or alien entity on the plantation (1061). In this regard, an important component of Dana's tutelage on the type of behavior that was expected of her is an understanding of the slaveholding community's gaze in relation to her in racial and gender terms.

In this antebellum culture, Black women were fragmented through the antebellum Whites' eyes during the nineteenth century by their race and also by gender. From a race perspective Angela Davis writes in her 1981 book *Women, Race, & Class,* "compulsory labor overshadowed every other aspect of women's existence" for female slaves (5). Davis continues: "The slave system defined Black people as chattel. Since women, no less than men, were viewed as profitable labor-units, they might as well have been genderless as far as the slave holders were concerned" (5). As such, these women were mostly viewed as being capable of the same work as men -- agricultural (5). Davis notes that by the middle of the nineteenth century, "seven out of

eight slaves, men and women alike, were field workers" (5). She quotes an observer who saw a group of slaves working in a field. The woman stated that she saw "…forty of the largest and strongest women I ever saw together; they were all in a simple uniform dress of a bluish check stuff; their legs and feet were bare" (11). This description shares a close similarity to Dana's experience during her short experience as a field hand:

> Stunned, I took the sicklelike corn knife Fowler [the overseer] thrust into my hands and let myself be herded out toward the cornfield. Herded.…Slaves were walking down rows of corn, chopping the stalks down with golf-swing strokes of their knives. Two slaves worked a row, moving toward each other. (Butler 211)

While enslaved women were centrally believed to be laborers, their physical ability to perform domestic and agriculture work was not the only segment of enslaved women that the slave master owned. Scholars Angela Davis and Paula Giddings both note that oppression for a female slave was about more than race; it was also about gender. There were moments when these enslaved Black womens' gender alone became a part of their value or exploitation. In this sense, enslaved Black women were alternately seen as breeders and sexual objects. The abolition of the international slave trade in 1820 offers an example of how enslaved women's reproductive abilities were valued (Davis 6). Davis writes that "One year after the importation of Africans was halted, a South Carolina court ruled that female slaves had no legal claims whatever on their children" (7). Slaveholders began to rely heavily on reproduction within the slave community. As a result, "a premium was placed on the slave woman's reproductive capacity" (7). Thus, these bondswomen were not only viewed as workers, but also as resources for potential new laborers who would also be tangible assets that could be sold for profit or to alleviate a debt. (7).

Enslaved Black women's sexuality was easily exploited because it was seen as diametrically opposed to the sexual purity of White women. According to Giddings, "after 1830, slavery became 'domesticated'" (41). This is to say that slavery became an idealized institution of harmony and domesticity. Giddings refers to this new view of the institution of slavery as a "Victorian domestic institution" (42). Society's domesticated views of slavery answered the rise of abolitionist movements and the threat of slave revolts such as the one enacted by Nat Turner in 1831 (41). Whereas before, slavery was characterized as an institution where Black women and men were brutally beaten into submission, now slavery was romanticized as an institution that was mutually beneficial to slaves and masters and also wherein slaves were loyal and obedient to their masters (41).

Aside from any machinations slave owners were participating in to preserve their economic way of life, this paradigm of domesticity introduced a redefined notion of womanhood (41-55). Within this context, the morality of the family fell squarely on the shoulders of the women (43). It was their job to ensure that the home was in domestic order. This included implementing the "four cardinal virtues" of the cult of True Womanhood including piety, pureness, submissiveness and domesticity (Welter 152). This English-derived Victorian construction of family had a devastating effect on "slaves and women" (Giddings 42). While White women who were married were exalted "beyond the sensual reach of her own husband," Black women, within the context of slavery, were conversely viewed as existing at the opposite end of this moral spectrum (43). The outcome of this belief was that enslaved black women were often perceived as, "mistresses, whores, or breeders" (43).

