INDEPENDENT WOMEN: BLACK WOMEN AS CONSUMERS IN LITERATURE WRITTEN FROM SLAVERY TO THE HARLEM RENAISSANCE

by

TISHA ULMER

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12-6-10 Robert Reid Pharr

Chair of Examination Committee

12-6-10 Mario diGangi

Executive Officer

Barbara Webb

James de Jongh

Supervisory Committee

The City University of New York

Abstract

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This dissertation explores the role of consumerism in literature written by African-American women between 1861 and 1928. It consists of three chapters. Chapter One examines the birth of consumer culture in America and Benjamin Franklin's emergence as an exemplary American as it relates to the same. In this chapter I posit that Franklin was a model not only for European-Americans but also for African-Americans, as seen in the slave narratives of Frederick Douglass and Harriet Jacobs. I argue that as an enslaved black woman, Harriet Jacobs reflected and revised the Franklin model and her revision of this model influenced the black female writers who followed her. Chapter Two is concerned with the emergence of Booker T. Washington as *the* prime mediator between American consumer culture and newly freed African-Americans. This chapter looks at how two black female writers, Ida B. Wells and Pauline Hopkins, responded to Washington, even as they reconfigured the Jacobs template. The final chapter places Nella Larsen's *Quicksand* within the context of America's blossoming consumer culture in the twentieth century and I argue that her rewriting of the Jacobs paradigm represents a breakthrough in depictions of black women's financial and relational autonomy.

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I would like to thank God for giving me the strength to complete this project. I would like to thank my mother for her unflagging encouragement. I thank my family, friends and colleagues for their support during my graduate studies. Finally, this dissertation is dedicated to the memory of my father, Ronnie Lee Ulmer and my aunt, Ella Louise Chestnut.

Independent Women: Black Women as Consumers in Literature Written from Slavery to the Harlem Renaissance

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Introduction: Independent Women

In their 2000 hit, "Independent Women Part I" from the album *Survivor*, Beyonce, the lead singer of the top selling female R&B group, Destiny's Child, asks her romantic interest two questions:

> Question: Tell me what you think about me?
> I buy my own diamonds and I buy my own rings
> Only ring your cell-y when I'm feelin' lonely
> When it's all over please get up and leave
> Question: Tell me how you feel about this?
> Try to control me boy you get dismissed
> Pay my own fun, and oh I pay my own bills
> Always 50/50 in relationships[1]

Three years later, R. Kelly, R&B's leading male artist and the rapper Twista, responded affirmatively to Destiny Child's queries. In the song "So Sexy," the singer and rapper state their desire for "downtown shoppin' honeys, stayin' on the grind, got your own car and crib honeys." R. Kelly's affirmative response to Destiny Child's lyrics is echoed by Ne-Yo, one of the crown princes of R&B. In the 2008 hit "Miss Independent" Ne-Yo croons, "something ooh so sexy about kinda woman that don't even need my help…. everything she got best believe she bought

[1]"Independent Women Part I" is also the theme song for the 2000 film version of *Charlie's Angels*, based on the television show about three female undercover detectives which aired from 1976 to 1981. The show was ground-breaking for featuring women in roles which had been reserved for men.

it, she gonna steal my heart." For these black male artists and others, financially independent women are celebrated as the most desirable.[2]

Lyrics such as these would seem to simply mirror the dominant culture, in the thralls of post-feminism, in which women's financial independence and their sexual freedom are inextricably linked. Indeed, I write this on the day that the highly anticipated film version of *Sex in the City* premiers around the United States. Airing on HBO from 1998 to 2004, *Sex in the City* captured the zeitgeist of the post-feminist moment, featuring four successful, self-sufficient women searching for love and meaning in New York City. The television show, based on Candace Bushnell's 1997 novel, featured frank depictions of female desire not only for sex, but also for $895.00 Manolo Blahniks, which were readily accessible to the show's white female lead characters.

While they remain largely absent from chick lit and films in the vein of *Sex in the City*, black women have been busy creating their own images of women who are successful consumers in the malls and in the sexual marketplace not only in music, but also in literature, film, and television, such as the popular novel and film, *How Stella Got Her Groove Back* (1996) by Terry McMillan and the television series *Girlfriends*, (2000-2008) created by Mara Brock Akil.[3] It is not surprising that the confluence of the Civil Rights, Black Power and Second Wave feminist movements of the 1960s and 1970s would lead to images such as these that I would like to call post-black feminist. These movements set the stage for the ascendancy of black female writers

[2] Depictions of black women as hyper-sexual and/or gold diggers in hip hop have been examined at some length, and I wish to look at the under-explored image of the independent woman.
[3] In "'It's Not Right, But It's Okay': Black Women's R & B and the house that Terry McMillan Built," Daphne Brooks explores "the striking cross-pollination of themes and imagery in Black popular literature and the diva-dominated R & B of the 1990s" (33).

and an unprecedented black female middle class audience in the 1970s and 1980s and into the present moment.

In fact, popular fiction by and about black women exploded in the 1990s, and for many observers the spark that lit this explosion was the publication of Terry McMillan's phenomenally successful novel, *Waiting to Exhale* in 1992, which became a blockbuster film in 1995 starring Whitney Houston and Angela Bassett. Following her success many African-American female writers published popular novels with mainstream houses, including April Sinclair and Jill Nelson, leading to the coining of terms such as "sistah gurl" lit or "sistah girl" fiction.[4] Not far behind them, black men such as Omar Tyree, Eric Jerome Dickey and E. Lynn Harris also found success with light fiction that engages black life in the contemporary moment.

In one of the few critical essays about the growth of popular fiction by and about African-American women, "'Sistahs Are Doin' It for Themselves': Chick Lit in Black and White," from the anthology *Chick Lit: The New Woman's Fiction*, Lisa A. Guerrero describes contemporary black women's literature in phenomenal terms using words such as "herculean" and "revolutionary" as the authors present protagonists who are "unconnected to histories of forced compliance with the roles of caretaker, breeder, sexualized object" (90). She writes that:

> The indelible connection between black women, the domestic sphere, manual service labor and the underclass had existed for so long in the American popular imagination and social reality that the emergence of this new model of the 'sistah' onto the popular stage posed a nearly **herculean** move toward naturalizing a

[4] This spelling of girl references "girl power" slogans of the 1990s which used alternative spellings. The Oxford English Dictionary defines girl power as "a self-reliant attitude among girls and young women manifested in ambition, assertiveness, and individualism."
As it relates to black female artists, the pop-culture critic David Swerdlick describes Destiny Child's lyrics in the songs "Independent Women Part I" and "Bills, Bills, Bills" as examples of the group's "sistah grrl power."

> distinctly different vision of black womanhood. ….sistah lit represented not only a reflection *of* a new African-American womanhood but also a **revolution** *for* this new African-American womanhood. (90)

The notion of this fiction as revolutionary has been articulated by Terry McMillan herself. In her introduction to *Breaking Ice: an Anthology of Contemporary African-American Fiction,* (1990) McMillan writes that this generation of black writers is "a new breed, free to write as we please…because of the way life has changed" (xx). Reinforcing the idea that this fiction is disconnected from African-American women's history and literature, in a 1992 interview on the dawn of the publication of *Waiting to Exhale* Terry McMillan asserted, "This is 1992. I appreciate and value all the protest literature of the 60's, but I'm tired of carrying this plantation on my shoulders" (Smith 51).

> Black literature is alive, and it's singing my brother. It depends on what songs you want to hear, OK? There's a song of tradition, there's a song of what I call great writing, there's a song of fun, there's a song of romance and adventure…There's enough room for all kinds of literature to advance and be listened to, and be bought and read. (M. Lewis 24)

Baraka, on the other hand, struck a decidedly more political and sardonic tone commenting:

> They wanna push a literature and an art that's non-contentious, that's actually soporific—that puts you to sleep, that makes you content with things rather than transforming them….The whole intellectual life of America is suffocating. Now that the big publishers, such as there are remaining in the United States, found that black people can read, they're

> publishing a whole mountain-load of essentially mediocre, useless kind of materials. (M. Lewis 24)

Perhaps because it is light, there has been little scholarship on popular African American fiction. A handful of critical essays and Paulette Richard's 1999 *Terry McMillan: a Critical Companion* have been the scant critical responses to this phenomenon, and none of this work reads contemporary literature by and about black women within the context of the African-American female literary tradition or African-American history prior to the movements of the 1960s and 1970s. In this way, observers reinforce the notion that this work is post-black feminist in that it represents a complete break from the past. I would like to suggest, however, that if we read "sistah girl" lit within the context of the tradition of African-American women's literature, it is more accurate to describe contemporary popular fiction as evolutionary as opposed to revolutionary as it relates to depictions of black women's financial and relational autonomy.

