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TRANSGENERATIONAL GHOSTING IN THE PSYCHES AND SOMAS OF AFRICAN AMERICANS AND THEIR LITERATURES

By

Sonya McCoy-Wilson

Under the Direction of Dr. Janet Gabler-Hover

ABSTRACT

I argue that William Wells Brown's narrative, *Clotel,* is informed by the white racism inherent in Thomas Jefferson's *Notes on the State of Virginia* and reveals evidence of the trauma it has fostered transgenerationally. By examining Toni Morrison's *Beloved,* I assert that the trauma of slavery is transmitted transgenerationally in the black female body. I develop my argument using trauma theory, postulated through the work of Cathy Caruth, Dori Laub, Diana Miles, Abraham and Maria Torok, and William Cross. My purpose is to reveal the relevance and lasting significance of the legacy of slavery in contemporary American society. Thomas Jefferson's white supremacist ideas, along with the system of slavery which nurtured them, continue to plague contemporary American thought and continue to shape African American female identity.

INDEX WORDS: slavery, transgenerational, ghosting, intergenerational, trauma, body, identity, *Beloved, Clotel*

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Sonya McCoy-Wilson

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2008

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College of Arts and Sciences
Georgia State University
August 2008

DEDICATION

I dedicate this scholarship to my mother and father, their mothers and fathers, my enslaved African ancestors (on whose shoulders I stand), to my African American people whose plight is often diminished and made invisible by the dominant culture, and finally to future generations of African Americans. May you never forget and find strength and courage in the struggle.

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INTRODUCTION

There is an overwhelming silence permeating American culture regarding the legacy of slavery and its effects on today's contemporary society. Rather, Americans engage in staunch denials and disavowals about the relevance of slavery in a society that boasts meritocracy and egalitarianism. There is a historical amnesia and misappropriation of linear historical time as it relates to the contextualization of slavery in American culture. Much of the current rhetoric posits that slavery ended hundreds of years ago, American society has transcended this blight in its otherwise illustrious history, and African Americans should forget about slavery. Let us entertain for a moment the assertion that slavery ended hundreds of years ago. The sheer mathematics of time tells us that the United States of America, from the date of independence, is only 232 years old. If we go even further back in time, to the date of the first American colony in Jamestown, VA, this brings us to the year 1607. Again, the math shows us that America, as a concept, is 401 years old. This makes America a bit older conceptually. However, America as an independent nation begins in 1776, making the country 232 years old and only an infant of an empire if we contextualize her alongside other great empires such as the Roman Empire, the Ottoman Empire, and the British Empire, who reigned respectively over 500 years, 320 years, and over 400 years. Therefore, the current perception of America as an "old" empire is flawed and somehow connected to the more flawed perception that slavery ended hundreds of years ago.

The first enslaved Africans arrived in America in 1619, and slavery was abolished in 1865; therefore, of the 401 years of British colonization and American independence, Africans were enslaved 246 of those years. Some may say, then, African Americans have enjoyed 143 years of freedom, still not the misconceived "hundreds" of years so indelibly engraved on the American imagination. Yet, this naïve assertion fails to acknowledge the system of oppression

that replaced slavery. Legalized "Jim Crow" segregation was yet another form of brutality and oppression that replaced slavery and endured until the signing of the Civil Rights Act on April 11, 1968, which, it would seem, was only signed because of the assassination of Martin Luther King, Jr. just seven days earlier. America, embarrassed and guilty, finally makes good on the promises of the Constitution and the guarantees of the Emancipation Proclamation. Therefore, Africans in America have only been legally "free" since 1968, forty years. And yet, there is no sentiment of government culpability and responsibility for the egregious injustices of legalized and systematic lynchings (which amounted to genocide), legalized white terrorism, and legalized deprivation of Fourteenth Amendment Rights. Instead, white America chooses to shroud this bloody and violent history, writing it out of school history books, reducing it to a mere "sound bite" that is the Civil Rights movements, and suggests that African Americans forget and move on.

Ironically, however, there is no such suggestion given to American Jews whose ancestors suffered during the holocaust or Japanese Americans who were interred in American concentration camps during World War II. As a matter of fact, the American government has offered national apologies to the Japanese, Germany was ordered by the United Nations to pay reparations to the Jews, and American Jews are encouraged never to forget the holocaust and to never allow their oppressors the comfort of amnesia. Slavery, however, has become invisible or, at the very least, its legacy has been diminished in public and written discourse. The American government has refused, for over a century, to seriously consider the notion of reparations for those African Americans whose ancestors were enslaved in America. To date, no American president has ever officially apologized for slavery. Apologizing would make visible the legacy

of slavery and would imply white American responsibility for the degradation, generational enslavement, and genocide of millions of Africans in America.

As I have detailed above, Africans in America have only truly been "free" forty short years; however, they have been expected to forget and transcend transgenerational, chattel slavery and the institutionalized white supremacy which followed. I argue that white America's, and even some African American's, expectations are too high and too unreasonable considering the transgenerational trauma indicative of the aftermath of slavery. Furthermore, I contend that slavery is transgenerationally, psychically ghosted in the bodies and consciousness of contemporary African Americans and this ghosting continues to haunt and traumatize Blacks, thus impeding the formation of black identity and self-definition. The literatures of African Americans have consistently reflected the trauma of the legacy of slavery from the earliest publications in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries to more recent contemporary narratives.

Moving to one of the earliest American texts, we see the beginnings of an indoctrination of white supremacist thinking at the highest level of American society – the United States Congress. Thomas Jefferson writes *Notes on the State of Virginia* in 1781, only five years after drafting *The Declaration of Independence.* No one can deny the eloquence and fecundity in the phrase "We hold these truths to be self-evident, that all men are created equal, that they are endowed by their Creator with certain unalienable rights, that among these are Life, Liberty and the pursuit of Happiness." These words still summon a nostalgic tear from even the most cynical and apathetic eye in this post-modern moment, which proclaims there is no Truth and God is dead. In fact, it can be said that these are the promises that have drawn millions of immigrants to American shores seeking the bounty of this "land of good and plenty." Indeed, these words have been an integral part of nation making and empire building for over three centuries. However, the words that followed in Jefferson's *Notes* were not nearly as inclusive. In this text, Jefferson

textually addresses the "Negro question" and the slavery problem. Some scholars contend that the text illuminates Jefferson's obvious ambivalence about slavery.[1] However, "Query XIV" demonstrates that Jefferson's only ambivalence was whether or not Africans and whites could coexist peacefully if and when slavery was abolished. Rather, Jefferson's "Query XIV" resonates a fixed surety about the position of the African as slave, based on the African's innate physical, intellectual, and emotional inferiority. Even though Jefferson asserts the inferior beauty of the black female, ironically, he fathers children with one of his slaves in the years following the drafting of *Notes*. William Wells Brown writes the first version of the novel *Clotel* in 1853 after he has escaped slavery and has become an abolitionist.

Jefferson writes *Notes on the State of Virginia* in 1781 in order to refute the notion of America as a nation of barbarians. Instead, Jefferson posits the New World, specifically the state of Virginia, as an organized civilization dedicated to the principles of progress, "right" thinking and "right" living. In doing so, he must address the slave problem. At the time Jefferson drafts his text, Africans had been enslaved in America for over a century. In "Query XIV", Jefferson decides that the colonies must dispense of the African presence because keeping them in bondage contradicts American rhetoric of democracy, and the African presence threatens the very future of white democracy. Jefferson cannot imagine a New World after slavery in which Africans and whites coexist peacefully. Most importantly, the presence of Africans calls attention to "the real distinctions which nature has made," Jefferson explains.[2] According to Jefferson, Africans are inferior to whites physically, intellectually, and emotionally. Jefferson

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[1] Edward L. Ayers and Bradley C. Mittendorf, *The Oxford Book of the South*, 13. This text is an anthology of Southern literature from the eighteenth century through the twentieth century. Throughout the text, Ayers and Mittendorf's attitudes toward slavery are conservative, at best. In their Introduction and commentary, they seem to imply slavery was an unfortunate yet necessary evil which shaped the eccentricities of the South, making a unique and distinctive American culture.

[2] Thomas Jefferson, "Query XIV" *Notes on the State of Virginia*, 147.

questions the physical beauty and aesthetic appeal of the African in "Query XIV", and since physical beauty has been constructed as a female asset, we can infer that Jefferson imagines the black woman specifically when he says:

> Are not the fine mixtures of red and white, the expressions of every passion by greater or less suffusions of colour in the one, preferable to that eternal monotony, which reigns in the countenances, that immoveable veil of black which covers all the emotions of the other race? Add to these, flowing hair a more elegant symmetry of form, their own judgment in favour of the whites, declared by their preference of them, as uniformly as is the preference of the Oranootan [orangutan] for the black women over those of his own species.[3]

Here, Jefferson holds that black skin is inferior to white skin, as white skin is more aesthetically pleasing. This is evidenced by the fact that, according to Jefferson, the black man prefers the white woman over the black woman, leaving, absurdly enough, the orangutan as the only suitable mate for the black woman. One could say that Jefferson's assertions exist in isolation and are simply the postulations of a racist. However, Jefferson's enduring significance to the shaping of American ideals and culture cannot be understated. He was considered one of America's first philosophers and great thinkers. Thomas Jefferson has been historicized as one of the "founding fathers" of America. He is known as the "The Sage of Monticello", the epicurean, and most importantly, the founder of Republicanism in the United States. Therefore, his white supremacist rhetoric should not be dismissed as merely a product of its times but rather a creation of its times. Jefferson had the power to construct truth, and indeed, he did and he has.

I argue that the trauma of slavery, which informs Jefferson's ideas, continues to plague contemporary American thought and continues to shape African American female identity. I

[3] Thomas Jefferson, 147-48.

interrogate the notion that bodies do remember. In the novel *Beloved* (1988) Toni Morrison examines the trauma left by the legacy of slavery by historicizing and rewriting the slave narrative of Margaret Garner. She focuses much of her attention on the black female, her psychological, and physical trauma. Morrison dramatizes transgenerational haunting in the figures of Beloved and Sethe. Throughout the narrative, Sethe attempts to reconcile the trauma of slavery through a repetition compulsion, a "re-memory," or testimony of the enumerable physical and psychological atrocities she experiences while enslaved and during her escape from slavery. The characters in the world of the text, as well as the readers of the narrative, bear witness to Sethe's testimony.

Once Sethe reaches freedom, rather than have her children recaptured into the brutality of chattel slavery, Sethe slits the throat of Beloved, the "crawling already girl," killing her. Her plan is to kill herself and her other children, but she is stopped before she can complete the act. Consequently, Sethe is haunted by her memories and the ghost of her dead daughter, Beloved, for the remainder of the narrative. When Beloved manifests in the flesh, Sethe attempts to atone for her "rough choice" of infanticide. Therefore, through Sethe's re-memory of the body (soma) trauma she experiences through rape, brutality, and other physical abuse, she attempts to reconcile and heal her psychological (psyche) trauma. We find that psyche and soma are linked irrevocably.

"White's Alright, Brown Stick Around, Black Get Back": Internalized Structures of Trauma in William Wells Brown's *Clotel*

The title of this chapter includes a rhyme that black children all over America recited in playgrounds, backyards, and school yards for most of the twentieth century. Its meaning is clear – white people are preferred, brown people are acceptable, and black people need not apply. A similar brand of self-loathing was used as evidence in the landmark 1954 *Brown v. Board of Education* Supreme Court case which desegregated American schools. Psychologists interviewed black children and recorded their responses about black and white dolls. Overwhelmingly, the children not only preferred the white dolls to the black dolls, but they ascribed negative, even deviant, characteristics to the black dolls. Attorneys for the NAACP attributed the children's responses to poor self-image caused by segregated and inferior school systems. In the end, American school systems were ordered by the Court to desegregate because the Separate but Equal Doctrine was found to be unconstitutional. In this case, faulting the Separate but Equal Doctrine for the poor self-image of black children was like faulting the street drug dealer for the infestation of illegal street drugs in America. Just as the true source of the drug problem can be traced back to drug Cartels and specious agreements between governments, so can the true source of the troubled consciousness of African Americans be traced back to slavery.

The macabre nursery rhyme titling this chapter signifies the abysmal and profound scarring that began in slavery and is ghosted in the psyches and somas of African Americans today.[4] During slavery, a part of transforming an African into a slave, a human into chattel, was

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[4] Deborah E. McDowell. "Recovery Missions: Imaging the Body Ideals", 309. In this Afterword to the text *Recovering the Black Female Body: Self-Representations by African American Women*, McDowell makes a connection between the contemporary African American female body, ravaged by psychological and physical abuse and the historical oppression and subjugation of the black female body. Her desire is to magnify the reciprocal relationship between the psyche and soma, inside the body and outside the body, visible and invisible "matter" in order to promote healing of the black female body and consciousness.

the process of "breaking".[5] This process included physical and psychological torture, reprogramming the African, making her believe that her suffering was ordained by God and therefore deserved. She was taught that not only was her body and all of its corporeality loathsome and grotesque, but that the white female body was everything she was not – beautiful, clean, and preferred.[6] Of course, black men endured the breaking process as well. However, as bell hooks explains in *Ain't I a Woman*, the process was compounded for the black female because of her vulnerability to sexual and reproductive exploitation.[7] Unfortunately, this "breaking" was rather successful, as the trauma caused by this kind of abuse has broken the psyches and somas of black women for over two centuries. As Deborah E. McDowell explains in "Recovery Missions: Imaging the Body Ideals", we cannot separate psyche from soma, inside from outside.[8] Wounds inflicted upon the soma manifest in the psyche and vice versa.

William Wells Brown's *Clotel or The President's Daughter: A Narrative of Slave Life in the United States* illustrates this reciprocal relationship between psyche and soma. William L. Andrews argues that Brown attacked Jefferson not simply to unmask a hypocrite in high places, but also "to point out a characteristic contradiction in American life, which the remainder of his novel illustrates extensively."[9] Although Brown attempts to respond to Jefferson's assertions that black women are inferior physically, intellectually, and emotionally, and he seeks to indict and contradict the ideals of the empire Jefferson has built, Brown's response undermines his

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[5] bell hooks, "Sexism and the Black Female Slave Experience." *Ain't I a Woman*, 19. In this book chapter, hooks seeks to magnify black female struggles during slavery. The experiences of the black male slave have been generously theorized and examined, while the experiences of the black female have been subsumed within those of the black male. hooks argues that because of her sexual vulnerability and close working proximity to the white family, the black female slave suffered atrocities that the black male slave did not.
[6] bell hooks, 29-31.
[7] bell hooks, 19.
[8] Deborah E. McDowell, 311.
[9] William L. Andrews, "Introduction". *Clotel* in *Three Classic African American Novels*, 15.

intentions.[10] Suggested by the title, readers presume the central focus of the novel to be slave life from the perspective of a female protagonist. Instead, Brown's narrative demonstrates an internalization of Jefferson's white supremacism, as he privileges the voices and presence of the white and mulatto females and denigrates the full-blood black females. By the end of the narrative, the reader is hard pressed to find any black characters remaining in a novel about slave life in America. Brown renders the black female body invisible yet uses the black female presence and consciousness as a divisive tool to reify white female gentility.