Dana's introduction to this gender concern begins on her second trip to the Weylin plantation when she sees how a free Black woman, Alice's mother, who lives in the slave

quarters is treated. After Dana saves Rufus from burning down the main house on the plantation, she goes in the woods in the direction of the slave quarters that young Rufus showed her, so she can have somewhere to sleep until she time travels back home. As she is looking for the slave quarters, Dana hears patrollers and hides. From her hiding place, lying flat on the grass, Dana sees the patrolmen find who they are looking for -- a man who they said did not have a pass to leave his master's plantation and come to the Weylin plantation. The patrollers pull the man and another woman, both of whom are nude, out of a house. After the patrollers pull the man and woman out of the house, the woman manages to wrap a blanket around her. Dana says that just as she was noticing the woman's blanket, one of the patrollers "tore it from her" (Butler 35). The woman offers a verbal protest and is told by the patroller, "'shut your mouth'" (36). Reverberating the question of identity that Dana had raised with Rufus earlier, the patroller asks her "'Who in the hell do you think you are, anyway?'" (36).

In this exchange lies the questioning of this woman's identity, and the sense that she is not an individual at all. As evidence of this notion, Dana relates that the patrollers do not notice the woman again until they have finished whipping the man. Alice's mother is only really seen by the patroller when he views her as an object to be used or possessed. One of them speaks to the woman in low tones. When the woman does not provide him the answer he desires he punches "the woman in the face exactly as her husband had been punched earlier….The patroller rode away and left her there" (37). This scene reinforces Davis's earlier point that men and women were viewed as equal in terms of being slaves, or in this case -- viewed as slaves, but unequal in terms of their sexuality. The patroller's general treatment of the woman is also an example of the negative end of the contrived moral barometer of the "Victorian domestic institution" that Giddings describes with which Black women on the plantation were often

judged. Dana has direct experience with this moral barometer when her husband Kevin mistakenly time travels with Dana to the nineteenth century.

When Kevin and Dana arrive in the nineteenth century, they have to pretend that he is her master and she is his concubine. Initially, Dana does not consider how she is perceived as she enacts her job of being Kevin's concubine and maidservant as a way to "preserve a little of 1976 amid the slaves and slaveholders" (92). One morning, Mr. Weylin winks at Dana as he catches her leaving from Kevin's room (96-97). In contrast, on an earlier occasion Margaret Weylin, the person charged with the morality of the household, refers to her as a "filthy Black whore" and slaps Dana after asking her the obvious question of where she had slept the night before (92-97). It is after Margaret slaps Dana that she develops a tension or temporal double-consciousness about her relationship to Kevin. Dana says:

> I knew then that if Margaret got me kicked out [of Kevin's room], it wouldn't be for something as normal as sleeping with my master. And somehow, that disturbed me. I felt almost as though I really was doing something shameful, happily playing whore for my supposed owner. I went away feeling uncomfortable, vaguely ashamed. (97)

Dana also begins to feel fragmented in this nineteenth-century environment. She explains, "There was no shame in raping a Black woman, but there could be shame in loving one" (124).

Conversely, in the beginning of their courtship in the twentieth century, race for Kevin and Dana is seen as a description of one another, not an aspect of their identity that determined how they would treat each other. For example, Dana describes Kevin as, "an unusual-looking White man, his face young, almost unlined, but his hair completely gray and his eyes so pale as to be almost colorless" (54). In this example, race is listed as another characteristic. In the

context of the twentieth-century "plantation" or temporary agency where Dana and Kevin are both employed in 1975, however, others view them as two people whose different races make their relationship as a couple a strange one. In one case there is a co-worker, a fellow "slave" Dana describes as the "agency clown" who asks during a lunch break that is essentially Kevin and Dana's first date, whether the two are going to write some "poor-nography together!" (54). Another co-worker from the agency describes Dana with what she describes as, "typical slave-market candor that he and I were, 'the weirdest-looking couple' she had ever seen" (57).

Amidst these opinions regarding their relationship in the late 1970s, Dana and Kevin still have a choice in how they define themselves to each other and how they choose to continue to define their relationship -- eventually as marriage. In contrast, on the nineteenth-century plantation, Dana and Kevin have no power to define how a sexual relationship between a White man and Black woman is viewed. Once Kevin travels back to the nineteenth century with Dana, he is forced to define himself as a White man in a nineteenth century antebellum context and, as a result, is also forced to relate to Dana according to her race.