Indeed, African-American female writers have been contesting America's notions of black women as "tied to the domestic sphere, breeders and sexual objects" from the time they stepped onto the nation's literary stage (Guerrero 89). While the movements of the 1960s and 1970s certainly had a profound impact on African-American lives and creativity, when Destiny's Child sings of "50/50 in relationships" and Terry McMillan pens a novel about a 42 year old black female investment banker who becomes involved with a 20 year old young man while vacationing in the Caribbean, or R. Kelly declares his desire for women who are financially independent, I contend that these artists are not creating something ground-breaking, but tilling black America's unique historical and cultural soil. Because of African-Americans' status within the dominant schema of gender and consumer relations, sheer imitation of bourgeois white culture was not always feasible. More importantly perhaps, it was not always desirable, as

African-Americans have created their own ways of being as it relates to gender, sexuality and consumption. In terms of gender relations and consumption, black women's fiction and African-American reality have historically reflected *and* critiqued the mainstream, all while fashioning a distinct culture. This dissertation examines black female literary production before the Civil Rights, Black Power and Second Wave Feminist movements to illuminate how we arrived at contemporary depictions of consumption in literature by and about black women.

This dissertation consists of three chapters. Chapter One looks at the emergence of European-American consumer culture and the ways Frederick Douglass and Harriet Jacobs responded to it in their slave narratives. I contend that Harriet Jacobs produced a template as it relates to black female consumption that black female writers would reproduce and revise for generations to come. Chapter Two examines the ways black female writers such as Ida B. Wells and Pauline Hopkins did just that, even as they responded to Booker T. Washington, who positioned himself as the prime mediator between African-Americans and American consumer culture in the post-slavery era. Chapter Three seeks to situate Nella Larsen's Harlem Renaissance classic, *Quicksand* (1928) within the context of America's blossoming consumer culture in the 1920s as it examines how Larsen reflects and revises the Harriet Jacobs model. It is my hope that this study of African-American women writers and consumption from slavery to the Harlem Renaissance will lead to a better understanding of what is old and what is new in contemporary fiction about the lives of African-American women.

Chapter One

Resistant Self-Fashioning in the Antebellum Era

In her 1993 article, "'A Nation of Thieves:' Consumption, Commerce and the Black Public Sphere," one of the limited number of scholarly works exploring race and consumption, Regina Austin delineates two views of African-Americans' relationship to consumer culture: resistance and alienation. According to those who hold the alienationist view, "blacks consume conspicuously as a way of compensating for the humiliation and disappointments they incur by reason of being black, exploited, degraded and oppressed" (236). According to those who hold the resistance view, African-American consumption is "a site of struggle to exploit the transformative potential of commodities" (239). While this delineation is certainly valuable, it assumes that American consumer culture and blacks' relationship to it have remained static. Instead, I wish to examine how this relationship articulates itself in literature produced by African-American women at particular historical junctures. In this chapter, I explore African-Americans' role in and response to European-American consumer culture in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. I posit that the development of European-American consumer culture was characterized by tensions, and blacks existed at the crucible of these incongruities. The Oxford English Dictionary defines a crucible as a situation of severe trial where different elements interact, leading to the creation of something new. Blacks responded to this reality in two fundamental ways. In the antebellum era we see a resistant impulse among enslaved blacks as well as the development of a cultural aesthetic characterized by bricolage, an aesthetic which is particularly evident in the lives and creativity of enslaved women. This resistant impulse as well as cultural bricolage are evident in the historical record, runaway advertisements and material

objects as well as the most prominent slave narrative composed by an African-American woman, Harriet Jacobs's *Incidents in the Life of a Slave Girl* (1861).

"A guinea a yard"

Without a doubt, African-American slaves and their descendants have a distinct history as it relates to American consumer culture. As Robert Weems notes in "Consumerism and the Construction of Black Female Identity in Twentieth Century America," "blacks possess the dubious distinction of being the only group in the United States to have once been designated slaves"(166). African-Americans were brought to the United States as cargo, were regarded as property as slaves, and their status as such was legalized by the Supreme Court in the Dred Scott vs. Sanford decision in 1857, an impetus in the Civil War. [5, 6]

Not only were African-Americans the only ethnic group who were commodities, but they are the only group for whom matters of consumption were matters of law. In "Slave Clothing and African-American Culture in the Eighteenth and Nineteenth Centuries," Shane and Graham White note that The South Carolina Negro Act of 1735 prescribed "the materials suitable for slave clothing, allowing only the cheapest fabrics" (White and White 154). Even as laws such as these restricted slaves to the cheapest attire, whites were using clothing to express their aspirations in the eighteenth century.

[5]Dred Scott sued for his freedom when he returned to the slave state of Missouri after living in two free states with his master, Illinois and Wisconsin. Chief Justice Roger B. Taney wrote that blacks "had no rights which the white man was bound to respect; and that the negro might justly and lawfully be reduced to slavery for his benefit. *He was bought and sold and treated as an ordinary article of merchandise and traffic, whenever profit could be made by it*."

[6] Native Americans were also held as slaves on an intermittent basis.

European-American consumer culture consolidated in the mid-eighteenth century due to two primary factors: the economic prosperity the colonists enjoyed during the Seven Years War (1756 to 1763) and the importation of free labor. The war led to an increase in military spending and a greater demand for goods and services, which contributed to a significant increase in colonial wealth. In modern terms this was an economic bubble, as the British were amassing a huge deficit as they fought for control of French lands east of the Mississippi River and in Canada.

American colonists were able to meet the greater demand for goods in the 1750s and 1760s because of the slave trade. Slaves cultivated the agricultural items and raw materials such as cotton, tobacco and rice that were exported to Britain, which was in the midst of the Industrial Revolution. The colonists used the money they made from these exports to consume British manufactured goods. Despite the significant profits they realized from exporting raw materials to England, imports came to exceed exports in the American colony, and British merchants responded by extending credit to the colonists. Prior to the 1740s debt was virtually unheard of in the colonies, but became commonplace in the ensuing decades.

As noted earlier, the colonists used this borrowed money to express their aspirations. People desired fashionable, portable status bearing goods such as sets of carved chairs, china and imported waistcoats to communicate their rising standard of living (Howell). Cloth was *the* major item for sale in the years leading up to the American Revolution. As one commentator stated in the 1760's, instead of the humble "homespun-made coat with horn buttons" that he wore, his American neighbors demanded "English made cloth that cost…a guinea a yard" (Breen 110). In this way, fashion became a prime example of the endless pursuit of wants in America's burgeoning consumer economy.

In the meantime, the war created a huge debt for Britain and once peace had been achieved a recession followed. Indeed, the British government's deficit doubled from 75 million pounds to 133 million pounds, which they borrowed from British and Dutch bankers to finance the war (Milazzo and Thorndike). English merchants asked the colonists to pay off the debts they had incurred by buying British manufactured goods. While Britain's leaders were responsible for incurring debt during the war, the colonists' profligate ways also contributed to the colonial economic crisis of the 18th century.

As British merchants called in their debts, the British government began imposing taxes on the colonists, beginning with the Stamp Act, which required the colonists to purchase a stamp for legal documents, cards, newspapers and land titles. This led to an uprising among the colonists who harassed British officials responsible for implementing the new law. The colonies came together at the Stamp Act Congress of 1765 and wrote petitions in which they argued that they could not be taxed by Parliament since they had no representative in the House of Commons.