We see Brown reifying white aesthetics of beauty when first he introduces Clotel (the fictional daughter of Thomas Jefferson), her mother Currer (the fictional stand-in for Sally Hemings), and sister Althesa (second fictional daughter of Jefferson) at the slave auction. Currer had been sold first. Clotel's sister, Althesa, "scarcely less beautiful", had been sold for $500 less than Clotel to the same trader earlier. It appears that Brown saves the best and most beautiful for last, as Clotel is the last to be auctioned of the three. Since Clotel stands on the auction block, the quintessential position of objectification, Brown frames her like a tableau vivant. The narrator describes the scene:

> There she stood, with a complexion as white as most of those who were waiting with a wish to become her purchasers; her features as finely defined as any of her sex of pure Anglo-Saxon; her long black wavy hair done up in the neatest manner; her form tall and graceful, and her whole appearance indicating one superior to her position. (Brown 121)

[10] Although Thomas Jefferson's Query XIV asserts that both black females and males are inferior, the part of his attack that focuses on beauty implies a specification of the black female body. Since beauty has been socially constructed as a quintessential female asset, we can infer that Jefferson's assertion of physical black inferiority by virtue of absence of long flowing hair and lack of blush in the cheek is aimed at the black female. Therefore, my exegesis focuses on the paradigm that Jefferson sets for black female corporeal inferiority, and how this paradigm informs Brown's narrative.

On the one hand, Brown's tableaux troubles the notion of the auction block and the purchasing of human flesh. On the other hand, his framing of Clotel clearly privileges white aesthetics of beauty, so that his tableaux not only problematizes the objectification of the auction block but it calls attention to Clotel's white skin, long hair, and well-formed body. In this sense, the tableaux loses the possibility for subversion.

Brown describes her "finely defined" features as "pure Anglo-Saxon". As Eve Allegra Raimon suggests in *The "Tragic Mulatta" Revisited* (2004), Brown attempts to trouble the notion of "fixed configurations of black and white bodies" and "the alert reader is necessarily forced to question the validity of the very category of 'pure Anglo-Saxon.'"[11] While troubling the notion of corporeal race surety, however, Brown does something else. He suggests that Clotel's African blood has not manifested any physical African features, therefore, rendering her white traits pure and untainted. In other words, Clotel is beautiful because her physical traits, skin tone, hair texture, and bone structure are that of an Anglo-Saxon (white) woman rather than an African (black) woman. No matter how invalid the category of "pure Anglo-Saxon" may be, we understand that Clotel's corporeal self is characterized by privileged white aesthetics. Not only does Brown privilege these Anglo-Saxon features, but he claims that the presence of these features are a marker of Clotel's superiority. Brown asserts that Clotel is "superior to her position" of slave because of her Anglo-Saxon blood. Clotel's white blood renders her unfit to be a slave. However, by suggesting that Clotel is unfit to be a slave, Brown implies that someone else is more suited for the position.

In the text, *Neither White Nor Black: The Mulatto Character in American Fiction* (1978), Judith Berzon explains that many "early black novelists used the mulatto character in

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[11] Eve Allegra Raimon, *The "Tragic Mulatta" Revisited*, 76. Much of Raimon's discourse seeks to re-present the trope of the tragic mulatta through a twenty first century lens, focusing on the current fascination with multiracialism while retrospectively and comparatively looking back to the nineteenth-century.

order to emphasize his superiority, to show white America that some blacks could succeed, within the framework established by the dominant white majority, and to attack American society for not recognizing the worth of some members of the non-Caucasian group."[12] Berzon further explains that the "mixed blood's life is fraught with tragedy and bitterness because his culture has defined him as a Negro and a slave."[13] We see these tropes employed in the characterization and the lives of the mulatto women in *Clotel*. Brown, a mulatto himself, privileges the experiences of the mulatto and white women in order to expose the system of slavery as inhumane and insidious primarily because of the copious and indiscriminate miscegenation it engenders, allowing fathers to enslave and sell their own children. However, while Brown vehemently indicts slavery in this respect, he negates the full-blood black woman not only by denying her personhood but by implying that she is more suited for slavery than the mulatta.

It appears that Brown's constructions of the full-blood black females in *Clotel* echo the white racism in Thomas Jefferson's "Query XIV" and represent the trauma of slavery, trauma that forces the oppressed subject to see himself through the eyes of the oppressor. Since William Wells Brown constructs the character of Clotel as Thomas Jefferson's mulatto daughter, and Brown, along with most African American writers in the nineteenth-century, would have been well-aware of Jefferson's rhetoric, it is more than feasible to argue that Jefferson's rhetoric informs Brown's narrative. As John Hope Franklin notes in *From Slavery to Freedom* (2000), "From the time Jefferson's *Notes on Virginia* was made public, Southern leaders did not hesitate

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[12] Judith Berzon, *Neither White Nor Black: The Mulatto Character in American Fiction*, 53. Berzon, on the other hand, differentiates between the way the trope of the tragic mulatto has been used by white and black writers from the nineteenth-century into the twenty first.
[13] Berzon, 54

to use his work to strengthen their contention that Negroes were by nature an inferior."[14] Therefore, Jefferson's ideas not only help to shape the southern "way of life" but also help to shape an empire. As a result, Brown positions black females much like white writers have positioned the African presence in American literature. Toni Morrison theorizes the use of the African in American literature in *Playing in the Dark: Whiteness and the Literary Imaginary* (1992). Morrison explains that

> Africanism is the vehicle by which the American self knows itself as not enslaved, but free; not repulsive, but desirable; not helpless, but licensed and powerful; not history-less, but historical; not damned, but innocent; not a blind accident of evolution, but a progressive fulfillment of destiny.[15]

She charges that white writers use black characters to define whiteness on the basis of what whiteness is *not* rather than what whiteness *is*. Brown does something similar with black females. He objectifies them, giving them no humanity via physical and emotional characterization, using them as literary devices, and placing them in antagonistic/adversarial positions with the mulatto females.

We see an example of this in the slave market at the New Orleans auction house when Althesa has been separated from her sister, Clotel, and mother, Currer. She is to be auctioned along with the other slaves. The narrator describes the scene: "Attached to the back premises is a good-sized kitchen, where two old negresses are at work, stewing, boiling, and baking, and occasionally wiping the sweat from their furrowed and swarthy brows" (Brown 139). Not only is this scene reminiscent of the witches in *Macbeth*, but Brown juxtaposes these two black women with the lighter skinned Althesa. The narrator describes "the beautiful Althesa, whose

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[14] John Hope Franklin, *From Slavery to Freedom*, 120. This text presents a history of Africans in America but also includes a section about African culture.
[15] Toni Morrison, *Playing in the Dark: Whiteness and the Literary Imaginary*, 52.

pale countenance and dejected look told how many sad hours she had passed since parting with her mother at Natchez" (139). As Elizabeth West explains in her essay "The Black Female Protagonists and the Abstruse Racialized Self in Antebellum African American Novels", "Her slave status aside, Althesa is the picture of nineteenth-century sentimental femininity. She is an undeserving victim whose plight is more horrible in light of her respectable and noble ancestry."[16] The old black women toiling over hot stoves are clearly stripped of all femininity, all beauty, and all subjectivity, complete with "furrowed and swarthy brows". This is the first presentation of full blood black women in the text. Their literary purpose is juxtaposition. In the black women, Brown provides for us dark, sweaty shadows that we must squint to see, while, we clearly see Althesa, the beautiful mulatto, whose genteel femininity is superior to the objectification of the slave auction. Brown presents these black women as flat characters without names and without lives. The only thing that we are sure of is that they are dark, frowning, kitchen women, in stark contrast to the light mulatto girl who we are admonished to pity because she is the "undeserving victim" of slavery.

The contrast of the full-blood black women and the mulatto women echoes Thomas Jefferson's assertions that whites have superior beauty to blacks, and that black men prefer white aesthetics of beauty. Brown's narrative clearly reifies this notion and privileges white female aesthetics even as it attempts to undermine the brutality of slavery. As West explains, "Bound by a dominant discourse on femininity that aligned ideal womanhood with the presumed fragility and vulnerability of white women, [Brown] is unable to transpose this image onto the widely

[16] Elizabeth West, "The Black Female Protagonists and the Abstruse Racialized Self in Antebellum African American Novels", 53. West interrogates the long held notion that African American Antebellum literature is mere mimicry of American literature by white authors. Instead she posits early African American literature as having distinct traditions that subvert gender, race, class, and sexuality.

accepted image of black women."[17] Brown is incapable of envisioning black female corporeality. He does not describe black female "bodies", rather he avoids them. Although Brown avoids blatant physically pejorative representations of black female bodies, his inability to envision their bodies at all is just as troubling. He is incapable of transposing beauty onto a black female body. Brown can only present the black female as a shadowy figure, devoid of facial features (aside from furrowed and swarthy brows), devoid of hair, body parts, and bodies. The dominant discourse to which Brown subscribes is rooted in Jeffersonian ideals, and the widely accepted image of black women is, as Jefferson states, that they are inferior to white women and preferred by animals rather than humans.

The twentieth-century historian Barbara Welter and the twentieth-century feminist scholar Patricia Hill Collins have theorized nineteenth-century white and black constructions of womanhood that are the doubtless offspring of Jefferson's eighteenth-century postulations. Welter outlines the virtues of true white womanhood in her text "The Cult of True Womanhood: 1820-1860" (1966). According to Welter, the attributes "by which a woman judged herself and was judged by her husband, her neighbors and society could be divided into four cardinal virtues – piety, purity, submissiveness, and domesticity. Put them all together and they spelled mother, daughter, sister, wife—woman. Without them, no matter whether there was fame, achievement, or wealth, all was ashes. With them she was promised happiness and power."[18] To uphold these virtues of white womanhood, there had to be a cultural barometer to measure them, and that barometer was the black female. White female identity, just as Morrison says of whiteness, defined itself on the basis of what it was *not* rather than what it *was*.

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[17] West, 53.
[18] Barbara Welter, "The Cult of True Womanhood: 1820-1860", 152.

Patricia Hill Collins explains that "the dominant ideology of the slave era fostered the creation of four interrelated socially constructed controlling images of black womanhood, each reflecting the dominant group's interest in maintaining Black women's subordination."[19] These four images were known as mammies, matriarchs, breeder women, and jezebels. Collins suggests the female body in the nineteenth-century was a site of fear and contempt. In order to negotiate the "Madonna/whore" impulse that permeated American society, the black woman becomes the repository for all of the "unclean" functions of the female body.[20] In the form of mammy, she becomes the desexualized wet nurse allowing "good" white mothers to severe themselves from their own bodily functions and the untidiness of nursing their infants. It is the system of slavery itself, along with those who maintained it, that constructed black female identity always referential to the white female. Therefore, Brown's inability to present black corporeal bodies but readiness to present mulatto bodies suggests that he has internalized these notions. Brown purposely whitens the mulatto females, so that we forget they are black at all. He emphasizes their whiteness whenever they take the stage. The only way that black women can gain subjectivity in the narrative is to become black women in white face.

Returning to the narrative, we see Brown reifying these notions of black female inferiority rather than troubling them. When Clotel is sold to the French family, Mrs. French cuts her hair short. She sees Clotel's long wavy her as competition for her, as it conforms to the white standard of beauty. As punishment for her white aesthetics, Mrs. French cuts her hair. The narrator tells us,

> Even with her short hair, Clotel was handsome. . . At her short hair, the other servants laughed, "Miss Clo needn't strut round so big, she got short nappy har well as I," said

[19] Patricia Hill Collins, "Mammies, Matriarchs, and Other Controlling Images", 70-71.
[20] Hill Collins.

> Nell, with a broad grin that showed her teeth. "She tinks she white, when she come here wid dat long har of hers," replied Mill. (194)

The narrator implies that short hair is outside the paradigm of beauty; "short nappy" hair is a trait reserved for black women. However, despite the short hair, Clotel maintains her beauty. The other slave women, who we can infer are black, receive satisfaction when Clotel's hair is cut. The narrator then surmises that "the fairness of Clotel's complexion was regarded with envy as well by the other servants as by the mistress herself" (194). Here, Brown presents these black women as a source of divisive envy. The only physical description he provides of this group is the picture of Nell and her "broad grin that showed her teeth." This description affirms Nell's and the other woman's malevolent feelings toward Clotel. Although Brown does not explicitly label black women ugly, he provides odious character traits. We are asked to pity Clotel at the expense of the black women. Brown uses the black female as a tool to provoke disapproval from the reader and garner sympathy for the mulatto female. The black women collude with the mistress in denigrating Clotel.

We see this scenario again with Clotel's daughter Mary. At the slave auction in New Orleans, Mr. Horatio Green purchases Clotel to be his slave and concubine. He immediately fathers a child by Clotel and covertly "keeps" both Clotel and the child. Mrs. Green, the legitimate, white wife of Horatio Green, discovers this illicit relationship and child. As punishment for both Clotel and Horatio, Mrs. Green forces Horatio to sell Clotel and keep Clotel and Horatio's bastard daughter, Mary, in the Green home as a servant. Mrs. Green devises many ways to torture young Mary. One such torture is when she forces Mary to spend hours in the sun as an attempt to darken her white skin. Mrs. Green, playing the part of the jealous mistress, is jealous of Mary's white skin and sees it as an affront to her white feminine gentility.

Mrs. Green has a conversation with the cook, Dinah, about Mary. Dinah says to the mistress,

> "Dees white niggers always tink dey sef good as white folks…" "Yes, but we will teach them better; won't we, Dinah?" "Yes missus, I don't like dees mularter niggers, no how; dey always want to set dey sef up for something big." Then the narrator explains that "the cook was black, and was not without that prejudice which is to be found among the negroes, as well as among the whites of the Southern states" (201-02).