Once Dana begins to accept the altered emotional state of being a slave, it is not long before she begins to understand how one comes to accept slavery as a social status. It is at this moment that she begins to encounter the challenge of not morphing into her nineteenth-century mask. Dana sees a strikingly clear example of how slaves were created in a children's game where Black children in the slave community were pretending to be at a slavery auction block. She says, "The ease seemed so frightening….The ease. Us, the children…I never realized how easily people could be trained to accept slavery" (101). In another instance she says, "Slavery is a long slow process of dulling" (183).

Even with these antebellum encounters with racial and gender oppression, there is a point

in the novel where Dana still views herself as a twentieth-century woman whose responses to her experiences with slavery are more progressive and more admirable than those of her nineteenth-counterparts in the slave community. The tension between her twentieth-century self and her nineteenth-century self is evidenced when Dana contemplates Sarah's identity as a Black woman on the plantation. Preceding the following passage are conversations between Dana and Sarah about the adversity endured by slaves who run away both during their escape and particularly when they are captured. Dana thinks to herself about Sarah:

> She had done the safe thing -- had accepted a life of slavery because she was afraid. She was the kind of woman who might have been called 'mammy' in some other house hold. She was the kind of woman who would be held in contempt during the militant nineteen sixties…the handkerchief head, the female Uncle Tom -- the frightened powerless woman who had already lost all she could stand to loose….I looked down on her myself for awhile. Moral superiority. Here was someone less courageous than I was. That comforted me somehow. Or it did until Rufus and Nigel drove into town and came back with what was left of Alice. (145)

Considering "what was left of Alice," Dana is referencing Alice's battered state after being physically beaten for running away. Before Alice eventually and reluctantly agreed to become Rufus's concubine, she had tried to run away with another slave named Isaac, with whom she was in love. When Rufus "paid nearly twice what she was worth" to bring her back to the plantation, he brought her back in a wagon "where Alice lay bloody, filthy, and barely alive" (146). Dana knows Alice not just as a member of the slave community; she also knows Alice as her great-grandmother. Dana also saw Alice grow from a young girl to a woman during her

time travels to the plantation. This up-close view of someone she not only knows, but to whom she is also related, being whipped for wanting the right to choose who she would love and share her body with, reminds Dana that as a slave she is a possession, not one to overtly or even appear to think independently about her own wants and desires. The repercussions of this type of independent thinking, this attempt to reconnect to one's self through choosing for oneself, could result in violence or death. Dana also learns that the fear that ties Sarah to the plantation is the fear of losing contact with the only one of her daughters who was not sold. These insights provide Dana an example of how Morrison's rootedness translates into a connection or responsibility for or towards one's family.

As a slave, Dana not only sees these violent punishments and the emotional sacrifices her ancestral models make, she eventually begins to experience them. For example, at different moments on the plantation, she is whipped, slapped and made to work in the fields. It is perhaps these punishments and the routine of her life on the Weylin plantation -- work, community, and general survival -- that lull her into false moments of contentment. As Dana dons her antebellum mask, she beings to slowly lose confidence in her self as a twentieth-century Black woman. In several instances she begins to believe that it would be easier to submit to the institution of slavery than to continue her ongoing battle against a system that constantly works to erode her identity.