Importantly, the colonists also began to probe "connections between parliamentary oppression and the consumption of British goods" (Breen 101). Indeed, some American colonists blamed the tax on the conspicuous consumption that became commonplace throughout the colonies during the war. They wrote that British soldiers returned home with stories of wealthy colonists, when in reality, as one pamphleteer wrote, the Americans were engaging in "superficial glamour," and were in truth "provincial bumpkins" who couldn't afford taxes and were "too untutored to display their wealth tastefully" (Breen 102). As a result, the Stamp Act triggered the Non-Importation Agreement of 1765 and the importation of British goods slowed to a trickle. In speeches, pamphlets and newspapers, the colonists urged each other to curb their consumption to protest the tax. As Breen notes, in this way, the non-importation movement

constructed a "public, an imagined body of people who demonstrated virtue by renouncing British goods" (120). [7]

Father Franklin

Leaders such as Benjamin Franklin spoke against taxation without representation and urged frugality among the colonists. In 1758 Benjamin Franklin published the pamphlet, "The Way to Wealth," a follow-up to his annual *Poor Richard's Almanac,* which he published for 25 years beginning in 1732. "The Way to Wealth" distilled the advice Franklin offered everyday colonists, focusing on advice related to "industry and frugality" (223). "The Way to Wealth" is set at an auction of merchants' goods, and as they wait for the auction to begin, the people complain about taxes to "a plain, clean, old man with white locks" named Father Abraham. In fact, even in the midst of the Seven Years War, the colonists were balking about the taxes imposed by the Crown, which available figures suggest were modest, at about two million pounds per year (Makin and Ornstein 54). A member of the crowd implores the wise old man,

[7] Breen asserts that "the most striking aspect of the Revolutionary boycotts is their utter novelty. No previous popular rebellion had organized itself so centrally around the consumer" (111). As James Axtell writes at the end of his essay, "The First Consumer Revolution," however, Native Americans also staged a consumer revolution in the 1760s. During the 17th century, the wealth of Native Americans grew as they traded animal skins with European traders who were willing to pay top dollar for them. Early European commentators noted that they were savvy consumers who were not interested in "baubles," "but in usefull things" (89). As trade increased however, the English "multiply'd their Wants" as Native Indians began to desire things they had never dreamed of before (95). Axtell comments that while items like bells and clothing fasteners didn't have a big impact on native life, "guns, alcohol and even mirrors" did (92). The mirrors, in particular, "may have promoted a preoccupation with personal fashion as much as full length hanging mirrors did among genteel colonists" (93). Indeed, some natives committed suicide when they saw their images in mirrors during the small pox epidemic. In the 1760s the Delaware's wanted to "learn to live without any trade or connections with the white people, clothing and supporting themselves as their forefathers did" (96). Unlike African-Americans, Native Americans were able to band together, much like the colonists, and create a resistant public sphere based on consumption.

"Pray Father Abraham, what think you of the times? Will not these heavy taxes quite ruin the country? How shall we ever be able to pay them? What would you advise us to do?" (220).

Father Abraham, a stand-in for Franklin, urges the multitude towards industry and frugality in maxims such as "Sloth makes all things difficult, but industry all easy…industry pays debts, while despair increaseth them" (221). He goes on to advise:

> Here you are all got together at this sale of fineries and knick-knacks. You call them *goods*, but, if you do not take care they will prove *evils* to some of you…. What madness it must be to run into debt for these superfluities. We are offered by the terms of this sale six months credit, and that perhaps, has induced some of us to attend it…. But ah, think what you do. When you run in debt you give another power over your liberty. (223)

Indeed, "Father Franklin" wished to be *the* prime mediator between America's burgeoning consumer culture and the American people and he achieved this through publications such as "The Way to Wealth" and *Poor Richard's Almanac*, but more prominently, through his life story which he began to compose in 1771 and was first published in English in 1793. Though it was not recorded until three years after his death, Franklin's life story was well-known throughout the colonies and Europe. Upon its publication, *Benjamin Franklin's Autobiography* became a best-seller and remains "the most popular autobiography ever written"(Lemay xiii). As America's first rags to riches tale, the first articulation of one man's realization of the American Dream, it became the touchstone for future American autobiographies, including those written by formerly enslaved Americans.

Father Franklin addresses Part One of his autobiography to his son, William, so that he might use his life as a model. He writes:

> Having emerged from the poverty and obscurity in which I was born and bred, to a state of affluence and some degree of reputation in the world, and having gone so far through life with a considerable share of felicity, the conducting means I made use of, which, with the blessing of God, so well succeeded, my posterity may like to know, as they may find some of them suitable to their own situations, and therefore fit to be imitated. (1)

More than his son, however, this American born into humble circumstances who would become a leader in the fight against the Stamp Act, wants all Americans to use his life as a model to achieve economic success and if not fame, then certainly respect. As Charles Sanford notes, *Benjamin Franklin's Autobiography* is "not simply a formless record of personal experience…consciously or unconsciously, it is a work of imagination which… achieves the level of folk myth" (310). According to his autobiography, by the tender age of 16, Franklin has tapped into the core of his success—self-mastery.[8]

Self-discipline can be defined as the act or ability to apply oneself or to control one's feelings. From his youth, however, what distinguished Franklin from his siblings and his peers was his innate intelligence. Born into a family of 17, his father, a soap and candle-maker, decides that Franklin will become a minister because of young Franklin's "early readiness in learning to read…and the opinion of all his friends that I should certainly make a good scholar"

[8] Other critics have noted Franklin's role in creating himself as the prototypical American. David Levin warns that we must resist letting the *Autobiography's* "general fidelity to historical fact blind us to the author's function in creating the character who appears in the book" (336). John William Ward writes that Franklin wrote his life story "in full self-consciousness that he was offering himself to the world as a representative type, the American" (327).

(6). Franklin enters school at the age of eight and rises from the middle of the class to the head of the class, but he is taken out of school at ten to help his father in his business. In the meantime, Franklin recalls that "all the little money that came into my hands was ever laid out in books" (9). Benjamin Franklin's father becomes concerned that his son's unhappiness with the family business will cause him to run off to sea. Franklin recalls that his "bookish inclination at length determined my father to make me a printer" (10). Franklin is certainly bright, but even as a youth; the seeds of self-mastery are present in his life. He diligently spends his money on books, not frivolities, and threatens to take control of his body by running off to sea.

Sent to serve as his brother's apprentice from 12 to 21, Benjamin Franklin is a quick study at the printing trade, and it is at this time that Franklin's self-mastery truly germinates as he continues to educate himself during his free time. Franklin improves his mind through a careful course of study in writing and mathematics, and he recalls, "my time for these exercises and for reading, was at night after work, or before work began in the morning" (12).

This discipline and attention to study led Franklin to find a public voice. He anonymously prints a piece in his brother's paper, *The New England Courant*. His brother's associates, "ingenious men among his friends" receive the anonymous piece with "approbation," and when they attempt to guess at the author name only "men of some character…for learning and ingenuity" (15). Franklin realizes his humanity by entering the European-American discourse of ideas through writing. Indeed, his growing book collection and growing skills as a writer, both achieved through discipline, will bring him to the attention of two colonial governors. He first comes to the attention of Sir William Keith of Pennsylvania and Delaware when Keith stumbles upon a letter that Franklin wrote to his brother-in-law protesting the treatment he receives from his printer brother. Governor Keith is surprised when he learns Franklin's age and

deems him “a young man of promising parts” (23). Franklin comes to the attention of Governor Burnet of New York while traveling by boat on a trip to his native Boston. He recalls:

> Hearing from the Captain that a young man, one of his passengers, had a great many books, desired he would bring me to see him…. The governor treated me with great civility, show’d me his library, which was a very large one, and we had a good deal of conversation about books and authors. This was the second Governor who had done me the honor to take notice of me, which to a poor boy like me was very pleasing. (26)

Having demonstrated the discipline needed to take control of his mind, so much so that he comes to the attention of powerful men in colonial America; at 16 he also takes control of his body with a vegetarian diet. His brother agrees to give him half the money he pays for his board and Benjamin saves money by preparing his own inexpensive vegetarian fare and spends the money he saves on books. When his brother and the other workmen go out to dine, Benjamin “remained there alone, and dispatching presently my light repast…had the rest of the time till their return, for study” (13). Eventually, in response to the ill treatment he receives at the hands of his brother and master, Franklin takes possession of his body by running away.

One of the governors he impresses, Sir William Keith, promises to set him up in business and sends Franklin to London to purchases supplies. When Sir Keith’s promises prove to be empty, Franklin finds work in a London printing house. Here Franklin also demonstrates mastery of his body through diet and exercise saying, “I drank only water, the other workmen, near 50 in number, were great guzzlers of beer. On occasion I carried up and down stairs a large form of types in each hand, when others carried but one in both hands” (36). Because he drinks

water, he saves money, and his fellow workmen are soon in debt to him. Moreover, Franklin's dedication to physical exercise also bears fruit. As a boy Franklin teaches himself how to swim and he improves his technique by studying "all Thevenot's motions and positions" (39). When he swims from Chelsea to Blackfriars the British are so impressed that they suggest that he open a swimming school. He opts not to, but does teach the sons of William Wyndham, a prominent Englishman, to swim. Later he negotiates with Wyndham's son during the Revolution.