Brown introduces Dinah, a dark-skinned black woman, as a way of elevating the mulatto female. Again, we discover nothing about Dinah, except that she does not like "mulatto niggers", and consequently, will help her mistress teach them a lesson. Just as in the earlier scene with Clotel, we are implored to pity the mulatta not only because she is subjugated by the white mistress, Mrs. French, but also because she is hated by the black females, Nell and Mill. We are entreated to loathe the jealous mistress as well as the jealous black women. Therefore, as much as Brown deplores the institution of slavery, he believes that the mulatto woman should have special exemption from her slave status not simply on the basis of the savagery and barbarism that slavery engenders but by virtue of her half white status. Brown implies that the mulatta, because she looks white, is far too beautiful and genteel to be enslaved. With this plea, he becomes a part of the system he seeks to destroy. He severs the cultural connection between the mulatta and the black woman, depicting the black woman as colluding with the white mistress to subjugate the piteous and tortured mulatta. He positions Mary and Clotel as ill suited for slavery because of their close resemblance to white women. Black women, on the other hand, should occupy the designation of slave more appropriately.

Brown's depictions respond to Jefferson's ideas in *Notes* by exposing the miscegenation engendered by slavery that would enslave mulattos, octoroons, and quadroons, those so closely resembling whites. Jefferson asserts that "The improvement of the blacks in body and mind, in the first instance of their mixture with the whites, has been observed by every one, and proves that their inferiority is not the effect merely of their condition of life."[21] Here, Jefferson implies that mixing with whites improves blacks physically and intellectually. Brown echoes these assertions in his characterization of Clotel and Mary. Because Mary's mother, Clotel, is an octoroon and her father, Horatio, is white, only one eighth of Mary's blood line is stained with blackness. At every turn, Brown interrogates the mulatto's position as slave based on her whiteness. He does not, however, question the status of the black female as slave. We are not called upon to pity the black woman. In fact, we are expected to resent the black woman for her jealousy, for she is apart of the system that oppresses her mulatto sister. The black woman, by virtue of her inferior beauty and lack of humanity, is ideal for chattel slavery. Brown's narrative clearly demonstrates an internalization of the structures of oppression created by slavery, and the objectified black women in the narrative bear the burden of this trauma.

As mentioned earlier, Berzon argues that Brown's characterizations of the mulatta are a trope employed by early black novelists to emphasize the mulatto's superiority and to demonstrate that *some* blacks could succeed within the framework of the dominant white society. Moreover, some scholars maintain that Brown's mulattos represent a form of "covert resistance". M. Guilia Fabi, in the text "The Unguarded Expressions of the Feelings of the Negroes: Gender, Slave Resistance, and William Wells Brown's Revisions of Clotel", argues that the mulatto figures in the text "constitute a challenge to rigid racial definitions and whose ability to pass for

[21] Jefferson, *Notes on the State of Virginia* 151.

white represents a genteel form of covert resistance."[22] Eve Allegra Raimon echoes Fabi with her contention that Brown uses the device of the 'tragic mulatta' to unsettle the very categories of identity at work in the construction of founding U.S. ideologies of national origin and identity."[23] However, Raimon and Fabi fail to sufficiently address Brown's ineffective deconstruction of the socially constructed identity of the black female. The covert resistance Fabi speaks about is undermined by Brown's divisive positioning of the full-blood black female characters and the mulattos. His excessive reification of white beauty and erasure of the black female, except when she colludes in the oppression of her mulatto sister, simply undermines a reading of this as covert resistance. As West affirms, "Throughout the novel, the beauty of the mulatto is acclaimed through the example of the female body, while the larger population of dark-skinned female slaves remain a faceless, noncorporeal entity."[24] As we see in the few scenes that include dark-skinned black women, Brown does not breathe life into these characters. We know not their faces or their physicality. We do, however, create a picture based on Brown's depictions of them as furrowing their dark brows and showing their evil grins after helping jealous mistresses denigrate mulatto women. Brown makes it difficult to feel abhorrence for their position as slaves. Therefore, he succeeds in dehumanizing and Othering the black female, even though he makes her body disappear.

He has little difficulty, however, representing a full-blood black male character who we can admire. When Clotel determines that she can no longer live as a slave, she plots with a male slave to escape. Brown portrays this dark-skinned male slave, William, quite differently than his portrayal of dark-skinned female slaves. "William was a tall, full-bodied negro, whose very

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[22]M. Guilia Fabi, "The Unguarded Expressions of the Feelings of the Negroes: Gender, Slave Resistance, and William Wells Brown's Revisions of *Clotel"*, 1.
[23]M. Guilia Fabi,. 64.
[24] Elizabeth West, 53

countenance beamed with intelligence" (Brown 213). The reader knows that William is a dark-skinned man because throughout the narrative, dark-skinned slaves are either referred to as negro (if male), negress (if female), and black (if referencing skin tone). We also know that William is dark-skinned because the escape plan he and Clotel devise revolves around Clotel masquerading as a white man and William as her slave. At any rate, Brown presents William as a more rounded character than any of the black women in the narrative. The reader can see William's face and his beaming "intelligent" countenance. Throughout Clotel and William's journey of escape, the narrator reassures us that William is honest because of his "earnest manner and the deep feeling with which he spoke" (214). We also discover that William is brave, as he uses his shrewd intellect to defend himself against a white train conductor after Clotel and he part ways. The train conductor will not allow him to ride in the passenger cars with the white patrons; instead he must travel in the freight car. The exchange between William and the conductor is suspenseful, yet William stands his ground and talks the conductor down:

> … I won't pay a dollar and a half for riding up here in the freight-van. If you had let me come in the carriage where others ride, I would have paid you two dollars. "Where were you raised? You seem to think yourself as good as white folks." "I want nothing more than my rights." "Well, give me a dollar, and I will let you off." "No sir, I shan't do it." "What do you mean to do then — don't you wish to pay anything?" "Yes, sir, I want to pay you the full price." "What do you mean by full price?" "What do you charge per hundred-weight for goods?" inquired the negro with a degree of gravity that would have astonished Diogenes himself. "A quarter of a dollar per hundred," answered the conductor. "I weigh just one hundred and fifty pounds, returned William, "and will pay you three eighths of a dollar." "Do you expect that you will pay only thirty-seven cents

> for your ride?" "This sir, is your own price. I came in a luggage-van, and I'll pay for luggage." After a vain effort to get the negro to pay more, the conductor took the thirty-seven cents, and noted in his cash book . . . (219).

Thereafter, we hear no more about William; however, Brown has given us a full characterization of him. We envision him as handsome, honest, intelligent, and brave. Brown has given us the vision of a black male hero. However, he does not offer a black female parallel. Brown breathes life into the mulatto female, white female, and even the black male characters, yet he is incapable of envisioning the corporeality of the black female. As M. Guilia Fabi explains, the slave women who cannot pass are "implicitly subsumed within the plight of the mulatto mother and the culture of resistance of the black community, without being adequately represented in either."[25]

Fabi's analysis of the plot structure is also problematic. He claims that there are two competing plots as well as two stylistic forms which represent those plots: the melodramatic, romantic plot and a collective, male, communal plot. However, Fabi attributes the marginality of those black women "who cannot pass" to "the inadequacy of the paradigms of true (white) womanhood and black (male) resistance to describe her situation."[26] Fabi's analysis is correct; however, it does not seek the origin of those paradigms. The problem is not so much the inadequacy of the paradigms, but rather the system which created the paradigms in the first place. Diana Miles tells us in her text *Women, Violence, and Testimony* "that it is not the race, class, or gender constructs that traumatize, but rather, the dehumanization of one human being by another."[27] In this respect, the system of chattel slavery necessitated Thomas Jefferson's white

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[25] M. Guilia Fabi, 647.
[26] Fabi, 647.
[27] Diana Miles, *Women, Violence, and Testimony in the Works of Zora Neale Hurston*, 6. Miles investigates the effects of trauma on its survivors and the relationship between trauma survivors and their communities. Her intent is

supremacism, and it is this white supremacism that informs Brown's narrative and renders his narrator incapable of envisioning a full-blood black female as beautiful and feminine.

In her essay, "Mama's Baby, Papa's Maybe: An American Grammar Book", Hortense Spillers offers insight into Brown's inability to represent the black female body, and Thomas Jefferson sees it as inferior. Spillers discusses early European exploration and how the Portuguese are responsible for first introducing the Africans to the European slave market. She explains the "Portuguese eye" saying, "[I]n a field of captives, some of the observed are 'white enough,' fair to look upon, and well-proportioned.' Others are less 'white like mulattoes,' and still others 'black as Ethiops, and so ugly, both in features and in body, as almost to appear (to those who saw them) the images of a lower hemisphere."[28] Spillers explains that "[b]y implication, this "third man," standing for the most aberrant phenotype to the observing eye, embodies the linguistic community most unknown to the European."[29] Therefore, Thomas Jefferson, and Brown as the filter for Jefferson, imagines the black female much like the Portuguese imagined the black body. Jefferson, the white American, privileges his own phenotype, and therefore, mongrelizes the black female body. He exhibits what Robert J. C. Young calls repulsion/desire. Young finds "an ambivalent driving desire at the heart of racialism: a compulsive libidinal attraction disavowed by an equal insistence on repulsion."[30] Therefore, Jefferson, like many colonials, was "caught in the push and pull of an irreconcilable

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to posit the psychic processing of trauma as a human problem, even though the social constructions of race, class, and gender may be used to intensify or perpetuate traumatic experiences.

[28] Hortense Spillers. "Mama's Baby, Papa's Maybe: An American Grammar Book", 390-91. Much of Hortense Spillers' argument examines the black family and black motherhood as it engages Daniel P. Moynihan's infamous Report. Spillers contextualizes the black family, mothering, and fathering practices, linking these practices to a legacy of slavery.

[29] Spillers, 391.

[30] Robert J. C. Young. *Colonial Desire: Hybridity in Theory, Culutre, and Race*, 149. Young's text engages the discourse of hybridity. In doing so, he looks at colonialism around the world. He examines slavery in America and the hybridity, in the form of miscegenation, that it engenders.

conflict between desire and aversion for interracial sexual union."[31] On the one hand, Jefferson's "Query XIV" affirms his distaste for the black female body, yet he later has a long relationship with his black slave Sally Hemings. In turn, Brown, a mulatto and ex-slave, is caught in a similar repulsion/desire, even though it manifests differently. Brown portrays an "ugly" psychological black female and is incapable of representing a black female body at all, because that body has been constructed by the dominant culture as something repulsive and distasteful. Therefore, Brown privileges that part of him that is preferred by the dominant culture, not the blackness of the mother but the whiteness of the father.

Brown decorporealizes the black female and allots no personhood to her throughout the narrative. As stated earlier, Fabi explains that she is subsumed in the collective, male communal plot or used as a tool in the melodramatic romantic plot of the mulatto women.[32] However, the white and mulatto females receive full attention; Brown writes their lives and we hear their voices. Although Brown's narrative claims to be a portrait of slave life, he idealizes white female gentility; we see this in the apocryphal Georgiana Peck, the daughter of the Reverend John Peck, a slave-owner. Brown offers this parallel melodramatic plot as a way, it seems, of reifying the white abolitionist project. The narrator introduces Georgiana as follows:

> …there was another person in the room, seated by the window, who although at work upon a fine piece of lace, paid every attention to what was said. This was Georgiana, the only daughter of the parson. She had just returned from Connecticut, where she had finished her education. She had the opportunity of contrasting the spirit of Christianity and liberty in New England with that of slavery in her native state, and had learned to feel deeply for the injured Negro. Georgiana was in her nineteenth year, and had been much

[31] Young, 149-50.
[32] Fabi, 647.

> benefited by a residence of five years at the North. Her form was tall and graceful; her features regular and well defined; and her complexion was illuminated by the freshness of youth, beauty, and health. (146)

Here, the narrator encompasses all of the virtues of true womanhood and the ideals of abolitionism in one white woman. Exemplified by her needlework "upon a fine piece of lace", Georgiana is domestic. Her Christian ideals suggest piety. Purity and chastity are the paradigm for the true nineteenth-century white woman; therefore, the narrator need not provide this information, for it is assumed. And finally, Georgiana's deep feelings for the "injured Negro" not only foreshadow her later abolitionist ideals but reinforce her piety. Indeed, at nineteen years of age, Georgiana becomes the voice of abolitionism, republicanism, and justice.

Upon her father's death, Georgiana inherits his plantation and wealth. In keeping with nineteenth-century patriarchal edicts, Georgiana must marry so that, under the protection of a husband, her inheritance will not be usurped by male relatives. As her abolitionist zeal grows, her first decision is to free her slaves. As justification for such action, she pleads the case of the Negro to her future husband, Carlton:

> …the kindness meted out to blacks would be unkindness if given to whites…If we would not consider the best treatment which a slave receives good enough for us, we should not think he ought to be grateful for it. Everybody knows that slavery in its best and mildest form is wrong. Whoever denies this, his lips libel his heart. Try him! Clank the chains in his ears, and tell him they are for him; give him an hour to prepare his wife and children for a life of slavery; bid him make haste, and get ready their necks for the yoke, and their wrists for the coffle chains, then look at his pale lips and trembling knees, and you have nature's testimony against slavery" (197).

Brown not only depicts Georgiana as the quintessential nineteenth-century lady, but he also positions her as the iconoclastic female abolitionist. Her vocal and radical views would have violated all proscriptions of true womanhood, as the genteel lady never lifted her voice above a whisper, and the motivations of many female abolitionists were not as noble as Georgiana's. bell hooks explains that for many "white female abolitionists the sole motivating force behind their anti-slavery efforts was the desire to bring an end to sexual contact between white men and black female slaves. They were not concerned about the plight of enslaved black women, but about saving the souls of white men whom they believed had sinned against God by their acts of moral depravity."[33] It seems, therefore, that Brown's characterization of Georgiana is either needlessly idealized, an attempt to elevate white womanhood even beyond its historical privileged space, or Georgiana is simply the vehicle for Brown's own black radical abolitionism. In either case, the white female is the paradigm of true womanhood and the standard by which all women in the text are measured.