Chapter Three - Resolution: Dana's Interstitial Consciousness

Dana's decision to pretend to be a slave places her in direct contact with socially constructed racial and gendered oppression that she must learn to navigate while healing her fragmented identity. Initially, assuming this role is arduous for Dana as she adopts subservient mannerisms and tolerates subjective attitudes towards her. As the novel progresses, twentieth-century Dana becomes so melded to her nineteenth-century façade that even other members of the slave community, such as Alice, accuse Dana of being complacent or satisfied with her role as slave. Dana recounts:

> 'You ought to see yourself,' Alice told me one day as I was hiding out in her cabin….'Marse Rufe really put the fear of God in you, didn't he?'….'You run around fetching and carrying for that woman [Margaret Weylin] like you love her. And half a day in the fields was all it took.' (220)

At a later time Dana asks herself, "Once - God knows how long ago - I had worried that I was keeping too much distance between myself and this alien time. Now, there was no distance at all. When had I stopped acting? Why had I stopped?" (221). On some level, Dana had stopped acting like a slave for the reason she suggested earlier, slavery is a slow process of dulling one's sense of identity. It is this slow dulling that Dana has to resist to prevent her from erasing her twentieth-century self and giving herself over to the nineteenth-century identity she is in danger of adopting. Just as Dana needed to be shocked into reconnecting with her ancestral, racial and gendered history through time travel, she also needs a catalyst to encourage her to not become complacent in the past. This catalyst is the sporadic, increasingly invasive infractions on her identity. Dana finds she cannot abide the dominant gaze of slavery, in the alternative persons of Rufus and Tom Weylin, that fragments and seeks total ownership that controls the

intellectual, emotional and sexual components of her identity. These sporadic infringements make the moments when Dana considers how much easier it would be to become a full participant as a slave on the plantation, very uncomfortable for her.

The increasing intensity of these encroachments solidify for Dana that she cannot completely surrender her self to bondage. Her immediate and instinctive reaction is to resist. The equally immediate retribution for her resistance is violent punishment. There are three key moments in *Kindred* where the price Dana pays for her resistance is violent punishment: (1) when she teaches a slave to read, (2) when she runs away because Rufus has betrayed her, and (3) when she resists rape from Rufus. These punishments result in scars that in turn document her movement out of a state of *in medias res* and into an interstitial consciousness that fosters her healed identity. The two types of resistance that Dana engages in towards her self creation are oral resistance, expressed through literacy and speech, and physical resistance exercised through running away and self defense.

Ultimately, in resisting fragmentation, Dana is exercising an intrinsic need to maintain her humanity in the face of the institution of slavery and connecting to a heritage of women who shared her desire to resist fragmentation of their identity. Giddings writes that from the beginnings of slavery, many Black women resisted the notion that they were less than human and solely the master's property (43). Not only did they resist against what Giddings terms the "property relation" but, as evidence of how important these notions were, these women also inculcated the same values into future generations (43). This ancestral intention echoes Alice Walker's concept of the ancestor as model and Dana's experience of learning how to survive complete identity fragmentation from the enslaved women on the Weylin plantation. Dana's continual resistance against a complete conforming to slavery can also be attributed to what

Audre Lorde referred to as "body memory" which will always "refer to one's past and beyond to a collective race memory of the violence of the middle passage" (Alexander 221). Dana's body, as memory in this sense, represents physical documentation of her journey as her scars symbolize her refusal to allow infringements on the intellectual, emotional and sexual components of her identity.

The significance of this non-written, textual documentation is evident not only in the beginning, but also at the end of *Kindred* wherein dismemberment marks the beginning of Dana's *in medias res* experience and punctuates the end of her journey. This is marked in the first sentence of the novel as Dana recalls the physical cost of her last travel: "I lost an arm on my last trip home" (Butler 9). At the end of the novel Dana and Kevin stand in the twentieth century near the Maryland Historical Society trying to reassure themselves that their time-travel experience had actually happened. Dana says, "I touched the scar Tom Weylin's boot had left on my face, touched my empty left sleeve" (264). The notion of Dana's body as text is mirrored in Elizabeth Alexander's article "Coming Out Blackened and Whole: Fragmentation and Reintegration" which addresses Audre Lorde's texts, *Zami* (1982) and *Cancer Journals* (1980). Alexander writes of these texts, "Both are autobiographies of Lorde's body…The African American woman's body in Lorde's work -- specifically her own body -- becomes a map of lived experience and a way of printing suffering as well as joy on the flesh…The flesh, the text, remains scarred, marking the trail of self creation" (220). Dana's flesh bears the marks of whippings, a beating and dismemberment. However, all of these fragmentations of her body are an imprint of her intrinsic desire to evolve her identity.