He also negotiates a lower rent with his British landlady, and these actions allow him to save money for his return to America. When he returns he continues to work in the printing business and eventually opens a printing house in Philadelphia with his friend, Hugh Meredith, borrowing money from Meredith's father and others. When he separates from Meredith he says:

> I began now gradually to pay off the debt I was under for the printing-house. In order to secure my credit and character as a tradesman, I took care I dressed plainly; I was seen at no places of idle diversion; I never went out a-fishing or shooting; a book, indeed, sometimes debauched me from my work, but that was seldom, snug, and gave no scandal; and to show that I was not above my business, I sometimes brought home the paper I purchas'd at the stores, through the streets on a wheelbarrow. (54)

This passage represents the culmination of Franklin's self-mastery as he is on the threshold of becoming one of the wealthiest men in America through the printing business he starts in Philadelphia. His willingness to do manual work demonstrates mastery over his body. He demonstrates that he has mastered his mind by reading books. And importantly, this passage shows that he has mastered his relationship to consumer culture by not spending on frivolities

like expensive clothing and leisure activities and paying off his debts. He has mastered his body, mind and finances. Franklin has risen from indentured servitude to freedom; from a poor, obscure background to wealth and fame and industry is how he achieved this success. As he articulates it, "I considered industry as a means of obtaining wealth and distinction" (64). Moreover, he is a stand-in for the American people. As Benjamin Vaughn writes to him "all that has happened to you is also connected with the detail of the manners and situation of a rising people" (59). Franklin's life is an example for every American.

"Economy and liberty"

As critics such as David Levin have noted, Franklin tapped into the Puritan mores of his parents as it relates to this self-discipline, industry and frugality. Franklin, however, was a Deist, a religion which privileged facts over faith. A man of the Enlightenment, he is a man of reason, and urges Americans to be rational in their relationship to the marketplace. Through Franklin, this reasonable approach to the market is what makes one not only a superior human being as consistent with Enlightenment thought, but a superior American, particularly when this was required for a common goal—the overthrowing of British oppression through taxes.

Indeed, the colonists followed the lead of Benjamin Franklin and other leaders such as Thomas Jefferson, who wrote, "We must not let our rulers load us with perpetual debt. We must make our election between economy and liberty or profusion and servitude…Taxation follows that, and in its train wretchedness and oppression" (Letter to Samuel Kercheval). As British exports to the colonies evaporated, British merchants put pressure on Parliament, and the Stamp Act was repealed in 1765.

Parliament again tried to raise revenues in the American colony with the Townshend Act, which imposed a levy on glass, paint, lead, paper and tea imported into the colony. The colonists responded with another boycott, and American exports came to exceed British imports by close to a million pounds (Milazzo and Thorndike). Importantly, American resistance to British taxes was spurred not only by ideological concerns, but also by the realities of the debt Americans owed to British lenders. Indeed, the years leading up to the American Revolution reflect a cycle of bubbles and belt-tightening that would come to characterize the American economy.

In response to the economic boycott Parliament repealed the Townshend Act, but retained the 3 pence tax on tea. To protest, the colonists began drinking Dutch tea. Then, in order to prop up the ailing British East India Company, Parliament gave the Company a monopoly on the tea market in the colonies. The colonists continued to drink illegally imported Dutch tea and famously threw British tea into the Boston Harbor in 1773, leading to the American Revolution.

Even as the boycotts leading up to the American Revolution resolved one tension in American consumer culture: conspicuous consumption based on debt, it left another for future generations to address. The boycotts were inspired by high ideals regarding liberty as well as pecuniary expediency, as debt-laden European-Americans could not handle more demands on their purses. This tension between freedom and financial viability remained alive in the institution of slavery, however. European-Americans continued to rely on a system that was economically advantageous but morally unsustainable.

"People-commodities"

When the *Declaration of Independence* was written in 1776, there were about 500,000 slaves in the United States, primarily in the South. Thomas Jefferson and other members of the Continental Congress wanted to include a passage which called for abolishing slavery in America, but the institution was too profitable for white Southerners who used slave labor and white Northerners who reaped huge profits by transporting these slaves. In his autobiography Jefferson recalls:[9]

> The clause too, reprobating the enslaving of the inhabitants of Africa, was struck out in complaisance to South Carolina and Georgia, who had never attempted to restrain the importation of slaves, and who on the contrary still wished to continue it. Our northern brethren also, I believe, felt a little tender under those censures; for tho' their people have very few slaves themselves yet they had been pretty considerable carriers of them to others. (341)

Therefore, the members of the Continental Congress opted to strike from the original draft of the *Declaration of Independence* the passage that accused George III of waging "cruel war against human nature itself, violating its most sacred rights of life and liberty in the persons of a distant people who never offended him, captivating and carrying them into slavery in another hemisphere" (Jefferson 344).

[9] Thomas Jefferson owned 400 slaves, including his own children by his slave Sally Hemings. Jefferson never freed his slaves, even upon his death. This was in part due to the fact that he lived above his means. He accumulated debt for several reasons, including debt he inherited from his father-in-law. Another reason however, was a fondness for shopping for items such as furniture, wine, and fabric. For instance, when he returned from his four year sojourn in France, he had 86 crates shipped to America ("Paris").

The *Declaration of Independence* begins with words that are sacrosanct in American culture, "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." However, the members of the Continental Congress chose to omit from the final draft of the nation's founding document the assertion that slavery violated the "most sacred rights of life and liberty." In this way, the nation's founders opted to build the American economy on a system that was economically advantageous but morally untenable.[10]

Even as the *Declaration* declared that all men "are endowed by the Creator with certain unalienable rights," blacks were regarded as non-human, as objects. In "On Being the Object of Property" Patricia Williams explains:

> When a valued object is located outside the market, it is generally understood to be too 'priceless' to be accommodated by ordinary exchange relationships; when, in contrast, the prize is located within the marketplace, all objects outside become 'valueless.' Traditionally, the Mona Lisa and human life have been the sorts of subjects removed from the fungibility of commodification, as 'priceless.' Thus, when black people were bought and sold as slaves, they were placed beyond the bounds of humanity. (30)

[10] The entire omitted passage regarding slavery reads "he has waged cruel war against human nature itself, violating its most sacred rights of life and liberty in the persons of a distant people who never offended him, captivating and carrying them into slavery in another hemisphere, or to incur miserable death in their transportation hither. This piratical warfare, the opprobrium of infidel powers, is the warfare of the Christian king of Great Britain, determined to keep open a market where MEN should be bought and sold, he has prostituted his negative for suppressing every legislative attempt to prohibit or to restrain this execrable commerce: and that this assemblage of horrors might want no fact of distinguished die, he is now exciting those very people to rise in arms among us, and to purchase that liberty of which he had deprived them, by murdering the people upon whom he also obtruded them: thus paying off former crimes committed against the liberties of one people, with crimes which he urges them to commit against the lives of another" (Jefferson 344-345).

Moreover, this objectification had a gender dimension. While men and women were valued for their ability to labor, women were also valued for their ability to reproduce. As Jennifer Morgan observes in "Some Could Suckle over Their Shoulder: Male Travelers, Female Bodies, and the Gendering of Racial Ideology, 1500-1700, "descriptions of African women in the Americas almost always highlighted their fecundity along with their capacity for manual labor….Early on metaphors of domestic livestock…relied on notions of reproduction for consumption" (52). During the Middle Passage and in the New World, black women were raped by their white male captors to produce more slaves. To justify this behavior, white men and women produced stereotypes of black women as hypersexual. As Angelyne Mitchell explains, "thus the agents of slavocracy constructed the myth of the lewdly sensuous enslaved black woman—the Jezebel—who animalistically and uninhibitedly acted upon her sexual urges when in reality her body became the site of white male licentiousness and economic desire" (25).

As David Waldstreicher notes, advertisements for slave auctions and runaway slaves underscore the reality that African-American slaves lived at the crucible of European-American consumer tensions. He writes that "this proliferation of people-commodities—of laborers as goods—is reflected in the number of advertisements for goods, for the sale of servants and slaves, and for the recapture of runaways in the newspapers," which steadily increased in the mid-eighteenth century (249). [11]

Runaway advertisements also reflect the gender aspect of this traffic in "people-commodities." For example, in *Aunt Jemima, Uncle Ben, and Rastus: Blacks in Advertising,*

[11] These advertisements appeared in Benjamin Franklin's newspaper. Franklin owned two slaves, George and King. Like other colonists, he thought people of African descent were intellectually inferior to Europeans. However, his opinion changed when he went to an African school. This contrasts with Jefferson who writes in *Notes on the State of Virginia* that blacks possess "a want of forethought" and "in general, their existence appears to participate more in sensation than reflection" (187-188).