Brown's deification of Georgiana is yet another example of his internalization of Jefferson's rhetoric and the rhetoric of slavery. As hooks affirms, "the message of the idealization [of white women] was this: as long as white women possessed sexual feeling they would be seen as degraded immoral creatures; remove those sexual feelings and they become beings worthy of love, consideration, and respect."[34] Therefore, explains hooks, as "American white men idealized white womanhood, they sexually assaulted and brutalized black women."[35] Moreover, Brown's idealization of white womanhood and privileging of white female aesthetics renders black womanhood mute, faceless, and dehumanized. If Georgiana is the standard by which all other women in the text are to be measured, then the few black women Brown presents

[33] bell hooks, 27-28.
[34] bell hooks, 31.
[35] hooks, 32.

fall short of the standard. His inability to envision the black woman as a "true" woman only reifies the notion that she is not a woman, a notion so famously interrogated by Sojourner Truth. Brown's depiction of the black woman as an odious creature toiling over boiling pots, as seen with the negresses in the opening of the narrative, and as contemptuous black women colluding in the subjugation of the beautiful Clotel or the beautiful Mary, is tantamount to literary brutalization and assault. Brown does not brutalize the black female body in violent scenes or physical descriptions, as the black female body is invisible in the text, but, as we have seen, he does mongrelize her in his characterizations.

Some believe that contemporary scholars have been too harsh in their critiques of Brown's novel. Ann duCille claims that "the boogeyman that haunts not only *Clotel* but a great deal of nineteenth-century African-American literature [is] a prescriptive sense of 'the right direction,' a tendency on the part of contemporary critics to privilege a particular notion of black identity and 'the black experience' and to fault early writers for, in essence, not being 100 years ahead of their time."[36] Addison Gayle argues that the "right direction" in nineteenth-century African American literature was one that sought to dismantle the prevailing images of blacks as childlike and feeble minded or brute and savage. According to Gayle, the objective of black writers in the nineteenth-century should have been to re-present and redefine the Negro. However, Gayle explains that Brown offers "counter images more appealing to whites and the black middle class than to those on the slave plantation who bore the brunt of the Southerners' attacks."[37] In addition, although Gayle maintains that Brown should be applauded for having written the first black protest novel, he argues that Brown "leaves major ground untilled, shies

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[36] Ann duCille, "Where in the World is William Wells Brown? Thomas Jefferson, Sally Hemings, and the DNA of African-American Literary History", 654. duCille engages other readings of *Clotel* as well as the historiography of the text in light of the recent DNA validation of the Jefferson and Hemings relationship.

[37] Addison Gayle, *The Way of the New World: The Black Novel in America*, 8. Gayle attempts to define and delineate the function of African American literature from the nineteenth-century through the mid-twentieth-century.

away from the equally important battle to be waged in behalf of the right of people to define themselves. In doing so, he sets a precedent for writers to come." Gayle blames Brown for setting a standard of assimilation in African American literature and setting the cause of Black Nationalism back almost two hundred years.[38] Many of Gayle's observations may be accurate. Brown appears to have no interest in the creation of a distinct African American identity. Instead, he clings to assimilationist rhetoric by way of blood line. However, as duCille suggests, Gayle tends to allot more responsibility to Brown than is warranted.

Censuring Brown for writing within the context and convention of the nineteenth-century or for not "moving the novel in the right direction," as Gayle contends, only evades the source of the problem.[39] Such harsh criticism of Brown also demonstrates, as duCille explains, a trend in African American scholarship, in which black scholars readily condemn and dismiss works by black authors, yet we accept degrading depictions of blacks by early twentieth-century white writers. At times, we even applaud the generous use of the term "nigger" by white writers like William Faulkner and Ernest Hemingway, heralding their literary modernism. Following this trend, Gayle accuses Brown of self-hatred without proper interrogation and examination of the source of that hatred. My analysis, however, seeks to expose the system that created the trauma resonating throughout Brown's narrative and not Brown himself. Slavery perpetuated the white supremacism and white racism that inspired Thomas Jefferson's assertions in "Query XIV." William Wells Brown, the progeny of a slave mother and a white slave-owner father, writes the first African American novel that demonstrates an internalization of the structures of trauma caused by a system that indoctrinates the loathing and abhorrence of the black female body. Brown is bound by a white supremacist literary tradition that never meant to include him, his

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[38] Gayle, 12
[39] Gayle, 7

voice, or the voice of his people. Therefore, he uses the only strategy available to him and writes the only novel his obscured vision allows. As duCille explains, "It was a strategy of the time, this attempt to argue for equality by establishing resemblance, by collapsing difference into sameness, by pointing out the mutability of race and the absurdity of white society's color codes through the trope of the mulatto, tragic and heroic."[40] Therefore, Brown's privileging, even fetishizing, of white aesthetics of beauty caters to the dominant discourse of race that permeated white and black America from its inception until the nineteenth-century. Brown's novel reveals his inability to escape the domineering white gaze that saw the black female body as lacking in beauty and the black female, in general, as lacking personhood and humanity. She was, as Zora Neale Hurston phrased it a century later, "the mule of the world."[41]

As the first African American novel, William Wells Brown's *Clotel* echoes the trauma of its creation – the legacy of slavery. Thomas Jefferson's *Notes* not only shapes an empire, but it informs the American imagination for centuries to come. The white supremacism inherent in Jefferson's "Query XIV" also informs Brown's novel. Although Brown seeks to indict the system of slavery and the myth of American meritocracy and freedom, his internalization of structures of trauma engendered by the rhetoric of slavery undermines his indictment. Brown's narrator breathes life into the white and mulatto females, granting them subjectivity and personhood. The black women, however, become dehumanized, faceless caricatures, that Brown uses as literary devices to assert mulatto female gentility. Like the Othering that Morrison theorizes in *Playing in the Dark*, and Patricia Hill Collins in "Mammies, Matriarchs, and Other Controlling Images", the black female is the vehicle by which the white and mulatto females

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[40] Ann duCille, 655.

[41] Zoral Neale Hurston, *Their Eyes Were Watching God*, 14. Hurston illuminates this particular image of the black woman in the conversation between grandma and Janie. Grandma attempts to explain to Janie the much maligned position of the black woman in society. Her sentiments explain precisely the hierarchy of suffering in American society with the black female always baring the burden for the rest of society.

know themselves as not black but white, not unclean but pure, not sinful but pious, not repulsive but beautiful. Therefore, as victim himself of the system of slavery, Brown is unable to envision the black female as feminine, as beautiful, as woman. He has internalized the structures of oppression that once bound and enslaved him, so that even as he attempts to expose that "peculiar institution," his narrative only repeats the same denigrating and subjugating social constructions he seeks to indict. Therefore, Brown's narrative evinces one of the psychological traumas of slavery – the inability to maintain body identity which does not rely on a white paradigm. Diana Miles asks the question, "What does it mean if we admit that our culture is a factory for the production of so many walking wounded?" She answers saying, one result is that "[p]ost-traumatic symptoms can be[come] intergenerational. . . [and] can be spread laterally throughout an oppressed social group."[42] Several scholars have theorized the phenomenon of haunting and trauma in life as well as the literary imaginary. Maria Torok and Nicholas Abraham, students of Freudian psychoanalysis, discuss the concept of "transgenerational haunting" in their text, *The Shell and the Kernel*, which postulates the psychological and physiological manifestations of trauma across generations. Abraham and Torok refer to this phenomenon as a "phantom," a "haunting," or a "phantomatic haunting," saying that it "moves the focus of psychoanalytic inquiry beyond the individual being analyzed because it postulates that some people unwittingly inherit the secret psychic substance of their ancestors' lives."[43] Therefore, Abraham and Torok locate the source of repressed trauma not in the individual but in phantomatic haunting inherited transgenerationally.

This intergenerational or transgenerational trauma is what we see depicted in the novel *Clotel*. White supremacy becomes indoctrinated into a slave-holding American society, and then

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[42] Qtd. in Diana Miles 6.
[43] Abraham and Torok. *The Shell and the Kernal: Renewals of Psychoanalysis,* 166.

it asserts white superiority intellectually, emotionally, and physically. William Wells Brown internalizes this ideology, writing the only narrative he can conceptualize, and repeating the trauma engendered by slavery. Perhaps the most horrific revelation about this trauma, as we will examine in the next chapter, and as Miles suggests, is that American culture continues to foster and harvest the seeds of this trauma laterally throughout the African American community.

"In Re-Memory": *Beloved* and Transgenerational Ghosting in Black Female Bodies

Thinking about the transgenerational quality of slavery and the intergenerational nature of trauma, even before I had a term to represent my thoughts, my point of reference was my own phobia of prisons. Yes, the very idea of prisons frightens me beyond belief; therefore, I do not break the law. Close proximity to federal court buildings and police departments provokes an unimaginable terror in me; me, a person who does not break the law. I have a general aversion to prison movies, prison scenes within other movies, people confined to chain-gangs, and people in handcuffs. I also distrust the police, not only because I was trained to do so (for my own self-preservation) but because I have witnessed events that nurture my distrust. I came to realize that everyone does not categorically share my fear. Of course, there are white people who distrust the police and do not particularly like the idea of being imprisoned. However, for them, there is no historical terror connected to prisons and law enforcement agents in particular. Certain whites may have an aversion to the penal system, but for me, and many other African Americans, there is a deep and abiding fear and terror associated with imprisonment and police. Noting this differentiation in white aversion to the police and prisons versus black *fear* and *terror* of those same entities, I started to wonder about the source of the terror. I wondered, "Do prisons frighten me because my ancestors were enslaved? Do I remember, somehow, that feeling of insurmountable captivity? Do bodies remember?" Apparently, my questions did not exist in isolation; others had been investigating this notion as well. Toni Morrison provides an evocative perception of the notion of freedom, and its lack, in the foreword to her critically acclaimed novel, *Beloved*. She provides a personal narrative illustrating how she conceived the idea for the text. She explains that she was forced to resign from her editing job in a well-known

publishing house because her writing, ironically, was interfering with her editing. She describes her feelings after leaving her job,

> A few days after my last day at work, sitting in front of my house on the pier jutting out into the Hudson River, I began to feel an edginess instead of the calm I had expected. I ran through my index of problem areas and found nothing new or pressing. I couldn't fathom what was so unexpectedly troubling on a day that perfect, watching a river that serene. I had no agenda and couldn't hear the telephone if it rang. I heard my heart, though, stomping away in my chest like a colt. I went back to the house to examine this apprehension, even panic. I knew what fear felt like; this was different. Then it slapped me: I was happy, free in a way I had never been, ever. It was the oddest sensation. Not ecstasy, not satisfaction, not a surfeit of pleasure or accomplishment. It was a purer delight, a rogue anticipation with certainty. Enter *Beloved*. (Morrison)

What Morrison had experienced was the shock of freedom, a freedom that had eluded her while working for the publishing house. I do not wish to infer that working for publishing houses is akin to slavery; however, I am implying that Morrison's body remembered. Her body remembered, sitting on the pier that day, a psychic ancestral connection to the shock the enslaved may have experienced in their newfound freedom. Therefore, she was inspired to uncover what the notion of freedom really meant and means for black women and to articulate how the bodies of black women remember slavery.

Morrison was motivated to write *Beloved* for other significant reasons as well. In a 1989 *Time Magazine* interview, Morrison was questioned about having said that she didn't like writing about slavery. That segment of the interview went this way:

Q. You've said that you didn't like the idea of writing about slavery. Yet *Beloved,* your most celebrated book, is set in slavery and its aftermath.

A. I had this terrible reluctance about dwelling on that era. Then I realized I didn't know anything about it, really. And I was overwhelmed by how long it was. Suddenly the time – 300 years – began to drown me. Three hundred years – think about that. Now, that's not a war, that's generation after generation. And they were expendable. True they had the status of good horses, and nobody wanted to kill their stock. And, of course, they had the advantage of reproducing without cost.

Q. *Beloved* is dedicated to the 60 million who died as a result of slavery. A staggering number – is this proved historically?

A. Some historians told me 200 million died. The smallest number I got from anybody was 60 million…I thought this has got to be the least read of all the books I'd written because it is about something that the characters don't want to remember, I don't want to remember, black people don't want to remember, white people don't want to remember. I mean it's national amnesia[44]

When Morrison begins to explain the enormity of slavery's generational impact – 300 years of oppression, physical brutality, and genocide (60-200 million slaves died during slavery, outnumbering any other documented genocide) – the interviewer immediately questions the historical accuracy of the figure. Inherent in the interviewer's questioning and subsequent disavowal of the answer lies Morrison's other motivation for writing *Beloved* – not only "national amnesia", as she says, but national disavowal.

[44] Toni Morrison. "Pain of Being Black." *Time Magazine.*

Kathleen Brogan explains that another of Morrison's motivations for writing *Beloved* was to fill in the gaps left by the slave narratives written by former slaves. Brogan states that Morrison

> views American slave narratives as extraordinarily rich, yet essentially incomplete, records of slave life. She has argued that repeated references in the narratives to 'proceedings too terrible to relate' indicate that the authors elided the most repulsive details of their experience at least partly in deference to popular taste and literary convention, a self-censorship rendering many aspects of slavery (particularly sexual abuse) unspeakable.[45]

In *Beloved*, Morrison gives voice to the unspeakable, the abuse of black women and their bodies. In a public radio interview with Don Swaim, she explains that in writing the novel, she had hoped that history could provide answers to the questions of today.[46] Indeed, *Beloved* answers as many questions as it asks; it reveals much about the notion of freedom and the black female body as text. Like a metaphorical palimpsest, the black female body has been layered transgenerationally with ghosts of oppression and slavery. *Beloved* serves as a testimony to the trauma inflicted upon the psyches and somas of African American women, and we, as the readers and as American society, through our reading of the text, bear witness to this trauma. I argue that the trauma of slavery is psychically "ghosted" transgenerationally in the bodies of

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[45] Kathleen Brogan. *Cultural Haunting: Ghosts and Ethnicity in Recent American Literature*, 62-63. In this text, Brogan engages the work of several multicultural writers such as Louise Erdrich, Sandra Cisneros, Maxine Hong Kingston, Gloria Naylor, and Toni Morrison, to name a few. In the chapter dedicated to *Beloved*, Brogan interrogates the relationship between traumatic memory and historical consciousness.