One of the first acts of resistance for which Dana is punished and scarred is one related to oral resistance on two levels. Her first level of oral resistance is to teach Nigel, one of the slaves,

to read. Dana believes it is safe to teach Nigel to read in the cookhouse because, "For as long as I had been on the plantation, it had not happened -- no white had come into the cookhouse…Nigel had agreed with me that it didn't happen" (106). But it does happen in this instance; Tom Weylin comes into the cookhouse and sees Dana with a book in her hands and her finger marking the place where she and Nigel had left off their studies. Dana acknowledges that her action is subversive, but her will to teach Nigel overrules her concerns about being punished by Weylin (101, 105). In effect, she engages in a figurative act of talking back to Weylin and teaching Nigel how to talk back. This action is the second component of Dana's oral resistance.

Tom sought to control all resources on his plantation. These resources were not only the slaves themselves, but also what they could produce. Once he learned that Dana could read and write, he sought to fragment her by controlling her intellectual resource of literacy. He recognized her value as a teacher of literacy and at one point in the novel asks Dana a series of questions that lead to a proposition to purchase her from Kevin. Her job would be to teach Rufus to read and write (91). Dana notes that Tom did not want her reading on her own, but he did want her to read to his son. Her observation is illustrated when he notes that the book Dana was using to teach Nigel was *taken* from his library without his permission or knowledge. He said, "'Didn't I tell you I didn't want you reading?...I treated you good…and you pay me back by stealing from me! Stealing my books! Reading!'" (107). The word "stealing" in this sense addresses not only a literal taking of the book, but also the theft of knowledge. By teaching Nigel to read, Dana was also stealing from Weylin in that she was nurturing his sense of himself by giving Nigel access to knowledge and potentially a tool to run away. When Dana and Kevin later discuss her decision to teach Nigel to read, Kevin inquires, "You think someday he'll write his own pass and head North, don't you?" Dana replies, "At least he'll be able to" (101). The

additional implication of Dana's action then is a theft of one of Tom Weylin's slaves. Tom Weylin punished Dana for her resistance by dragging her from the cookhouse and beating her:

> Weylin dragged me a few feet, then pushed me hard. I fell, knocked myself breathless. I never saw where the whip came from, never even saw the first blow coming. But it came – like a hot iron across my back, burning into me through my light shirt, searing my skin…I thought I would die on the ground there with a mouth full of dirt and blood and a white man cursing and lecturing as he beat me…I vomited. And I vomited again because I couldn't move my face away. (107)

The effect of this beating is that Dana is literally scarred and, for the moment, silenced. Her mouth, the prime source of orality, is filled with foul elements -- blood, dirt, vomit -- because of an outside force, violence, used in an attempt to submit her will. She can neither control what is coming out of her mouth, nor can she stop what goes into her mouth.

Oral resistance applies to the written word as well as the spoken word. In her book *Speaking Power: Black Feminist Orality in Women's Narratives of Slavery* (2006) DoVeanna S. Fulton writes:

> The use of language as a weapon to combat oppression and dehumanization illuminates a critical interpretation of the world that demands Black women practice active resistance to invisibility and objectification by using our voices to represent intelligence and integrity in a society that denies Black women these qualities. (x)

Fulton states that one of the important components of oral traditions such as stories, sermons and Blues is that Black people are at the center of the stories (xii). These representations of testifying

or Black feminist oralities -- as Fulton names them -- "presents an alternative worldview that places African Americans at the center of narratives and values Black subjectivity" (xii). Oral resistance is related very closely, as Fulton points out, to language and more specifically, subjectivity in language. In the context of testifying, one considers not only how to exist, but how to see one's self. This becomes important to Dana as she has to re-conceptualize who she is as Black woman. In the period and location in which Dana was traveling, Black woman most often was synonymous with slave woman, this was not the case in the twentieth century. The reader sees Dana early in the novel changing her name from Edana to Dana. This insight allows the reader to see how important self-naming is to Dana. The reader also sees how devastating it must be to Dana to not be able to control how she is defined as a person, to have the threat of erasure.