Yesterday, Today, and Tomorrow, Marilyn Kern-Foxworth notes the use of the word wench to describe black female runaway slaves in 18th century advertisements. She points out that:

> Quite often the women in advertisements were called wenches, a term used to refer to a young woman, a female servant, or a lewd woman or prostitute. It is generally assumed that such references were more likely associated with the latter definition offered, reinforcing a common theme, or stereotype, that many plantation mistresses thrust upon their black female slaves in retaliation for bearing the children of their husbands, brothers and fathers. (20)

An example is an advertisement that appeared in New York on February 7, 1751:

> Run away last Sunday night, from Judah Hays, a Negro wench, named Sarah, aged 30 years; she is a likely wench, of a Mulatto complexion, was brought up at Amboy, in Col. Hamilton's family, and has had several Masters in the Jerseys. She dresses very well, has a good parcel of clothes, and speaks good English. Whoever takes up the said wench, and brings her to said master, or secures her in any country goal, so that he may have her again, shall receive Forty Shillings reward, and reasonable charges. Whoever entertains said wench, shall be prosecuted with the utmost riguor of the law. All masters of vessels, boatmen, &c. are forewarned of conveying said wench away, as they shall answer the same…N.B. Said wench has robb'd her said master, in apparel, &c. upwards of Fifty pounds. (Kern-Foxworth 20)

Even as this advertisement reflects stereotypes of slave women as lascivious, it also reveals that to portray African-Americans solely as the objects of consumption paints an

incomplete picture. As Shane and Graham White assert in "Slave Clothing and African-American Culture in the Eighteenth and Nineteenth Centuries," runaway advertisements reveal that clothing was "traded between slaves in an underground economy that easily and quietly absorbed items of questionable (and legitimate) origin" and that "in many ways mirrored the colonial elite's and middling classes concerns with consumption and fashion" (160). Indeed, I would characterize one of the slaves' responses to eighteenth and nineteenth century consumer culture as "resistant self-fashioning" as reflected in the historical record and runaway advertisements.

In fact, laws such as The South Carolina Negro Act of 1735 were challenged by both blacks and whites. Shane and Graham White explain that in addition to purchasing clothing, slaves received clothes as gifts from their masters as "clothing was embedded in the system of rewards and punishments designed to make the plantations, and indeed, the whole system of slavery run smoothly" (159). In this way, masters used these material goods as a means of control.

Moreover, we know that white men gave clothing to the black women with whom they had sexual relationships. In 1769, one visitor to South Carolina noted that "many of the *Female* Slaves [are] by far more *elegantly* dressed, than the Generality of *White Women* below Affluence," a state of affairs which he attributed to "scandalous Intimacy" between the "*Sexes of different Colours"* (White and White 161). He goes on to complain that "there is scarce a new mode [of fashion] which *favourite* black and mulatto *women slaves* are not immediately *enabled* to adopt" (White and White 161). While the visitor doesn't indicate who made the purchasing decisions, "enabled" suggests that black women were deciding on the attire they wished to own. Their choices demonstrate a familiarity with what was in vogue, and by choosing items that were

signs of the genteel class, African-American women's clothing choices became a challenge to the status quo (White and White 160). They were demonstrating that they too were human, on par with the European-Americans who subjugated them. [12]

As mentioned earlier, that slaves used clothes to rebel is also reflected in runaway advertisements. In fact, David Waldstreicher argues that the advertisements are the original slave narratives: "Realistic in intent, they are also rhetorical to the core. Runaway advertisements, in effect, were the first slave narratives—the first published stories about slaves and their seizure of freedom" (247).

While they were meant to bolster the slave system, runaway advertisements of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries simultaneously bore witness to African-Americans' desire to assert their subjectivity, revealing them to be more than chattel but "self-motivated persons"(Waldstreicher 248). The clothing runaway slaves wore also spoke to African-American agency and subjectivity. Indeed, the acts of running away and wearing clothing above their stations simultaneously constitute critical acts of rebellion. Waldstreicher asserts that these individual acts of rebellion are connected to organized rebellion writing that, "slaves' individual acts of running away proved to be profoundly destabilizing, even comparable over the long term to the slave rebellions and other collective acts of resistance" (245). I would add that clothing choices, as reflected in observations such as those by the visitor to South Carolina, runaway advertisements and the slave narratives, were also "profoundly destabilizing" acts of rebellion that could be compared to slave rebellions in the long term. While slavery precluded them from constructing a public sphere based on consumption like their European-American and Native

[12] Black men also wore the clothes of the upper class. In one runaway advertisement an owner remarked, "[H]is cloaths I can't recollect…as he has a great variety of them and of the best kind" (White and White 148).

American countrymen, contemporary observers and runaway advertisements reveal that blacks used their limited participation in the marketplace to assert their humanity, as clothing became a site of resistant self-fashioning.

"And lay up a little money every week"

As Henry Louis Gates articulates it, writing, like clothing, was also a primary site where blacks asserted their subjectivity. He writes that "Black people…had to represent themselves as speaking subjects before they could even begin to destroy their status as objects, as commodities within Western culture" (129).

Gates asserts that this was so important because:

> After Descartes, reason was privileged, or valorized, over all other human characteristics. Writing, especially after the printing press became so wide-spread, was taken to be the visible sign of reason. Blacks were reasonable, and hence 'men,' if—and only if—they demonstrated mastery of 'the arts and sciences,' the eighteenth century's formula for writing. (129)

I would argue that to establish themselves as "men" or "human," enslaved blacks had to respond fully to the American model set by Benjamin Franklin. They had to demonstrate self-mastery as it related not only to their minds but also their bodies and importantly, their relationship to American consumer culture.

The first slave narrative to be an international best-seller was Ouladah Equiano's *The Interesting Narrative and the Life of Ouladah Equiano or Gustavas Vassa, the African,*

published in 1789, well after the colonists' consumer revolution had become the American Revolution. The most enduring slave narrative, however, is Frederick Douglass's *Narrative of the Life of Frederick Douglass, an American Slave, Written by Himself* (1845). While various commentators have noted how Douglass shapes his narrative to fit the contours of the anti-slavery movement, I wish to explore the influence of Benjamin Franklin's folk myth on Douglass's narrative.[13]

Frederick Douglass pursues a strikingly similar path to Benjamin Franklin as it relates to mastery over his mind, though his status as a slave means that his path is more circuitous and there are more thorns along the way. When Douglass goes from a plantation in rural Maryland to Baltimore, his mistress, Mrs. Auld, begins teaching him to read. When her husband finds out he "at once forbade Mrs. Auld to instruct me further, telling her, among other things, that it was unlawful, as well as unsafe, to teach a slave to read" (Douglass 29). Douglass recalls:

> It was a new and special revelation, explaining dark and mysterious things, with which my youthful understanding had struggled, but struggled in vain. I now understood what had been to me a most perplexing difficulty—to wit, the white man's power to enslave the black man…. From that moment, I understood the pathway from slavery to freedom. (29)

Spurred by Mrs. Auld's lessons, we see the beginning of Douglass's self-mastery. Like Franklin, when his formal education comes to end Douglass pursues his own education. Unlike Franklin, who began his self-education with the advantage of knowing how to read, Douglass's course of study is jagged, in contrast to the careful course of study Franklin pursues on his own.

[13] See Robert Stepto's "Narration, Authentication, and Authorial Control in Frederick Douglass's *Narrative* of 1845."

However, like other former slaves reveal in their autobiographies, Douglass pursues a crooked path to a fixed destination saying, "Though conscious of the difficulty of learning without a teacher, I set out with high hope, and a fixed purpose, at whatever cost of trouble to learn how to read" (29).

Just as Franklin made the best use of his time in the printing shop, Douglass recalls that by completing "one part of my errand quickly, I found time to get a lesson before my return" (32). Unlike Franklin, who is able to procure books, his is a hand-me down education—recopying the discarded school books of his young master and goading poor white boys in Baltimore's streets to teach him by telling them he can write better than they. This is just one example of how he uses white notions of black inferiority to achieve mastery over his mind. Unwittingly, these young white boys are doing his bidding. He is able to use the master's tools, or ideology, to dismantle European-Americans' ideological house, and to give him the tools that will allow him to buy his own house.

Indeed, the difference in Franklin and Douglass's status due to race is also highlighted by the conditions under which they conduct their self-education. Franklin is on the inside, able to take advantage of the calm and quiet of the printing house before and after hours. The bulk of Douglass's education, in contrast, literally takes place on the outside, in the streets. He writes, "my copy-book was the board fence, brick wall, and pavement; my pen and ink was a lump of chalk" (35). Though integral to the running of the home, he is beyond its bounds, and as Patricia Williams asserts, this is symbolic of being thought of as beyond the bounds of humanity.

While I agree with Lori Merish's assertion that Douglass's path to freedom is characterized by changes in his status as a worker, I would add that this is but one road on that

path (201). Consistent with Benjamin Franklin's template, Douglass must take control of his mind and body, *and* his relationship to the market as a laborer *as well as a* consumer.