[46] Toni Morrison Interview.

contemporary African American women, and this ghosting continues to impede the formation of black female body identity.[47]

Many theorists have studied trauma and its transgenerational effects on collective groups. William E. Cross examines the legacy of slavery and manifestations of trauma in African Americans. He documents the trauma itself and the point at which the trauma terminates, then he attempts to "determine whether attitudes and behaviors originally elicited by the trauma have been handed down to the immediate and extended kin of the original victims, even though the survivors and their progeny live under conditions that are a far cry from the period of trauma."[48] According to Cross, there is, however, a difficulty applying this "trauma-transcendence-legacy model" to African Americans and slavery for several reasons. First, it is difficult to identify one sudden traumatic event in an institution that lasted 400 years. Also, Cross, a black scholar who shares personal narratives about his and his family's racial traumas, finds it difficult to connect slavery with contemporary racism without trivializing the "instances of oppression faced by blacks since slavery."[49]

Particularly interesting is his claim that self-hatred was not a residual traumatic effect of slavery. "Along the same line", Cross states, "the history of the behaviors, activities, and organizational accomplishments of the slaves immediately after slavery and well into the early part of the 20th century […] suggests that to the extent it can be inferred, the ex-slaves seemed to exit slavery with far more psychological strengths and resources than psychological deficits and dysfunctionalities."[50] There are some flaws in Cross's reasoning. First, the blacks to which

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[47] Toni Morrsion. *Beloved.* Although Morrison engages black male trauma quite extensively through the suffering of Paul D., my focus here is black female trauma. Therefore, I omit any treatment of the narrative as it relates to Paul D and any of the other black male characters in the novel.
[48] William E. Cross. "Black Psychological Functioning and the Legacy of Slavery: Myths and Realities." *International Handbook of Multigenerational Legacies of Trauma*, 387.
[49] Cross, 387.
[50] Cross, 394.

Cross refers (immediately after slavery) were post emancipation blacks, who, with their newfound freedom, were extremely optimistic and hopeful about the promises and possibilities of that freedom. These black people were a part of a small burgeoning group in a brief historical period during the 1860s and 1870s. They had yet to experience the debilitating blow of institutionalized white racism that began during the 1880s through Post-Reconstruction and was characterized by a nearly irrevocable loss of hope, segregation, systematic and government sanctioned lynchings, and a revocation and denial of Fourteenth Amendment Rights. Also, "the behaviors, activities, and organizational accomplishments" of African Americans should not be a litmus test for positive formation of identity. Western women have made tremendous strides in "behaviors, activities, and organizational accomplishments", yet there exists an enduring struggle with identity and even self-hatred. Cross's theorizing is also problematic because he tries to make a distinction between the trauma caused by slavery and the contemporary racial oppression that African Americans suffer. The fact that slavery endured for 400 years or more makes it a unique trauma to study. Another unique quality of slavery is that once the institution was abolished, institutionalized racial oppression, fostered by the 1896 *Plessy v. Ferguson* ("Separate but Equal Doctrine") decision replaced slavery for another 100 years. Therefore, the connection between the trauma of slavery and contemporary white racism and oppression are inextricable.

As Danieli Yael contends, time may not heal all wounds.[51] However, indicative of trauma survivors is the need for testimony and witness; this testimonial is a necessary part of the healing process. As Diana Miles asserts, "There is an inextricable link between trauma, survival, and the ethical imperative to give testimony.[52] In fact, the process of testifying and witnessing

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[51] Danieli Yael. *International Handbook of Multigenerational Legacies of Trauma*, 10.

[52] Diana Miles. *Women, Violence, and Testimony in the Works of Zora Neale Hurston*, 48. Miles investigates the effects of trauma on its survivors and the relationship between trauma survivors and their communities. Her intent is

not only disrupts the individual isolation but a wider historical isolation.[53] This testimony/witness process is what Morrison suggests when she says that there is a national amnesia about slavery.[54] America, black, white, and everyone else, does not want to remember slavery. Perhaps, the pain is too severe, the trauma is too irreconcilable, or perhaps, Morrison offers us, through *Beloved,* an opportunity to experience several levels of testimony and witness. There is the historiographic testimony of the Margaret Garner story given by the writer to the readers. Margaret Garner was the historical figure upon which Sethe was based. After having escaped slavery, she was arrested for killing one of her children and attempting to kill the others rather than have them returned to bondage.[55] In addition to this historiographic testimony, there are several narrative testimonies of the central trauma of the story – the infanticide of Beloved – the "crawling already baby"; in each, the readers are the witnesses.

In Part I of the narrative, we are provided with two perspectives on the traumatic event – the white male oppressor and the collective third-person omniscient narrative point of view. Schoolteacher is the slave driver on the Sweet Home plantation from which Sethe escapes. He has tracked her out of Kentucky and across the Ohio River. When he finds Sethe in the community of freed slaves where she has sought refuge, she sees him coming, and springs into action. Schoolteacher provides his account of what he finds. He explains the "rough choice" of infanticide that Sethe is forced to make:

> Right off it was clear, to schoolteacher especially, that there was nothing there to claim.
>
> The three (now four—because she'd had the one coming when she cut) pickaninnies they

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to posit the psychic processing of trauma as a human problem, even though the social constructions of race, class, and gender may be used to intensify or perpetuate traumatic experiences.

[53] Cathy Caruth. "Trauma and Experience: Introduction". *Trauma: Explorations in Memory*, 11. The purpose of this text is to explore the impact of trauma on both psychoanalytic theory and on artifacts of culture such as literature, film, and social and political activism.

[54] Toni Morrison. "Pain of Being Black." *Time Magazine*

[55] Toni Morrison. *Beloved*, Foreword xvii.

> had hoped were alive and well enough to take back to Kentucky, take back and raise properly to do the work Sweet Home desperately needed, were not. Two were lying open-eyed in sawdust; a third pumped blood down the dress of the main one—the woman schoolteacher bragged about, the one he said made fine ink, damn good soup, pressed his collars the way he liked besides having at least ten breeding years left. But now she'd gone wild, due to the mishandling of the nephew who'd overbeat her and made her cut and run. Schoolteacher had chastised that nephew, telling him to think—just think—what would his own horse do if you beat it beyond the point of education. (175-76)

Here, we become the witnesses of schoolteacher's testimony, wrought with objectifying and dehumanizing references. For schoolteacher, Sethe and her children are mere livestock. As Morrison says in the previously mentioned interview, "True [slaves] had the status of good horses, and nobody wanted to kill their stock."[56] Schoolteacher, the voice of the white male oppressor, provides a stoic, methodical account of Sethe's attempt to save her children from what she feels is a fate worse than death – slavery. He refers to the children as pickaninnies or assigns to them the passive pronoun "one". He refers to Sethe as "the woman" who had "ten good breeding years left". For schoolteacher, the whole scene is no different than what might result from an animal gone wild, as he says, from being mishandled and overbeaten (as if there is as an *acceptable* amount of beating that shouldn't be surpassed). Schoolteacher does not recognize Sethe as a human, as a mother, who sees slavery as a fate worse than death, who would rather take the lives of her children than have them live through slavery. Therefore, schoolteacher views Sethe's infanticide as a consequence of being driven wild rather than the consequence of the terror and trauma of slavery. His testimony, and our witness to it, is crucial, for we must be forced to contrast the oppressor's point of view with that of the oppressed. In bearing witness to

[56] Toni Morrison. "Pain of Being Black." *Time Magazine*

schoolteacher's testimony, we get a sense of his ideological perspective. From schoolteacher's point of view, Sethe and her children are animals, chattel that have been driven wild and mistreated. Sethe's infanticide, then, is the inevitable consequence of having been misused. However, schoolteacher's definition of misuse in no way correlates to Sethe's status as a victim of generational chattel slavery. Rather, he sees her as an animal that has turned on its master, an animal that has been *over*beaten and driven beyond reasonable animal expectations.

In Part II, a little over half-way into the novel, we finally witness the victim's testimony, as Sethe provides a first-person account of both the infanticide and the traumatic events leading to the infanticide. Morrison provides the witnesses with what Mikhail Bakhtin would describe as a kind of heteroglossia.[57] Throughout the narrative, we receive multiple testimonies (competing truths) of the same traumatic event, so that by the time we bear witness to Sethe's testimony, we may make our own decisions, not about *what* happened but about *why* it happened. After Beloved returns in flesh, Sethe starts imagining the testimony she will give, saying, "Beloved, she my daughter, She mine. See. She come back to me for her own free will and I don't have to explain a thing. I didn't have time to explain before because it had to be done quick. Quick. She had to be safe and I put her where she would be" (236). Both the readers and Beloved become the witnesses of Sethe's testimony, a testimony that stands in stark contrast to that of schoolteacher. Sethe recalls:

> Bit a piece of my tongue off when they opened my back. It was hanging by a shred. I didn't mean to. Clamped down on it, it come right off. . . They dug a hole for my stomach so as not to hurt the baby . . . I have felt what it felt like and nobody walking or stretched out is going to make you feel it too. Not you, not none of mine, and when I tell you you mine, I also mean I'm yours. I wouldn't draw breath without my children . . .

[57] Mikhail Bakhtin. "Discourse in the Novel." *The Dialogic Imagination: Four Essays.*

> My plan was take us all to the other side where my own ma'am is. They stopped me from getting us there, but they didn't stop you from getting here. (238-40)

Unlike schoolteacher's testimony, Sethe's voice gives humanity to her own story. She provides necessary details about the beating that schoolteacher only mentions. Where schoolteacher makes Sethe's body disappear, Sethe makes her body reappear. Physical pain so severe that one must clinch one's teeth to bear it makes the pain of a whip vivid for the witnesses. Sethe's account also shows the utter disregard and antipathy the white plantocracy had for the black female body. Pregnant women were not exempt from the lash of the whip. We bear witness to her physical and psychological trauma, the type of trauma that no human should be made to endure, so that we interpret her infanticide as a mercy killing.

Not only does Sethe's testimony elevate her from the status of animal, giving the witnesses a glimpse into her psyche, but it demonstrates an imperative to tell that all trauma survivors exhibit. Dori Laub's theories and studies on Holocaust survivors can be applied to those survivors of slavery. He explains that "survivors [do] not only need to survive so that they [can] tell their story; they also [need] to tell their story in order to survive. There is, in every survivor, an imperative to *tell* and thus to come to *know* one's story, unimpeded by ghosts from the past against which one has to protect oneself. One has to know one's buried truth in order to be able to live one's life."[58] This is precisely what we see Sethe experiencing throughout the narrative. In fact, the entire narrative is a "repetition compulsion" of Sethe's traumatic experiences.[59]

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[58] Dori Laub. "An Event Without a Witness: Truth, Testimony, and Survival." *Testimony: Crisis of Witnessing in Literature, Psychoanalysis, and History*, 78.

[59] Sigmund Freud, *Beyond the Pleasure Principle.* In this text, Freud establishes the foundation for the study of trauma testimony in literature. He theorizes the notion of traumatic repetition, in which the survivor exhibits a repetition compulsion, or a repetitive return to the trauma as a means of mastery and recovery.

For example, when Paul D finally escapes the chain gang and arrives in Ohio at the house at 124, Sethe cannot stop her brain from recalling the rape at Sweet Home. The memories are fragmented yet persistent. She recalls shaking "her head from side to side, resigned to her rebellious brain…But her brain was not interested in the future. Loaded with the past and hungry for more, it left her no room to imagine, let alone plan for, the next day" (83). Sethe's brain, or her memories, are full "of the two boys with mossy teeth, one sucking on [her] breast the other holding [her] down, their book-reading teacher watching and writing it up" (83). She provides testimony about the rape and the stealing of her milk as a way of providing an explanation for her later infanticide of Beloved.

Although Paul D does not understand her "rough choice", he must bear witness to Sethe's trauma. She testifies to Paul D, describing the first twenty-eight days of bliss she enjoyed after arriving at 124. Making colorful clothing for her crawling already girl had been a

> selfish pleasure [she] never had before. [She] couldn't let all that go back where it was, and [she] couldn't let her nor any of em live under schoolteacher. That was out…and when she saw them coming and recognized schoolteacher's hat, she heard wings…Simple. She just flew. Collected every bit of life she had made, all the parts of her that were precious and fine and beautiful, and carried, pushed, dragged them through the veil, out, away, over there where no one could hurt them" (192).

Sethe remembers and repeats these events again in Part II of the narrative when she imagines the explanation she will give to Beloved. Through the memories of these events, Sethe continues to relive the trauma. The repetition of these events signifies the imperative to tell. Sethe "re-members" her traumas repeatedly and testifies to them in varying ways in order to heal the wounds they have caused.

Maria Torok and Nicholas Abraham also discuss the concept of "transgenerational haunting" in their text, *The Shell and the Kernel*. Unlike William Cross, they see the potential of one type of trauma manifesting across generations, possibly in the form of another, seemingly unrelated, trauma. Abraham and Torok refer to this phenomenon as a "phantom," a "haunting," or a "phantomatic haunting," saying that it "moves the focus of psychoanalytic inquiry beyond the individual being analyzed because it postulates that some people unwittingly inherit the secret psychic substance of their ancestors' lives."[60] In other words, the unfinished business of the dead returns to haunt the living. Also contrary to Cross's assertions, Laura S. Brown points out that these post-traumatic symptoms "can be intergenerational, as is the case of children of the Nazi Holocaust." However, Brown argues, "We have yet to admit that [trauma] can be spread laterally throughout an oppressed social group as well, when membership in that group means a constant lifetime risk of exposure to certain trauma."[61] We see this theory manifesting in *Beloved*.

Once Beloved, the "crawling already girl," transcends her poltergeist state and manifests in the flesh, the community decides to support Sethe and exorcise Beloved's ghost. However, prior to this, two of the community members, Stamp Paid and Ella, determine that the woman living in Sethe's house at 124 is indeed, Beloved, the dead child returned. Ella says, "You know as well as I do that people who die bad don't stay in the ground" (221). Transgenerational haunting supports Ella's assertion, as it gives psychological substance to folklore. Like many folkloric and ancient beliefs, Abraham and Torok argue that "certain categories of the dead return to torment the living: those who were denied the rite of burial or died an unnatural, abnormal death, were criminals or outcasts, or suffered injustice in their lifetime." In Abraham's

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[60] Abraham and Torok. "Secrets and Posterity: The Theory of the Transgenerational Phantom." *The Shell and the Kernel: Renewals of Psychoanalysis*, 166.
[61] Laura S. Brown. "Not outside the Range," *Trauma: Explorations in Memory*, 108.

view, "the dead do not return, but their lives' unfinished business is unconsciously handed down to their descendants."[62] The very nature of chattel slavery is in keeping with this theory. Since many slaves were hanged from trees, with their bodies left on display to rot, denial of burial rites, abnormal death, and the suffering of injustices were the order of the day. Moreover, in the world of Morrison's text, Beloved, the murdered child, dies badly, as Ella asserts, and returns in spirit as well as through Sethe's remembering, like a transgenerational ghost. Later, she returns in flesh to wreak havoc on her murderer, her mother Sethe. Beloved's anger becomes her unfinished business. As an innocent, a child, she lives and dies at the will of others. She does not understand her mother's decision, her "rough choice" of infanticide. Instead she believes she has been left behind and abandoned in the spirit world (284). Therefore, Beloved returns in order to reconcile *her* trauma.