A more implicit mode of resistance is literal resistance. For enslaved women, this resistance often meant not just resisting being enslaved, but resisting violations and uses of their bodies specific to them as women. Davis writes in her article, "Reflections on the Black Woman's Role in the Community of Slaves" about open rebellions that "erupted with such a frequency that they were as much a part of the texture of slavery as the conditions of servitude themselves" (86, 91-95). She also explains that "resistance expressed itself in other grand modes and also in the seemingly trivial forms of feigned illness and studied indolence" and in other actions such as "poisoning the food and setting fire to the houses of their masters" (86, 91). Giddings writes that female slaves practiced a little known form of resistance wherein they prevented the birth of children by resisting forced marriages and aborting forced pregnancies: "They used contraceptives and abortives in an attempt to resist the system and gain control of their bodies" (46). Arguably, resisting the system and gaining control of their bodies is at the

heart of slaves' resistance, especially women. Rufus attempts to control Dana's body by controlling her emotional and sexual resources. Dana's literal resistance against this control of her body manifests in her attempt to run away and in her stabbing Rufus.

Dana returns to 1976 from her third time travel trip after being beaten for teaching Nigel to read. She returns without Kevin. As she fades from what is now 1819, she sees Kevin running towards her. However, he does not reach her in time to travel back with her (107). Dana learns, while caring for Rufus that Kevin has been writing to him. She says to Rufus, "'Rufe, now that I'm here, now that you are safe, I want to find my husband'" (135). Rufus provides paper and time for Dana to write Kevin, but Dana soon learns that Rufus has not been mailing the letters. Implicit in Rufus's decision to not contact Kevin for Dana is his increasing desire to control Dana's emotional resource as it relates to her husband Kevin.

He works to control how Dana communicates with Kevin first by offering to be her amanuensis to communicate with Kevin, but Dana knows that this will give Rufus an opportunity to insert his words and thoughts, and therefore his control, into her communication with Kevin. Using Sojourner Truth as an example, Fulton explains the pitfalls of allowing someone to communicate for you. Fulton writes that Sojourner Truth understood that the person acting the amanuensis of her narrative "could not truly depict every aspect of her identity without inserting foreign ideas and implications" (25). Sojourner Truth's oral resistance to this infringement is signification through storytelling. Thus her anamnesis, perhaps unwittingly writes, "She [Sojourner Truth] wished to compare the teachings of the Bible with the witness within her and she came to the conclusion, that the spirit of truth spoke in these records, but that the recorders of those truths had intermingled them with ideas and suppositories of their own" (Fulton 24-25). Here, Fulton presents an example of Sojourner Truth's orality acting as an echo

of true representation within a written format.

Dana's solution to this kind of infringement is to decline Rufus's offer and to write Kevin herself. Rufus acquiesces, and then tries to control when she will be represented by insisting that he mail the letters (Butler 136). While, in the first example of resistance Tom tried to control how Dana used her intellectual capital, Rufus is now trying to control how she uses her emotional capital. As the narrative progresses, the reader sees Rufus using Kevin as a bargaining tool to get Dana to submit to his wishes (142-143). At one moment of foreshadowing Rufus expresses fear that Dana will use a map in a book she brought with her from the twentieth century to run away. He says to her, "That map is still bothering me. Listen, if you want me to get that letter to town soon, you put the map in the fire too" (142).