Through self-discipline Benjamin Franklin charts his trajectory from apprentice, to running away to gain his freedom from his abusive printer brother, to eventually opening his own successful printing business. Likewise, as a youth Douglass leaves rural plantation life for a more permissive and privileged life as an urban slave. When he returns to the plantation he says, "my master found me unsuitable to his purpose. My city life, he said, had had a very pernicious effect upon me" (42). This leads to the "epoch" in his "humble history," in which he gains mastery over his body after being sent to Mr. Covey, a slave breaker whose brutality almost drives him mad (47). He famously writes, "You have seen how a man was made a slave; you shall see how a slave was made a man" (47). Like Franklin, at the tender age of 16, having taken control of his mind, he now takes control of his body. One day Covey beats him for a minor offence and Douglass fights back.

After fighting for hours Douglass recounts:

> Covey at length let me go, puffing and blowing at a great rate, saying that if I had not resisted, he would not have whipped me half so much. The truth was, that he had not whipped me at all. I considered him as getting entirely the worst end of the bargain; for he had drawn no blood from me, but I had from him. The whole six months afterwards that I spent with Mr. Covey, he never laid the weight of his finger upon me in anger. (50)

He goes on to say,"This battle with Mr. Covey was a turning point in my career as a slave. It rekindled the few expiring embers of freedom, and revived within me a sense of my own

manhood" (50). Having gained control of his mind and body, he is ready for the next step in his journey towards becoming a "human" or "American"—he must gain control of his relationship to American consumer culture.

Though he has gained control over his mind through teaching himself to read, and his body through prevailing in his physical altercation with Mr. Covey, Douglass is still a slave, an object in American culture. Returning to Baltimore after his year with Covey, Douglass learns the caulking trade. He works independently as a caulker and as his skills increase, he demands more compensation. He now has a different relationship with the market, but not with his new master in Baltimore, Mr. Hugh, who receives all of his earnings. When Douglass made six dollars, his master gave him six cents to encourage him, but this had the opposite effect and Douglass considers Hugh "a pretty honorable sort of robber" (66). Douglass is determined to become master of his finances as a laborer.

In a deal similar to the one Benjamin Franklin struck with his brother, Douglass convinces Mr. Hugh to allow him to hire his own time. He must pay his master $3 a week and provide for his own board and clothing. Though difficult, he recalls that "it was a step towards freedom to be allowed to bear the responsibilities of a freeman, and I was determined to hold on upon it" (67). He displays industry as he "was ready to work at night as well as day, and by the most untiring perseverance and industry, I made enough to meet my expenses, and lay up a little money every week" (67). In this way, Douglass has demonstrated that he is capable of maintaining a rational relationship with the marketplace. In opposition to the stereotype that blacks would not be industrious unless they were compelled to by their white masters, Douglass is a disciplined earner-consumer—he works hard and diligently puts money aside.

Mr. Hugh revokes these privileges when Douglass decides to go to a church meeting one day instead of coming home with his master's share of the week's wages on the exact day they are due. Douglass protests this by going on a work strike the following week. In this way Douglass demonstrates that even if he does not fully possess his income, he is a man in full possession of his labor. This is when Douglass decides to run away, and to throw Master Hugh off the trail, he begins to work steadily and gives him between eight to nine dollars a week. Just as he did with the young white boys, Douglass outwits his European-American superior, writing, "My object in working steadily was to remove any suspicion he might entertain of my intent to run away; and in this I succeeded admirably. I suppose he thought I was never better satisfied with my condition than at the very time during which I was planning my escape" (68).

Douglass's master condescendingly gives him 25 cents of the money he earns weekly, "quite a large sum for a slaveholder to give a slave, and bade me to make good use of it. I told him I would" (68). This gesture demeans Douglass's abilities as an earner and assumes that he won't be a wise consumer. Douglass has demonstrated that he possesses the ability and willingness to procure and carry out employment, but his master suggests that he will not spend the fruits, or fruit (a single quarter) of his labor wisely. However, at the very time that his master is insulting his ability to have a rational relationship to the marketplace, Douglass is making plans to seize his freedom—to take full possession of his person.

Ultimately, it is Douglass who has the last laugh. Early in the narrative he talks of the material deprivations he experienced on the plantation. He says:

> In the hottest summer and coldest winter, I was kept almost naked—no shoes, no stockings, no jacket, no trousers, nothing on but a coarse tow linen shirt…. My

> feet have been so cracked with frost, that the pen with which I am writing might be laid in the gashes. (26)

Here we have two contrasting images: Douglass the boy slave, under-clothed by his master, juxtaposed to Douglass the free man, who successfully played the game according to the rules set by Franklin—the uber-American. Just as Franklin the wealthy businessman reports that his wife finally replaced his "twopenny earthen porringer" and "pewter spoon" with a "china bowl with a silver spoon," we are presented with an image of Douglass in a well-appointed home, dressed in a fine suit, composing his narrative at his writing desk (65). Consistent with the Franklin model, he has taken control of his mind and body and become a successful participant in the American marketplace as an earner and consumer.[14]

[14] Throughout this dissertation I define successful consumerism as one's ability to purchase goods without accruing excessive debt.

Resistant Self-Fashioning in the Antebellum Era: Part II

African-American women did not publish slave narratives until the nineteenth century, beginning with *The History of Mary Prince, a West Indian Slave*, (1831) the first slave narrative by a woman to be published in the Americas. The most enduring slave narrative to be published by a woman however, the female counterpart to Douglass's narrative, is Harriet Jacobs *Incidents in the Life of a Slave Girl* (1861).

While Douglass's path was more thorny and circuitous than Franklin's because of race, Jacobs's path from slavery to freedom is even more arduous because she also bears the burden of gender. Like Douglass, Jacobs shaped her narrative to fit the contours of the abolitionist movement, and, as many critics have noted, she invoked aspects of the sentimental narrative to appeal to her white female audience. What has been un-examined, however, is the way Jacobs's narrative reflects the model set forth by Benjamin Franklin. Like Douglass, she will achieve these goals, but she will follow a distinctly different path to reach her destination.

Akin to Frederick Douglass, Jacobs learns how to read from her first mistress and teaches herself to write, but these achievements take up only a few sentences in the narrative as opposed to the lengthy passages in Franklin and Douglass's life stories. Of learning to read by the age of twelve she says, "I loved my mistress…. While I was with her, she taught me how to read and spell; and for this privilege, which so rarely falls to the lot of a slave, I bless her memory" (16). Of teaching herself how to write as a teenager she says simply, "One day he [my master] caught me teaching myself how to write. He frowned as if he was not well-pleased" (50). Here, Jacobs's experience is strikingly similar to Frederick Douglass. They are taught how to read by

their mistresses and when the lessons end, (in Jacobs's case upon the death of her mistress) they pursue an impressive path of self-education.

As other critics have noted, while Douglass can rely on methods similar to Franklin on his path to liberation, methods consistent with notions of masculinity as defined through rugged individualism, Jacobs must find alternative approaches to freedom. Indeed, the rugged individualism that characterizes Franklin and Douglass's autobiographies is replaced by inter-connectedness in Jacobs's life story that will lead to her liberty.

Hence, for Jacobs, the liberation of her mind does not come exclusively through self-achieved literacy, but is achieved by mirroring the model of mental fortitude set by her maternal grandmother, Aunt Martha, who cares for Jacobs after she loses both of her parents at the age of eight. Aunt Martha's resolve is first revealed in her life story, which Jacobs recounts at length. Indeed, after spending just six sentences describing her parents and brother at the outset of her narrative, Jacobs launches into the history of her grandmother, whom she describes as "a remarkable woman in many respects" and spends several paragraphs on her life story (12).

As we have seen, from Franklin, the pillars of success in America are taking control of one's mind through education, one's body through diet and exercise, and one's relationship to American consumer culture by being a disciplined consumer. Though we never know if Jacobs's grandmother knows how to read, one would surmise that Jacobs would mention this as she states that "this privilege…so rarely falls to the lot of a slave" (36). Though she is untutored, Jacobs's grandmother is able to take control of her mind, her body and her relationship to American consumer culture. In this way, Jacobs's grandmother hits a straight lick with an unconventional stick and becomes an inspiration for her progeny.

Jacobs recounts that Aunt Martha and her children are freed by her master and father, a South Carolina planter, upon his death. He sends them to live with relatives in St. Augustine, North Carolina, but along the way they are recaptured and sold to different owners. Despite this potentially devastating blow, Aunt Martha quickly distinguishes herself at the hotel where she is sent to work and becomes integral to its operations. In addition to her duties at the hotel, she begins to cook crackers on the side, and saves the income from this labor with the goal of purchasing her children. During this time one of her children is sold and Jacobs writes, "His sale was a terrible blow to my grandmother; but she was naturally hopeful, and she went to work with renewed energy, trusting in time to be able to purchase some of her children" (13). In this way, her life story reveals her resilience.