Scholars, like Deborah Horvitz, have argued that Beloved is purely supernatural. Others, like Elizabeth B. House, claim that Beloved is purely flesh.[63] However, the complexity of Morrison's characterization and positioning of Beloved does not support these types of reductive and incomplete assertions. Beloved's identity is multitudinous. She is always already both spirit and flesh. Beloved is the physical and psychic manifestation of slavery's trauma, the women and men murdered during the middle passage and slave trade, as well as the traumatized African Americans who lived to tell and testify.

Kathleen Brogan argues that Morrison attempts a burial of traumatic events through her writing. Brogan explains, "Dedicated to the 'Sixty Million or more' Africans and African

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[62] Abraham and Torok, 167.

[63] House, Elizabeth B. "Toni Morrison's Ghost: The Beloved Who is Not Beloved". This text, originally published in 1990, is one of the first to challenge the notion that Beloved is supernatural. She argues that Beloved is a flesh and blood girl who has suffered under the tyranny of slavery. Deborah Horovitz's essay, "Nameless Ghosts: Possession and Dispossession in *Beloved*", claims that Beloved is purely supernatural, a memory that has manifested in the corporeal. She argues that Beloved represents all Africans who died during the middle passage.

Americans killed in the slave trade, *Beloved* attempts to perform a ritual burial of the forgotten, unnamed dead. It aims to shift the meaning of haunting from an unfinished, private mourning to a more openly shared awareness of what was suffered and what endures."[64] Therefore, we can view the entire narrative as a form of "proper" burial and a traumatic memory, which reconstructs history. The novel unearths the trauma of slavery, which has never "rested in peace" or received a complete burial. As Morrison says, no one wants to remember it, witness it, and bury it. Instead, America has lived in silence with things unspoken. The narrative gets its name from the dead child's unfinished tombstone entitled "Beloved." The complete epitaph should have read "Dearly Beloved", but Sethe had no money for a proper burial and could not afford the other six letters. She was forced to barter herself to the gravestone engraver. "Ten minutes, he said. You got ten minutes I'll do it for free" (5). Sethe's love for her daughter forces her to use her body in order to leave something of her dead child in the world – the pink headstone with glittering chips. Sethe's body, again, is the site of trauma, and the tombstone represents Beloved, the slain child, all the Africans killed in the slave trade, their denied burial rights, and the collective traumas caused by slavery, still living in the psyches and somas of African Americans today.

As Deborah E. McDowell suggests, there is a reciprocal relationship between psyche and soma, interior body and exterior body. Therefore, "While the skin encases, compasses the body, it does not constitute the body's total compass, is not its beginning and its end."[65] The inside or interior of the body refers to the unseen psychological, the invisible consciousness, the psyche.

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[64] Kathleen Brogan, 65.

[65] Deborah E. McDowell. "Recovery Missions: Imaging the Body Ideals", 309. In this Afterword to the text *Recovering the Black Female Body: Self-Representations by African American Women*, McDowell makes a connection between the contemporary African American female body, ravaged by psychological and physical abuse and the historical oppression and subjugation of the black female body. Her desire is to magnify the reciprocal relationship between the psyche and soma, inside the body and outside the body, visible and invisible "matter" in order to promote healing of the black female body and consciousness.

The outside of the body refers to the physical casing, the visible corporeal body, the soma. In *Beloved,* Sethe attempts to reconcile her psychological trauma that is entangled in the physical trauma she has endured. Because of this reciprocal relationship between inside and outside, psyche and soma, she, like many slave women, struggles with body identity development. At Sweet Home, the plantation from which she escapes, schoolteacher measures Sethe's body and attempts to delineate her "human" and "animal" characteristics (228). Schoolteacher's Eugenicist notions trouble Sethe. She attempts to resist these racialized perceptions of her body as part animal part human. When she overhears schoolteacher discussing her body with his nephews, she stops and begins to "walk backward", symbolically and literally backing away from and disavowing the perception of herself in parts (animal and human).

Schoolteacher's delineation of Sethe's "human" and "animal" characteristics is derived from the ideology of Eugenics, which can be described as the "science" of controlled breeding in order to render "preferred" genetic characteristics. This "science" was popularized in the mid-nineteenth century by scientist Sir Francis Galton (Darwin's cousin), who advocated "improving the race of a nation by increasing the reproduction of the best stock."[66] Other race theorists like Count Gobineau and Robert Knox, similarly, emphasized biology and comparative anatomy to assert white supremacism. According to Robert J. C. Young, this "new racialism could be described, therefore, as the over determined product of the conjuncture of a loss of belief in Biblical explanation and its replacement by apparently authoritative scientific laws, a sense of European cultural and technological preeminence, accompanied by working-class unrest at home, revolution and colonial rebellion abroad and a Civil War in the United States focused on

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[66] Dorothy Roberts. *Killing the Black Body: Race, Reproduction, and the Meaning of Liberty*, 60. In this text, Roberts exposes America's policing of black female reproduction. Predicated on bell hooks and Patricia Hill Collins' theories about constructions of the black female during slavery, Roberts focuses much of her attention on the controlling image of the "breeder women" during slavery and her contemporary counterpart, the "welfare mother".

the issue of slavery."[67] In essence, along with the spread of imperialism and slavery, "science" had given credibility to biblical rhetoric, which conflated the face of Christ as the white man himself.[68] During slavery, the white plantocracy used notions of white genetic supremacy as a means to justify the "peculiar institution" on the basis of African genetic inferiority. They believed that Africans were "fit only for servitude, that the rich and powerful South was part of God's plan for the spread of Christianity and progress."[69] Although this "science" gained proliferation during slavery and imperialist movements, it can be argued that its theory and practice continue to haunt black women well into the twentieth century.

In the novel, *Beloved,* Morrison seeks to demonstrate that "the traumatized carry an impossible history with them, or they themselves become the symptom of a history they cannot entirely possess."[70] Therefore, contemporary black women carry this "impossible history" with them. Dorothy Roberts discusses this in her text *Killing the Black Body: Race, Reproduction, and the Meaning of Liberty.* Roberts provides extended discourse and research data about the evolution of Eugenics in the U.S. At the turn of the twentieth century, for example, "Eugenicists opposed social programs designed to improve the living conditions of the poor. They argued that adequate medical care, better working conditions, and minimum wages all harmed society because those measures enabled people with inferior heredity to live longer and produce more [inferior] children."[71] By the 1930's, Eugenicists became interested in the "Negro problem," "proposing government programs that would reduce the Black birthrate." These programs came in the form of anti-miscegenation laws; consequently, "by 1940, thirty states had passed statutes

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[67] Robert J. C. Young. *Colonial Desire*, 120.
[68] Robert J. C. Young. *Colonial Desire*, 180. Young cites Deleuze and Guattari's analysis of race in the text *A Thousand Plateaus.*
[69] Ayers and Mittendorf. *The Oxford Book of the American South: Testimony, Memory, and Fiction*, 4.
[70] Cathy Caruth. "Trauma and Experience: Introduction". *Trauma: Explorations in Memory*, 5.
[71] Dorothy Roberts, 65.

barring interracial marriage."[72] There were also programs promoting birth control and sterilization as a method of population control. Accordingly, Margaret Sanger, founder of the birth control movement, joined forces with Eugenicists in support of their racist ideologies. She believed the "mass of Negroes, particularly in the South still [bred] carelessly and disastrously, with the result that the increase among Negroes, even more than among whites, [was] from that portion of the population least fit and least able to rear children properly."[73] This marriage of Eugenicist ideology and the birth control movement gave rise to health clinics targeted at black women living in impoverished and disenfranchised communities. These clinics supported population control in order to eradicate inferior genetics, disguising their rhetoric as sound medicine in the form of long-term birth control and sterilization for the greater good.

According to Roberts, by the 1960's and 1970's "sterilization became the most rapidly growing form of birth control in the United States . . . Teaching hospitals performed unnecessary hysterectomies on poor Black women as practice for their medical residents. This sort of abuse was so widespread in the South that these operations came to be known as 'Mississippi appendectomies.'"[74] Therefore, the Eugenicist theories and subsequent indoctrination into black women's healthcare was predicated on the same Eugenicist ideology promulgated by slavery.

This ideology also adversely affected black female body identity during slavery. Although *Beloved* is a neo-slave narrative, a twentieth-century historicizing of slavery, it fills in the gaps, as Morrison explains, and illuminates things too "terrible to relate." Taking into account two centuries of research, historicism, and testimony, we can safely trust the historicizing of scholars like Morrison to provide a kind of historical truth and break the silences by which the original slave narratives were bound.

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[72] Roberts, 71.
[73] Roberts, 76-77.
[74] Roberts, 90.

When Beloved returns in flesh, Sethe experiences a "re-memory", both physically and psychologically, of Beloved's birth experience. She recalls, "And for some reason she could not immediately account for, the moment she got close enough to see the face, Sethe's bladder filled to capacity… and the water she voided was endless. Like a horse, she thought, but as it went on and on, she thought, No, more like flooding the boat when Denver was born" (61). Sethe's spontaneous urination represents the physical breaking of her embryonic waters during childbirth. Her psyche and soma remember the birthing event when the buried child, Beloved, returns as a woman. Sethe is remembering both the joy of Beloved's birth, while at Sweet Home, prior to the trouble, and the trauma of Denver's birth during her escape from Sweet Home. Her mind makes her body recall.

Adversely, in the following passage, Sethe is "remembering" the traumatic event, both psychological and physical, which was the catalyst for her escape from Sweet Home. She needs to testify to her daughter Beloved. She explains:

> Nobody will ever get my milk no more except my own children. I never had to give it to nobody else – and the one time I did it was took from me – they held me down and took it. Milk that belonged to my baby. Nan had to nurse white babies and me too because Ma'am was in the rice. The little white babies got it first and I got what was left. Or none. There was no nursing milk to call my own. I know what it is to be without the milk that belongs to you; to have to fight and holler for it, and to have so little left. I'll tell Beloved about that; she'll understand. She my daughter. The one I managed to have milk for and to get it to her even after they stole it; after they handled me like I was the cow, no, the goat, back behind the stable because it was too nasty to stay in with the horses. But I wasn't too nasty to cook their food or take care of Mrs. Garner. (236-237)

Here, Sethe discusses the traumatic event of having her breast milk stolen and being raped by schoolteacher's nephews. Both the rape and the stealing of milk was an unthinkable crime committed against her body. For Sethe, and many mothers alike, breast milk represents the ultimate mothering practice. It is the life-line connecting mother and child, like an umbilical cord outside the womb, providing not only antibodies and nutrients but hormones such as oxytocin and prolactin. Known as the mothering hormone, "prolactin is the major hormone of breast milk synthesis and breastfeeding. Traditionally it has been thought to produce aggressively protective behavior (the "mother tiger" effect) in lactating females."[75] The hormones in breast milk are designed to encourage the protective instinct in the mother and reinforce the bond between mother and child. Therefore, the ultimate violation of that bond is to rob a mother of her ability to breast feed her child. We bear witness to Sethe's trauma about both the sexual violation of her body, but more precisely, the violation and interruption of her ability to mother her children. As bell hooks tells us, "The deep hatred of women that had been embedded in the white colonizer's psyche by patriarchal ideology and anti-woman religious teachings both motivated and sanctioned white male brutality against black women."[76] Nineteenth-century patriarchal society sanctioned white male sexual assault and abuse of black female bodies in order to preserve white female gentility and virtues of true womanhood.

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[75] *Mothering Magazine*, *La Leche League.* The information about breastfeeding I have provided here can be found in a long list of print and web sources. I have listed two here. It is important to note that although *The American Academy of Pediatrics,* the *World Health Organization*, and the US Surgeon General all agree that human breast milk is best for human babies, much of the health benefits and the anatomy of the milk had not yet been discovered during the antebellum period. Because the production of breast milk is triggered by childbirth, and breast milk is naturally secreted from the breast, breastfeeding was simply seen as the only way to feed an infant.

[76] bell hooks. "Sexism and the Black Female Slave Experience." *Ain't I a Woman*, 32. In this book chapter, hooks seeks to magnify black female struggles during slavery. The experiences of the black male slave have been generously theorized and examined, while the experiences of the black female have been subsumed within those of the black male. hooks argues that because of her sexual vulnerability and close working proximity to the white family, the black female slave suffered atrocities that the black male slave did not.

In her repetition compulsion, Sethe also relates the fact that black women were often forced to provide their breast milk to white babies in a practice known as "wet nursing." This was also a form of usurpation of mothering. As Toni Morrison states, Sethe's deep desire was to maintain her right to mother her children, [77] and her breast milk was the quintessential source and symbol of mothering. Therefore, by running away as the ultimate form of resistance, not only does Sethe attempt to resist the racist perception of her body as "nasty," as animal rather than human, object rather than subject, but she is determined that "nobody will ever get her milk except her children." Although Sethe resists viewing her body through the eyes of her oppressors, as exemplified through her cynicism about being handled like a cow or a goat behind the stable, this traumatic event severely damages her psyche. As we saw earlier, she repeats it to Paul D, as a way of explaining her later infanticide; she repeats it to Beloved, and her "rebellious brain" persists in remembering it. Sethe continues to repeat the trauma in her "re-memory" throughout the narrative in order to purge the traumatic events and heal her psyche.

Another form of psychological and physical assault on the black female body was the practice of breeding, which Sethe resists, as she escapes Sweet Home before schoolteacher and his minion can size her up for breeding. hooks explains that in the early years of the slave trade, breeding proved difficult because,

> In traditional African communities black women suckled their children at their breasts and weaned them at the late age of two years old. For this time period, the African woman did not engage in sexual intercourse and consequently spaced her pregnancies. This practice allowed women time to recuperate physically before starting a new pregnancy. White slave owners could not understand the reasons slave women did not

[77] Toni Morrsion. Interview with Don Swaim.