It is her ancestral models, her great-grandmother, Alice, and Sarah who offer wisdom and support for Dana to discover that Rufus is not mailing the letters. Dana receives direction from Sarah to check with Nigel to be sure that Rufus is mailing the letters. Sarah says, "'Sometimes Marse Rufe says what will make you feel good-not what's true'" (150). Alice also urges Dana to write another letter to Kevin. Later, Dana learns from Alice that Rufus did not send the letters to Kevin (170). Alice tells her, "'I been looking where I wasn't s'pose to look-in Mister Rufe's bed chest. But what I found don't look like it ought to be there'" (170). It was Dana's letters to Kevin opened by Rufus. For Dana, this is a significant betrayal by Rufus. Her response is to resist this movement from she and Rufus's delicate balance of mutual respect to one of master and slave by running away (170-174).

After a short chase, Rufus sees her and yells to the others, "'She's here!'…'I've got her!'… His father strolled over and kicked me in the face" (175). Even after her whipping, which she described as "steady, slashing blows" that made her hope for death, she knew that

once she was well again she would try to run away once more (176). The thought of another attempted escape sickened her, but her will was not broken. Just as Dana believes that potential punishment is worth the risk of resistance to teach Nigel to read, she is willing to risk punishment again in order to resist against being silenced and fragmented into a real slave. Dana is punished and receives more scars on her back and looses two teeth (174).

The third instance of resistance that leaves scars on Dana's body is her resistance against an infringement of her body. A dominant gaze that presumes to be able to fragment its subject's intelligence and emotions into parts to be controlled or owned would have no second thoughts about applying this concept to his subject's sexuality. As Rufus matures during Dana's time travels, he comes to see Dana more as a body, in the slavery sense, than his savior. As such she could be possessed as he had forcibly possessed Alice -- who eventually committed suicide. At this point, Dana has to consciously make a decision not to acquiesce to Rufus, and a decision to resist Rufus's sexual advances which would have been for her, an ultimate erasure of her personhood. At this point Dana refuses to be fragmented into a sexual being. She understands that to "forgive him even this" -- attempted rape -- would mean to give her *self* up wholly.

Dana's sentiment echoes the experiences Harriet Jacobs related, under the pen name Linda Brent, in her slave narrative *Incidents in the Life of a Slave Girl* (1861). As in the case of Harriet Jacobs, slave narratives illustrated that enslaved women often had no choice regarding their chastity. Rather, the choice was more often how to retain some sense of their selves in an environment that constantly worked to deny them their basic humanity. For example, from the time that Jacobs was fourteen, Flint -- her slave master -- continuously propositioned her and sought to completely own her body and will. Flint tells Jacobs that she was made for his use, "made to obey his command in *every* thing; that I was nothing but a slave, whose will must and

should surrender to his" (16). Important to note here is the extent to which she was expected to be owned. Not just her body, but her will was expected to be surrendered to ownership. Jacobs resisted, however saying, "My *soul* [my italics] revolted against the mean tyranny" (26). It is indeed her soul or her will that fuels her refutation of his repeated requests. Jacobs's will can also be recast as her own notion of her humanness. At one point, Jacobs says, "The war of my life had begun [for the sexual ownership of her body]; and though one of God's most powerless creatures, I resolved never to be conquered" (17). She must decide whether to surrender to Flint or to willingly give herself to someone else.

Just as Flint tries to sexually engage Jacobs, Rufus tries to cajole Dana into being intimate with him. Rufus says of his relationship with Alice, "'She hated me from the first time I forced her…I wonder how long it will take you?'" (259). At some point during this encounter Dana has armed herself with a knife, yet she asks herself, "What was I waiting for?" to defend herself (259). She says she then "slowly began to realize how easy it would be for me to continue to be still and forgive him even this" (260). She continues to rationalize that Rufus was not as cruel or ugly as his father and that he would not sell Dana as Rufus's father had sold his concubine (260).

This version of Dana is a far, far cry from a Dana who corrects Rufus for calling her a "nigger" at the beginning of the novel and insists that she is instead, a Black woman. This Dana is betting that if she remains still and does not fight Rufus, he will not hurt her. She is hazarding that if she continues to be cooperative, Rufus will not sell her. Imploring oral resistance, Dana ends her rationalizing with one word, "No" (260). She then remembers, "A slave is a slave. Anything could be done to her" (200). With this realization she stabs Rufus twice with a knife. After the second time she stabs him, Rufus grabs her arm. Dana goes back in time, but does not

bring Rufus back with her. Instead her arm gets stuck in the wall. This action results in the dismemberment of Dana's arm and the end of her time travels.