If Jacobs only spends a few lines on achieving literacy, she goes on to discuss her grandmother's mental strength at length. For instance, she writes that her grandmother was "a woman of high spirit" who was "usually very quiet in her demeanor" but "if her indignation was once roused, it was not very easily quelled" (47).

Jacobs articulates various ways in which her grandmother's "high spirit" finds expression. The method that is most consistent with traditional gender roles in European-American culture is through language. Indeed, Jacobs writes that her master, Dr. Flint, fears being scolded by Aunt Martha. She recalls, "Dr. Flint was afraid of her. He dreaded her scorching rebukes" (47). In one instance, after witnessing Dr. Flint strike Jacobs, Aunt Martha tells him, "You ain't got many more years to live, and you'd better be saying your prayers. It will take 'em all, and more too, to wash the dirt off your soul" (126).[15]

[15] For instance, in Washington Irving's "Rip Van Winkle" (1819) the protagonist is burdened by a "termagant wife" (457). Coincidentally, "Rip Van Winkle" is the first anti-Franklin narrative in the American literary tradition. Rip

Aunt Martha's mental strength also manifests itself in ways that defy mainstream gender norms. For instance, Jacobs writes that her grandmother, "once chased a white gentleman with a loaded pistol, because he insulted one of her daughters" (47). Just as Franklin uses diet and physical exercise to achieve physical freedom and Douglass achieves this through a physical fight with Mr. Covey, Jacobs's grandmother is prepared for physical combat and literally possesses a phallic symbol—a gun.

While literacy does play a role in Jacobs's path to freedom and becoming a full American citizen, we have seen that her grandmother's mental strength and resolve have a much more powerful influence on young Jacobs. Importantly, Aunt Martha's resolute spirit also manifests itself in her determined participation in American consumer culture. Jacobs's grandmother's success in selling crackers on the side allows her granddaughter to throw off one of slavery's stigmas, the drab dress made of coarse "negro cloth." Jacobs writes, "It was *her* labor that supplied my scanty wardrobe. I have a vivid recollection of the linsey-woolsey dress given me every winter by Mrs. Flint. How I hated it! It was one of the badges of slavery" (20).

Like Jacobs, Benjamin Franklin and Frederick Douglass discuss the role of the sartorial in their autobiographies. Benjamin speaks of being a ragged boy entering Philadelphia after he runs away from his brother. He recounts, "I was in my working dress, my best clothes being to come round by sea. I was dirty from my journey; my pockets were stuff'd out with shirts and stockings" (20). This contrasts to the affluence he achieves years later as a wealthy printer, literally going from rags to riches. Douglass recalls that as a boy slave "I was kept almost

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Van Winkle would rather "starve on a penny than work for a pound" and "would have whistled life away …but his wife kept continually dinning in his ears" (457). When he awakens from his long sleep to find that he is wife is dead he rejoices not that the Revolution occurred during his slumber, but that he is free from "petticoat government" (466). In this way, Dame Van Winkle is in the European and European-American tradition of the nagging woman or shrew.

naked—no shoes, no stockings, no jacket, no trousers, nothing on but a coarse tow linen shirt" (26). Douglass is able to purchase fine attire after he attains freedom. For Jacobs, however, the liberating moment comes when she is able to replace the coarse cloth given to her by her master with finer garments because of her grandmother's success. Her mental liberation is not self-achieved but inter-dependent.

As discussed earlier, Jacobs's comments regarding the clothing her grandmother purchased reinforce the notion that clothing was not only a mirror of white consumption patterns, but also a way for slaves to defy the system. As Shane and Graham White put it, "the point of slaves wearing such clothes was not so much that they were adopting white values, but that they were subverting white authority" (162). Jacobs and other authors of slave narratives, including Douglass, delineate clothing as a significant badge of slavery. Jacobs is painfully aware of their social and psychological import. Therefore, taking off the coarse dress is not just a physical act, it is a psychological act. Negro cloth, as we see in the South Carolina Law of 1735, is a stigma, and her reaction to wearing and removing this Negro cloth is succinct and strong. Indeed, this is one of three instances when she uses the word hate in the narrative. Her use of the word hate in reference to the clothing allotted her by her mistress indicates how potent the stigma of this clothing was for her and how powerful removing it was. Indeed, clothing for white women was a symbol of their dependent status on white men, but also, as this passage indicates, a symbol of their power over black women. Through her grandmother, Jacobs is able to reclaim this power. She is able to claim her mind by removing the stigma attached to this clothing. In these ways, her grandmother is a model and resource in both "spiritual and temporal" matters (19). [16]

[16] She uses this word when Mr. Flint forbids her from seeing the black man she wants to marry. She says, "Reader, did you ever hate? I hope not…. Somebody has called it, 'the atmosphere of hell;' and I believe it to be so" (63). The other time is when she explains her decision to sleep with another white man in the community to fend off the

While an education and literacy are freeing for Benjamin Franklin and Frederick Douglass, for Jacobs literacy is a double-edged sword: both a tool of liberation and oppression. Literacy becomes a tool of oppression for Jacobs precisely because she is a woman. As she asserts, "slavery is terrible for men; but it is far more terrible for women. Superadded to the burden common to all, *they* have wrongs, and sufferings, and mortifications peculiarly their own" (119). Specifically, black women must confront the possibility of rape by their white masters. Though her master was not pleased when he saw her teaching herself how to write, she adds that "I suppose he came to the conclusion that such an accomplishment might come to advance his favorite scheme. Before long, notes were often slipped into my hand" (50). In this way, literacy becomes a tool of oppression for Jacobs as her master attempts to use it to coerce her into a sexual relationship with him.

The mental resolve that Jacobs learns from her grandmother will help her to take control of her body. She must do this not in the form of masculine models such as physical combat as we see in Douglass, or through diet and exercise, as we see in Franklin, but through gaining control of her sexuality. Just as Douglass writes of his fight with Mr. Covey as an "epoch" in his life as a slave, for Jacobs, when her master begins to demand sex from her in her "fifteenth year" it begins a "a sad epoch in the life of a slave girl" (44). She recalls, "the war of my life had begun; and though one of God's most powerless creatures, I resolved never to be conquered" (31).[17]

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advances of Dr. Flint. She justifies her behavior by telling her white female readers, "You never exhausted your ingenuity in avoiding the snares, and eluding the power of a hated tyrant" (86).

[17] This contrasts with her uncle's battle. Like Douglass, he has a physical altercation with his master and wins. She writes of this incident, "Master and slave fought, and finally the master was thrown. Benjamin had cause to tremble; for he had thrown to the ground his master" (33).

Dr. Flint attempts to have sex with her by filling her "young mind with unclean images" and reminding her that she is his "property" (44-45). Relentless in his pursuit, Dr. Flint causes her "days and nights of fears and sorrow" (47). However, Jacobs wins this war by choosing to sleep with Mr. Sands, another white man in the community. In doing so, she resists being reduced to "the condition of a chattel, entirely subject to the will of another" (86). Indisputably, she is also inspired by her grandmother, who is not afraid to stand up to Dr. Flint or the white man she chased with a pistol when he pursued one of her daughters.

Once again, Jacobs does not invoke notions of rugged individualism in her autobiography. She takes control of her sexuality not just for herself, but also for her potential progeny. Indeed, her actions are motivated by the reality that she has witnessed her master selling his children by other black women. In this way she seeks to free herself, and potentially her children, from solely being chattel. She writes, "of a man who was not my master I could ask to have my children well-supported" (85). Because of her status as a woman, she takes action for herself and for others. Moreover, she is motivated by her grandmother, who also acts on behalf of herself and her family.