> bear many children consecutively. Their response to this situation was to use threats of violence as a means of coercing slave women to reproduce.[78]

Therefore, as slaves, black women were no longer allowed the right to mother. According to Hortense Spillers, we cannot read "'birth' in this instance as a reproduction of mothering precisely because the female, like the male, has been robbed of the parental right, the parental function."[79] The black female could not own and control her body any more than she could own and control her children. Because the Garners had allowed their slaves a measure of humanity, Sethe, however, had the freedom to choose the mate that would father all of her children, and her driving desire is to have the right to mother those children and be free to nurture and protect them. Although Sethe experiences freedoms that many slave women did not, maybe this taste of freedom was a curse and not a blessing because, as a slave, any freedom she was allotted would have been fleeting. The Garners had given their slaves a false sense of humanity prior to the arrival of the slave driver, schoolteacher. With the Garners, they were humans, men and women, but only for a time. The life of a slave was always a precarious one, as the temperament of the slave owner or the conditions on the plantation were mutable. Changes in fortune or deaths of slave owners could turn a livable existence into a deplorable one overnight. This was the case at the Sweet Home plantation. Schoolteacher, a teacher and Mrs. Garner's brother-in-law, took control of Sweet Home after the death of Mr. Garner. Although Sethe was allowed to "marry" the man of her choosing and to mother her own children for a time, when schoolteacher arrives, he makes it clear that "definitions belonged to the definers – not the defined" (225). His goal was to redefine the slaves and strip any humanity that the Garners had allowed them. Sethe's

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[78] bell hooks, 39

[79] Hortense Spillers. "Mama's Baby, Papa's Maybe: An American Grammar Book." Much of Hortense Spillers' argument examines the black family and black motherhood as it engages Daniel P. Moynihan's infamous Report. Spillers contextualizes the black family, mothering, and fathering practices, linking these practices to a legacy of slavery, 400.

escape and subsequent infanticide is motivated by her desire to keep her humanity and right to mother.

Many slave women were unable to escape the physical and psychological torture of breeding. We see this in the character of Baby Suggs, Sethe's mother-in-law, holy woman and matriarch of the town. We discover that

> Baby's eight children had six fathers. What she called the nastiness of life was the shock she received upon learning that nobody stopped playing checkers just because the pieces included her children. Halle she was able to keep the longest. Twenty years. A lifetime. Given to her, no doubt, to make up for hearing that her two girls, neither of whom had their adult teeth, were sold and gone and she had not been able to wave goodbye. To make up for coupling with a straw boss for four months in exchange for keeping her third child, a boy, with her – only to have him traded for lumber in the spring of the next year and to find herself pregnant by the man who promised not to and did. That child she could not love and the rest she would not. (28)

Baby Suggs' child rearing history was indicative of breeding practices during slavery. Black women were, more often than not, forced to breed with their white owners, and the progeny of those unions were a ready source of capital for the slave owner. Furthermore, "breeding was oppressive to all fertile black slave women. Undernourished, overworked women were rarely in a physical condition that would allow for safe easy childbirth. Repeated pregnancies without proper care resulted in numerous miscarriages and death."[80] Even if the mother and child survived this process of breeding, they did not survive intact. Female bodies and psyches were equally traumatized by the savagery of this process. As we see in the passage above, Baby Suggs found loving her subsequent children impossible after her third was sold. She came to the

[80] hooks, 41.

painful realization that "it wasn't worth the trouble to try to learn features you would never see change into adulthood anyway. Seven times she had done that: held a little foot; examined the fat fingertips with her own – fingers she never saw become the male or female hands a mother would recognize anywhere" (163). Few could argue that the repeated severing of mother from child would not cause irreparable damage to a woman's psyche.

Some women attempted to cushion their psyches from these types of trauma. As we witness in Ella's resounding imperative, "Don't love nothing", love was a liability (Morrison 108). Because Ella had been "pulling colored folk out the water more than twenty years," helping to piece together the broken lives and bodies of runaways, she knew that loving anything or anyone, only to have them stolen away, was not worth the pain (220). She, along with all the black people she knew, had been traumatized physically and psychologically, so that loving something or someone was a risk most were not willing to take. The part of Ella that might have found it possible to love had been cauterized long ago at the hands of, what she called, the "lowest yet." The brutality of these male captors, made her consider love a "serious disability" (301). Her psyche and soma are entangled. The physical trauma of her rape caused her to protect herself psychologically in order to insulate her psyche from further abuse.

Fragmentation is another signification of body trauma. Beloved experiences this after she transcends her ghost stage and becomes flesh. She feels it difficult to keep "her head on her neck, her legs attached to her hips when she is by herself. Among these things she could not remember was when she first knew that she could wake up any day and find herself in pieces" (157). Beloved carries multiple psychic and physiological traumas, which render her unable to maintain wholeness. Beloved's transgenerational haunting is multifarious, as her presence in the world of the text represents the ghosting of slavery psychically and physiologically. Her re-

memory reveals a recollection of collective traumas: the transatlantic slave trade and the traumatic middle passage, the trauma of having been murdered by her mother, Sethe, as well as Sethe's guilt for having committed the act and the trauma Sethe experiences at Sweet Home. In the following passage, Beloved explicates the depth of her psychic origins. She explains,

> All of it is now it is always now there will never be a time when I am not crouching and watching others who are crouching too I am always crouching the man on my face is dead his face is not mine his mouth smells sweet but his eyes are locked . . . the men without skin bring us their morning water to drink we have none at night I cannot see the dead man on my face. (248)

Here Beloved describes the middle passage. In the world of the text, she represents both the reincarnation of the dead child and the collective consciousness of her ancestors who died, without proper burial, generations before her. The men without skin are the white slavers; the crouching she describes illustrates the layering, one atop the other, of African bodies on slave ships. The dead man on her face suggests the historical record of the vast numbers of Africans who, during the middle passage, remained shackled to a person who had died. Beloved recalls memories that have been transmitted to her transgenerationally.

Often the impact of abuse and oppression suffered by the black female body is fragmentation, a struggle to maintain wholeness. Sethe experiences body fragmentation after her perilous passage from bondage into freedom. She suffers the violation of her body through rape, the stealing of her breast-milk, and the back-splitting beating during her pregnancy (the "tree" on her back). She survives the escape, walking day and night, on bare feet, cracked and swollen, under the enormity of the long journey and the weight of her pregnancy. She gives birth inside the leaky canoe, rapidly filling with her own amniotic fluid and the waters of the Ohio River. So

when Sethe arrives at 124, the house where her mother-in-law Baby Suggs awaits her, she arrives broken in body as well as spirit, as she still carries with her the haunting memory of the rape at Sweet Home. By the light of a "spirit lamp," Baby Suggs methodically and ceremoniously bathes Sethe's body in sections, "starting with her face" and ending with the infected whip lacerations on her back (109). In doing so, Baby Suggs does the perfunctory work of literally and metaphorically piecing Sethe's fragmented body back together, making her whole again.

In her essay, "Summoning Some Body: The Flesh Made Word in Toni Morrison's Fiction," Vanessa Dickerson argues, "The Black body all in pieces constituted, as Sethe and Baby Suggs both knew, flesh subject to the most destructive legacies of all–self-hatred."[81] Therefore, by killing Beloved, Sethe attempts to spare her daughter the "haunting knowledge" "[t]hat anybody white could take your whole self for anything that came to mind. Not just work, kill or maim you, but dirty you. Dirty you so bad you couldn't like yourself anymore. Dirty you so bad you forgot who you were and couldn't think it up."[82] Sethe's desire is to protect her daughter from the trauma she experienced at the hands of schoolteacher and his nephews. Sethe seizes the only power she has to shield her daughter's body and mind from white abuse. She does the unthinkable. She kills her child. For Sethe, the killing of her daughter was not unthinkable, but living as a slave would have been. Although Sethe spares Beloved the self-hatred and fragmented lack of wholeness, she experiences it herself, along with an entire

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[81] Vanessa Dickerson. "Summoning Some Body: The Flesh Made Word in Toni Morrison's Fiction." *Recovering the Black Female Body*, 211. In this essay, Dickerson discusses three of Toni Morrison's novels: *The Bluest Eye, Sula,* and *Beloved.* Dickerson explains that in each novel, the protagonists must come to terms with "somatophobia" – a social disdain for the black body. According to Dickerson, *The Bluest Eye* engages the "problematics of visualization", and *Sula* deals with "aesthetic exploration". In *Beloved*, all of these notions are "subsumed in the historical recovery of the body".

[82] qtd. in Vanessa Dickerson, 211.

generation of enslaved black women, who have transmitted their experiences across generations into the bodies and collective consciousness of contemporary black women.

This pejorative self-image is ghosted in the bodies of contemporary black women not only because of psychic haunting of their ancestors, but because of the ghosting of white racist ideology itself, transgenerationally, into contemporary white society. Dorothy Roberts' research, along with the theoretical discourse of Patricia Hill Collins in her book *Black Feminist Thought,* demonstrates this transgenerational ghosting in contemporary African American women. The following is an excerpt from an interview Roberts conducted with a thirty-year-old black mother from Baltimore who describes her experience with the long-acting contraceptive Norplant. This mother was trying to have the contraceptive removed because of the numerous side effects she was experiencing. She explains:

> Then they tell me that it's not putting me in bed, as if they know how I feel on the inside of *my* body . . . I feel like because I'm a social service mother that's what's keeping me from getting this Norplant out of me. Because I've known other people that has the Norplant that spent money to have it put in and spent money to have it put out with no problems…. That's how they make me feel, like 'you got this Norplant you keep it.'[83]

The Baltimore woman was experiencing some of the common side effects of the contraceptive Norplant such as fatigue, prolonged bleeding, hair loss, depression, nervousness, dizziness, and nausea.[84] Because she is a welfare mother, this woman's side effects are irrelevant, and her desire to have the contraceptive removed is rendered mute by a system that has nullified her personhood and legitimacy as a subject. These types of physically and psychologically traumatizing side effects are dismissed when reported by women who society deems as breeders,

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[83] Dorothy Roberts, 104.
[84] Roberts, 122.

draining the public welfare system to support their genetically inferior children. Furthermore, Roberts argues that in the 1990's, legislators and policymakers in the United States seized upon Norplant as a means of domestic population control," targeting poor Black women in the hopes of decreasing the birthrate of purported genetically inferior offspring.[85] Medical professionals still encourage the use of long-acting contraceptives like Norplant in contemporary African American women, especially those who are economically impoverished. Therefore, contemporary African American women continue to experience the transgenerational haunting of racist ideologies that have demonized their bodies and the offspring those bodies produce.

The afore mentioned mother from Baltimore refers to herself as a "social service mother," a mother receiving public assistance in the form of food stamps, TANF, Medicaid, or some combination thereof. Patricia Hill Collins discusses stereotypes associated with this type of black woman in her book chapter entitled, "Mammies, Matriarchs, and Other Controlling Images." Collins explains, "The dominant ideology of the slave era fostered the creation of four interrelated, socially constructed controlling images of Black womanhood:" mammies, matriarchs, welfare mothers, and jezebels. All of these stereotypical images of black women were predicated on a nineteenth century ideology: the cult of true womanhood. In this ideology, white females defined their identity on the basis of who they were not rather than who they were. According to the cult of true womanhood, "*true* women possessed four cardinal virtues: piety, purity, submissiveness, and domesticity."[86] Black female identity, then, serves as the binary opposite of white female identity. As Hortense Spillers states in the opening of her essay "Mama's Baby, Papa's Maybe", "Let's face it. I am a marked woman, but not everybody knows

[85] Dorothy Roberts, 104.
[86] Patricia Hill Collins, 71

my name. . . My country needs me, and if I were not here, I would have to be invented."[87] American society requires the black female identity to be its "dark other". Many slave women were constructed as the mammy, the amiable, obedient, usually obese, domestic servant, "an asexual woman, a surrogate mother in blackface devoted to the development of a white family," as "*good* white mothers are expected to deny their female sexuality and devote their attention to the moral development of their offspring."[88] We also see this in *Beloved*, when Sethe is remembering the trauma of being raped and having her milk stolen. She describes the phenomenon of the slave mother being forced to negate her own mothering practice, subordinating the nutritional needs of her own children by sacrificing her breast milk for the nourishment of white children. Indeed, the slave mother did not own her children nor did she own her own body.

As I close, I wish to return to the question at hand: do bodies remember? Fervently, I say, Yes! Perhaps, my phobia of prisons is nothing more than a mere phobia, like fearing spiders, heights, or close spaces; or, perhaps my body remembers, remembers being shackled to other African bodies, remembers the white slavers policing those bodies, remembers the bondage. Torok and Abraham's work provides a plausible theoretical framework by which to examine this notion of transgenerational ghosting of slavery, as it gives psychological substance to folklore. As their research asserts, "certain categories of the dead return to torment the living," or, as Ella says in *Beloved*, "Nothing that dies bad stays in the ground" (221). Didn't scores of Africans die badly during slavery? How many were denied burial rites, died unnatural deaths, were outcasts, and suffered injustices? The very nature of slavery sanctioned this type of genocide. Therefore, the pain and unfinished business of these ancestors returns

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[87] Hortense Spillers. 390-391. Spillers positions black female identity as a binary construct upon which white identity is predicated.
[88] Patricia Hill Collins, 72.

transgenerationally, haunting the bodies and the psyches of contemporary African American women. Similarly, racist ideology, like Eugenics, originated during the slave trade and is ghosted likewise in the psyches and bodies of white contemporary society. Through government legislation, like welfare policies, targeting poor blacks and penalizing poverty, white American society continues to perpetuate white supremacist notions promulgated by slavery. Whether Americans choose to affirm it or not, there still exists a tacit agreement, covert and unspoken, that blacks are genetically deviant, at best.

Furthermore, contemporary black women are not alone in their present day pain; they are carrying the weight of ancestral pain inside their bodies and collective consciousness. Contrary to William Cross's assertions, this pain has perpetuated generations of self-hatred that must end. Only when African American women begin to make correlations to slavery in their contemporary lives, (as Morrison did sitting on her pier that day, and as I have while analyzing my fear of prisons) will they begin to start this healing process. They must be allowed to point to the origin, the traumatic event, which is slavery. If not, they proceed in seeing themselves through oppressors' eyes as deviant, defective, and deserving of their oppression. They must recognize that the cause of their pain lies outside themselves. Their testimony, like Morrison's *Beloved* and, like this exegesis, necessitates witnesses. As Diana Miles explains, "It is important that testimony has an address, and when the testimony appears in the form of a published text, it is addressed to the world."[89]

Kathleen Brogan challenges us to see *Beloved* as a ritual reburial of the dead, in which the witnesses, the readers, become "mourners who gather around the grave of American history." Brogan explains,

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[89] Diana Miles, 5.