As Dana employs these instances of resistance she moves closer towards healing her twentieth-century fragmented identity as well as the fragmented identity she is in danger of developing in the nineteenth century. While it is true that she grows increasingly complacent with her life on the Weylin plantation, she never becomes completely complacent about her right to exist in any century as a woman who owned herself. The result of this non-negotiable element of her identity that sporadically bobs to the surface of her consciousness is that her moments of complacency are intermittently interrupted with increasingly greater infringements on her sense of herself. These moments of infringement come with strong demands that remind Dana of the parts of herself of which she is not willing to relinquish control: her intelligence, her emotions and her sexuality. It is in these moments that the reader witnesses how Dana ultimately achieves interstitial consciousness wherein she develops a third consciousness, or middle way, of conceptualizing one's identity.

Dana conquers her state of *in medias res* and achieves an interstitial consciousness by ultimately bridging the temporal definitions of the term *Black woman* and re-conceptualizing her identity. The reader witnesses Dana's journey through the inverted lens of time and sees both a historically fragmented twentieth-century Dana and a slowly eroding twentieth-century Dana. As a result of this fragmentation and erosion, Dana risks erasure of her identity, and a resulting erasure of a complete personhood that considers one's past *and* present. One of the lessons that Dana seems to have to learn is that she cannot exist in the twentieth century as a whole person without knowledge of, or a connection to, her history; nor can she completely exist in the nineteenth century as a slave irrespective of her twentieth-century perspective.

During her time travels, it is Dana's sense that she does not purely exist for someone else's benefit that keeps her from crossing a line that was becoming more and more finite between her twentieth-century self and her nineteenth-century self. This innate, elemental sense of self consciousness or self awareness persevered no matter how the institution of slavery may have attempted to wear away her sense of free will. While she may have felt this way to some extent in the twentieth century, her self awareness evolves to include a more complete sense of herself as connected to a past, a history and people, that is not theoretical but actually lived.

The costs of this lesson are mapped on her body as scars from the punishments she receives as a slave as she resists erasure. These scars, in turn, result in her body being fragmented. Therefore, the experiences Dana shares with the reader are not only a story of her time travels, but also her struggle and learning curve to guarantee the preservation of her own life *and* of her own *self* or personhood amidst the randomly occurring temporal displacement that causes her to exist in two time periods that provide distinctively different conceptualizations of her identity as a Black woman.

Audre Lorde offers an example of re-conceptualizing one's identity through language. Her approach to resisting fragmentation was to retool language by re-conceptualizing the application of written language rules such as capitalization and spelling to offer a revised consideration of words such as America, re-writing the word in her texts as "america" (Alexander 226-227). Lorde even created a new way to talk about herself in her biographical book *Zami: A New Spelling of My Name* -- biomythography. This term implies that she can tell truths about her life using literal or metaphorical means. Note that this was not a re-naming of her self, but rather another way to consider her self. In a larger sense, one can consider Dana's story a biomythography of Black women in the United States.

While no one has literally traveled back in time to experience slavery, it is true that Black women collectively carry the scars and feelings of fragmentation that result from slavery. The oral and written testimonies of these experiences and subsequent accounts of how Black women were able to remain whole, even if only in the smallest way, offers methods of resisting existing in this historically fragmented, *in medias res*, state. In effect, these testimonies offer a figurative mode of time travel to a past filled with the resilient, resistive action of reshaping one's perceived image by the "other" through oral and or written means. Fulton writes that writings or oralities such as these create a text about Black women that confronts the image of Black women established during slavery which, "crystallized Black women's experiences of oppression and continues to inform Black identities and experience" (6). During Dana's time travels her literal interactions with her past evolves her fragmented concept of her identity. As a result she is able to move out of *in medias res* and resolve her historical fragmentation.

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