> Sympathetic readers replace the faceless congregation at Beloved's first, unsatisfactory funeral, the "Dearly Beloved" who give the ghost her name. In thus taking on the name of the ghost as their own, readers also become inheritors of a claimed legacy, performing the promise of the novel's biblical epigraph: "I will call them my people, which were not my people." Addressed presumably to black readers who may have, like the novel's traumatized community, disavowed portions of their own history, the epigraph perhaps more pointedly challenges nonblack, and particularly white, Americans to assume the responsibility of redefining exclusive conceptions of "my people."[90]

As a society, we cannot take responsibility for the present without first owning the past. Morrison's *Beloved* is a call for a national *re-memory* of the trauma of slavery, a repetition compulsion of the traumatic event so that American society can take responsibility for the 60 million or more who died during slavery, and get on with the business of healing. Our national amnesia about slavery has become a liability. Society continues to view the black female body in racialized terms: mammies, matriarchs, welfare mothers, and jezebels. In turn, black women internalize these perceptions of self and view themselves as dysfunctional and defective, *but they too sing America. For, yesterday, they were sent to the kitchen to eat when company came. Tomorrow they will eat at the table, because America will see how beautiful they are and be ashamed*.[91] Morrison's text challenges American society to desist in "othering" the black female body and take ownership of the traumatic past which has mapped a troubled and embattled trajectory for the black woman's life. The black woman is not the dark other; she is no less a part of the American family. She is sister, mother, and daughter.

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[90] Kathleen Brogan, 91-92.
[91] Langston Hughes. "I, Too, Sing America." 1945.

As Sethe's story shows us, "recovering the body requires attending to its inside parts, its buried zones. Grief, affect, the logos of emotion, constitute one buried zone of black women's 'body studies', largely because the boundaries of the body are typically drawn around the surface of the skin."[92] If we are to recover our bodies, the physical casings, we must recover our emotions; we must reconcile a legacy of trauma. Contemporary African American women suffer from a myriad of *dis*-orders and *dis*-eases that may have other origins that cannot be attributed to dysfunctional diet, poor healthcare, and poor fitness practices. Western medicine provides very little research that points to the connection between psyche and soma, how the outside affects the inside, and vice versa. At least where African American women are concerned, the tacit assumption is that we have a legacy of dysfunctional health practices rather than a legacy of transgenerational trauma that has caused disproportionate cases of heart disease, ovarian and breast cancers, hypertension, and diabetes. If we can locate an origin, a cause that does not blame the victim, that does not assume flawed genetics, we can begin to heal our bodies and our consciousness.

In *Beloved*, Baby Suggs offers this kind of purgation. As the matriarch and holy woman of the community, Baby Suggs allows the men, women, and children to testify. The narrator tells us, "She did not tell them to clean up their lives or to go and sin no more. She did not tell them they were the blessed of the earth, its inheriting meek or its glorybound pure" (103). For the newly freed Africans, the traumatized men, women, and children, she offers instead a space in which they are allowed to laugh, cry, and dance; she offers a space at the Clearing for healing. Baby Suggs reassures them that they can begin to trust freedom, and as freed people, they are the owners of their once objectified bodies; they are now freed subjects, free to love their wives,

[92] Deborah E. McDowell, 308.

husbands, children, and perhaps most importantly their own flesh, their own bodies. She tells them, “Love it. Love it hard. . .You got to love it” (103-104).

CONCLUSION

Slavery has been, and continues to be, an era and a legacy that is unspeakable. As Toni Morrison tells us about her novel *Beloved,* the characters don't want to remember it, black people don't want to remember it, white people don't want to remember it, and so we have experienced a national amnesia.[93] It is a past too painful to unearth. However, we must unbury the trauma of slavery if we are to heal the centuries of wounds it has caused. History is not only a way of understanding the past but a way of reconciling the present and breaking destructive cycles. In the previous chapters, we have witnessed the trauma of slavery and its insidious desire to transform subjects into objects, humans into animals. Thomas Jefferson, one of America's founding fathers and greatest thinkers, established a paradigm when imagining the black body. His assertions in *Notes on the State of Virginia* about the inferiority of the black body have helped to shape the American imagination from the eighteenth century through the twentieth century.

In Chapter One, we saw William Wells Brown attempting to indict Thomas Jefferson's rhetoric and the white racism of slavery in *Clotel,* his narrative of slave life. However, the constructions of race that Brown establishes undermine his indictment. Brown's novel suggests an internalization of white racist constructions of beauty and identity in such a way that renders Brown incapable of envisioning black female beauty as well as black female corporeality. With whiteness as the paradigm, the novel engages hierarchies of skin color. Just as slavery and the white supremacists who established the institution position the black female as the object of repulsion, so does Brown's narrative.

In Chapter Two, we witnessed the ghosting of slavery in the black female body. In *Beloved,* Toni Morrison reinscribes the story of Margaret Garner as a way of examining the

[93] Toni Morrison. "Pain of Being Black." *Time Magazine.*

trauma left by the legacy of slavery. *Beloved* serves as a testimony to the trauma inflicted upon the psyches and somas of African American women, and we bear witness to this trauma. As Morrison contends, her purpose for writing the novel was to address the national amnesia about slavery. The trauma of slavery still haunts American society. We either choose to shroud it in silence or we diminish its lasting significance. However, as Ella says in *Beloved,* "people who die bad don't stay in the ground" (Morrison 221). The trauma of slavery was never given a proper burial; consequently, it is psychically "ghosted" transgenerationally in the psyches and somas of contemporary African American women. This trauma will continue to repeat itself until there is a community and a societal recognition of its lasting and devastating effects.

For example, the "breeder woman" of slavery that bell hooks discusses has a contemporary double in the form of the welfare mother. This same image is what plagues the Baltimore mother, in Chapter Two, attempting to dispense with the harmful contraceptive. She and her children are a burden on the economic betterment of the dominant culture. Although she is behaving like a "good" welfare mother by attempting to halt the reproduction of her "inferior" offspring, her complaints are invalid and unworthy of legitimating. Therefore, these stereotypical images of black women and their bodies did not die with slavery. Rooted in racist ideologies, they have infiltrated the consciousness of black women transgenerationally. As Dorothy Roberts demonstrates, repeatedly, we see this damaging image of black women presented in contemporary culture via media and popular culture, as well as government legislation. These negative images continue to haunt black women psychically, and thus thwart the formation of positive body identity.

Deborah E. McDowell posits several strategies for the recovery of black women's bodies.[94] One of the strategies she suggests is decorporealization. This is a method of appropriating the body's uncovering through spectacle. She uses contemporary pop-culture examples of this decorporealizing of the black female body through spectacle. She discusses Tina Turner's perfomative use of her body in the 1980's exemplified by her revealing costumes, her blonde wigs, and the gyrating titillating movements of her body. McDowell contemplates her admiration of Tina Turner's bravado, her deconstructing of the "bourgeoisie body-in-the-making" ethos of the 1950's, which not only mandated covering the body in modest, blandly colored clothing but prohibited any movement that would "call attention to what lay below the waist."[95] Of course, this type of socialization was a direct reaction against the jezebel stereotype Patricia Hill Collins discusses. In an attempt to defy the transgenerational ghosting of the sexualized jezebel image of their bodies, contemporary African American women have either confined their "bourgeoisie bodies-in-the-making," reminiscent of the "New Negro" and "talented tenth" ideology of W.E.B Dubois and Booker T. Washington, or uncovered them defiantly like Tina Turner. "New Negroes" and the "talented tenth" were largely an invention of bourgeois blacks like W. E. B. Dubois, Booker T. Washington, and Anna Julia Cooper. The black bourgeois were a small, well-educated, and privileged segment of the black community that established themselves as such during the post-bellum period. By referring to themselves as the "talented tenth" of the black community, their strategy was to gain acceptance by the dominant white culture by arguing their merits on the basis of similitude. They believed that if they could show whites that they were "just like them," whites in black face, then the dominant

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[94] McDowell, Deborah E. "Recovery Missions, Imaging the Body Ideals." *Recovering the Black Female Body*. McDowell posits self re-presentation as a form of resistance and a way to recover or reclaim the black female body. She examines intellectual body recovery through theoretical modes that view the body as iterative and symbolic, and also as a battleground for cultural conflict and contestation.
[95] McDowell, 297.

culture would accept them by virtue of their assimilation. For the New Negro, the primary cultural route to acceptance was to suppress as many outward signs of blackness as possible by straightening the hair, lightening the skin, and dressing in conservative clothing that cloaked those parts of the black female body that were characteristically African. This equality on the basis of sameness argument is the same strategy we see Brown employing in *Clotel*. This argument only reifies white paradigms, positioning blackness as referential to whiteness.

McDowell cites examples from contemporary culture in which black women seek to recover their bodies and self re-present. She provides an example from the 1990's when Oprah Winfrey invited the public to share in her weight loss journey. Subsequently, Winfrey received numerous letters from fans, mostly white female fans, who felt alienated by the new slimmer Oprah. During an episode devoted to flushing out these issues, McDowell explains, "Oprah had invited twelve white women (there might have been ten? fifteen?) to her show to air their grievances, face to face."[96] In short, their grievances amounted to the new image of Oprah's slimmer body as an affront to their white womanhood. Oprah had dared to break the mold of the mammy; "[s]he was clearly not 'corporeal' enough."[97] These white female viewers imagined the svelte Oprah as no longer the amiable, obedient, comforting mammy; now, they had hurled her into the ranks of the jezebel, sexually available, competition for their white male resources.

Mapping on to McDowell's analysis, I offer an even more contemporary example of this mammy to jezebel paradox. In June 2006, Star Jones Reynolds, a well-known black female attorney, and protégé to the famous Johnny Cochran, resigned, or was forced to resign, from the daytime talk show, "The View." The controversy surrounding her resignation, during a live taping of the show, unceasingly permeates the tabloid media. At the risk of being reductive, the

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[96] McDowell, 303.
[97] McDowell, 303.

conflicts between Star, the producers, the viewers, and the other white females on the show, amount to a fall from grace, Star's "fall" from amiable obese mammy to a slender diva jezebel figure.

According to CBS News, journalist and creator of "The View," Barbara Walters said "ABC network chiefs had decided last fall not to renew Reynolds' contract because its research showed that Reynolds' dramatic weight loss and 2004 wedding to banker Al Reynolds had turned off viewers."[98] Therefore, the way in which Star resigned was an attempt to control her departure from the show. When Star transformed her body image from the obese desexualized mammy figure to a slimmer version of herself, she was catapulted into the sexualized gaze of dominant white culture. To say that Star's weight loss "turned off viewers," says that the expectations of the viewers (undoubtedly most of the offended viewers were white), are that black women are only acceptable when their bodies are desexualized, reifying the tenets of white female womanhood. In other words, when black female bodies transcend the stereotypical mammy image, they are sexualized, more aesthetically pleasing to the dominant culture, and therefore have crossed into territory in which they do not belong. Consequently, the dominant culture must now vilify them.

Furthermore, other reports cite justifications for Star's resignation in the anticipated arrival to the show of comedian Rosie O'Donnell. Apparently, there had been a public feud between Reynolds and O'Donnell about Reynolds' drastic weight loss. O'Donnell claimed to be offended because Reynolds refused to admit that her weight loss was the result of Gastric Bypass surgery rather than exercise and diet. O'Donnell, who is famously and defiantly overweight, argued that Reynolds' surgery was an affront to "fatties" everywhere. Essentially, O'Donnell would have preferred that Reynolds make her surgery public, so that her method of weight loss

[98] David Bauder. "'View' Divas React to Star Jones' Exit". *CBS News.*

could be publicly scrutinized and criticized. One must wonder, if Reynolds had been white, would her weight loss, regardless of method, have been the source of such public scandal. Furthermore, Star's elaborate wedding to Al Reynolds has a connection to this conflict, as Star's weight loss occurred during the year of planning leading up to the ceremony, and Star transformed herself from mammy to married woman. How dare she? Again, this kind of rhetoric returns to the rhetoric of slavery. Black women's bodies continue to be a site for public discourse. If black women do not adhere to their role as mammies, then they become the sexually available jezebel, the loose woman, the whore.

As we see socially constructed borders of identity may prove difficult to transgress. Decorporealizing the body through specularizing, as McDowell suggests, also becomes problematic for groups that continue to wield little societal power. African American female identity, as well as African American identity as a whole, is still constructed, manufactured, and packaged by a white dominant majority. In this historical moment, re-presenting the body in the form of spectacle is often times undermined by a white society that is still haunted by the ghosts of slavery. As Hortense Spillers charges, the country needs the black woman, and if she were not here, she would have to be invented.[99] American society necessitates a black female identity that is in binary opposition to white female identity. Black women still do not own their own bodies and identities. Therefore, the re-presenting of the body through spectacle usually results in one of Patricia Hill Collins' stereotypical images – the jezebel.

So, what are we to do with this legacy that we have inherited? We must have a space, a clearing, as Baby Suggs provides in *Beloved*. We must have ample time to heal slavery's wounds. In a roundtable discussion about this issue of transgenerational haunting, a black

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[99] Hortense Spillers. 390-391. Spillers positions black female identity as a binary construct upon which white identity is predicated.

woman once asked me, "How do you propose we heal these long-standing, often times, unconscious wounds?" I answered saying, "We must first be allowed to speak the unspeakable." For so long, the notion of slavery has been compartmentalized into a time period that many of us refer to as – "slavery times". We speak of this "time" as if we can truly identify its beginning, its end, and as if our entire society is not haunted by its legacy. For black folks, there seems to be a kind of shame attached to owning slavery. For whites, there is the ever abiding denial and disavowal of the depth of its brutality and inhumanity. As Morrison charges, no one wants to remember, but we must remember. We must be forever cognizant of our embittered past. Other traumatized groups are encouraged to remember, encouraged to testify. The desire to bury the painful legacy of slavery is what keeps our society wounded and in a constant state of racial regression. African Americans must be proud, not only of our current successes and transgressions, but we must also be proud that we survived the unconscionable brutality of the middle passage, the 246 years of slavery, and the 143 years of Jim Crowism. All of this is our history. All of this is our present. As trauma studies teaches us, until the trauma is reconciled, traumatized groups will continue to repeat and relive traumas. Black women's bodies continue to be a site of trauma. In order to heal those bodies, in order to love those bodies, we must understand and claim the legacy they carry.

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