As stated earlier, Aunt Martha has asserted herself in another way—through the market. Dr. Flint fears Aunt Martha because of the respect she has in the marketplace as a purveyor of crackers. This is one reason why he does not take Jacobs by force. She writes that her grandmother "was known and patronized by many people; and he did not wish to have his villainy made public" (47). Aunt Martha takes full advantage of the flexibility that some slaves were given to earn money by doing extra work on their own or neighboring plantations, such as raising vegetables, poultry and the like on small plots of land that were not needed for

commercial production (White and White 159). Harriet Jacobs recounts her grandmother's success selling crackers on her North Carolina plantation:

> She was much praised for her cooking; and her nice crackers became so famous in the neighborhood that many people were desirous of obtaining them. In consequence of numerous requests of this kind, she asked permission of her mistress to bake crackers at night, after all the household work was done; and she obtained leave to do it, provided she would clothe herself and her children from the profits. Upon these terms, after working hard all day for her mistress, she began her midnight bakings, assisted by her two oldest children. The business proved profitable; and each year she laid by a little, which was saved for a fund to purchase her children. (12)

Despite the many obstacles she faced, because of her success selling crackers in the community, when Flint places Jacobs's grandmother on the auction block, she is purchased by the sister of her former mistress and granted her freedom. Jacobs writes:

> She had for a long time supplied many families with crackers and preserves; consequently, 'Aunt Marthy,' as she was called, was generally known, and the intention of her mistress to leave her free. When the day of sale came, she took her place among the chattels, and at the first call she sprang upon the auction block. Many voices called out, 'Shame! Shame! Who is going to sell *you*, aunt Marthy? Don't stand there! That is no place for *you*. (21)

Jacobs's repeated emphasis on "you" underscores the fact that her grandmother's success as a businesswoman allows her to assert her individuality. Indeed, she is purchased by her

deceased mistress's sister. Aunt Martha successfully uses the market to establish her individuality and autonomy within the community and this leads to her freedom.

For Jacobs, her grandmother is a model of thrift and diligence as she transforms from servant to mistress. She recalls, "by perseverance and unwearied industry, she was now mistress of a snug little home, surrounded with the necessities of life" (28). Aunt Martha has succeeded according to the Benjamin Franklin myth. She rises from being a slave who is "unpaid, miserably clothed and half-famished" to the level of an independent laborer, who has quality clothing and is able to feed and clothe herself and her family (143). She is such a model that her children and grandchildren want to run away to attain their freedom. Her grandmother tries to discourage Jacobs and her uncle from running away, but Jacobs says, "We reasoned that it was much more the will of God that we should be situated as she was. We longed for a home like hers" (28).

However, because of her inferior position within the social hierarchy, this success is tenuous. Jacobs's grandmother's experience also reveals the painful reality that in an American consumer marketplace where humans were bought and sold, the legitimate market was anything but. Jacobs goes on to tell the reader that her grandmother managed to save money through her extra labor selling crackers. She recounts that, "She had laid up three hundred dollars, which her mistress one day begged as a loan, promising to pay her soon. The reader probably knows that no promise or writing given to a slave is legally binding; for, according to Southern laws, a slave being property, can hold no property" (13). The loan is never repaid, because Mr. Flint, their new master, claims the estate has become insolvent. Jacobs writes that, "It did not, however, prohibit him from retaining the silver candelabra, which had been purchased with the money. I presume they will be handed down in the family, from generation to generation" (20).

In this way, her grandmother's attempt to participate in the legitimate economy by trading her labor for goods and services is rendered null. Her extra labor is stolen by her master and transformed into a commodity, just like her reproductive capacity, as Jacobs writes that all of her grandmother's children are sold. She recalls, "Notwithstanding my grandmother's long and faithful service to her owners, not one of her children escaped the auction block. These God-breathing machines are no more, in the sight of their masters, than the cotton they plant, or the horses they tend" (16).

In addition to highlighting the immorality of the slave system, however, Jacobs also offers a subtle criticism of European-American consumption habits. Indeed, her grandmother is presented as a savvier consumer than her alleged superior, her white master. She demonstrates thrift, diligently putting money aside, whereas her owner is presented as an irrational and wasteful consumer, as evidenced by the possibility that his estate is bankrupt and his wasteful spending on a silver candelabra. In this way too, Jacobs's narrative becomes a site of resistance, challenging the notion that whites are rational participants in consumer culture.

Indeed, though they were considered objects, incapable of participating in the market, the slave narratives reveal that slaves were constantly reflecting on whites' relationship to the market and how this relationship could impact their lives. Throughout her narrative Jacobs is concerned about money as it relates to the whites in her life. For instance, even though she decides to have children with Mr. Sands because he is not her master and may free her children, Jacobs reflects that this situation is precarious, for "he might come under pecuniary embarrassments, and his property be seized by creditors; or he might die without making any arrangements in his favor (206). When he marries she worries, "if pecuniary troubles should come, or if the new wife required more money than could conveniently be spared, my children might be thought of as

convenient means of raising funds" (208). Though they were limited participants in the marketplace, slaves considered their masters as consumers and looked squarely at whites' potential ineptitude in the market.

Jacobs also depicts blacks as *more* successful in the marketplace than whites. For instance, as we progress through the autobiography, we see that Jacobs's grandmother's achievements in the market go beyond cooking crackers on the side. Her grandmother also raises "poultry and pigs for sale" and has both a turkey and a pig roasted for Christmas (181). Moreover, she not only owns land but rents it also. Jacobs informs us that another black woman, "lived in a small tenement belonging to my grandmother, and built on the same lot with her own house" (226). When she entertains Miss Fanny, the woman who purchased her freedom, her grandmother prepares the table with "snow-white cloth" and "china cups and silver spoons" (135). The table is spread with "hot muffins, tea rusks and delicious sweetmeats" and "fresh cream" from one of her grandmother's "two cows" (135). Her grandmother's success is perhaps highlighted by the fact that she owns silver spoons, like the silver spoons that characterize Benjamin Franklin's success in his autobiography.[18]

Another example of blacks as superior consumers is when she describes the poor whites that come to the slave quarters every year and steal the slaves' belongings. She reports that the dwellings of the colored people "were robbed of clothing and everything else the marauders

[18] Jacobs highlights not only her grandmother's financial independence, but that of Miss Fanny, who is in her seventies. Jacobs's mistress is upset that Miss Fanny spends such "cosey times" with Aunt Martha because she is aware of and angered by her husband's sexual desire for Harriet Jacobs, and we can suppose, because of the way these visits highlight Aunt Martha's prosperity. However, Jacobs says of Miss Fanny, "fortunately she was not dependent on the bounty of the Flints. She had enough to be independent; and that is more than can ever be gained from charity; however lavish it may be" (136). Both Aunt Martha and Miss Fanny, an unconventional white woman, are independently successful money managers and they are both models for Jacobs's life after freedom.

thought worth carrying away" (99). Jacobs reflects, "I knew nothing annoyed them so much as to see colored people living in comfort and respectability" (97). She protests this by "arranging every thing in my grandmother's house as neatly as possible. I put white quilts on the beds and decorated some of the rooms with flowers" (98).

In her retelling of this incident we again see the importance of cloth and clothing in 18th and 19th century America. She recalls, "My grandmother had a large trunk of bedding and table cloths. When that was opened, there was a great shout of surprise; and one exclaimed 'Where'd the damned niggers git all dis sheet an' table clarf" (100). She replies, "You may be sure we didn't pilfer 'em from *your* houses" (100). Just as when she describes her grandmother on the auction block, Jacobs employs contrasting *you's*—her grandmother, a successful buyer and seller is contrasted to the whites who are her inferiors in this realm. Jacobs chooses to highlight this, much like the black women in South Carolina who wore better attire than their mistresses. In response, the whites in Jacobs's narrative attempt to bring her grandmother down a few pegs: "'Look here, mammy,' said a grim looking fellow without any coat, 'you seem to feel might gran' 'cause you got all them 'ere fixins. White folks oughter have 'em all'" (100). In the retelling of this incident and others, consumption is a way for whites to establish their superiority over blacks and black consumption is a site of defiance.

Jacobs also demonstrates that blacks can be successful consumers as they resist the trinkets of the market, trinkets that whites believe they will be susceptible to. Just as in Douglass's narrative, her master assumes that she will be swayed by the temporary pleasures of the marketplace. Dr. Flint promises to "lavishly bestow" kindness on her if she will have sex with him (64). He offers her "a home and freedom" but she will not sell her body and soul for these material comforts (127). Moreover, even her children are able to withstand these trinkets.

Dr. Flint attempts to bribe her children with "bright little silver pieces and gay handkerchiefs" to get information about their mother's whereabouts after she runs away, but they refuse him (178). These examples demonstrate that blacks have the discipline to participate in the market. Indeed, throughout the narrative Jacobs demonstrates that they are often more disciplined than the whites in her story.

Therefore, I want to slightly disagree with Patricia Williams' assertion that "while blacks had an indisputable force in the marketplace, their presence could not be called activity; they had no active role in the market" (24). To a limited degree, blacks did have a role in the market as buyers and sellers and they used this role to assert their competency, individuality and even superiority. I hasten to add that the paradox inherent in their participation in the market as buyers and sellers is painfully revealed in Jacobs's narrative. Even as her grandmother's labor is transformed into a decorative item for her owners and her reproductive capacity is commoditized as her children are sold, her success as a seller also allows her to assert her subjectivity and gain her autonomy. One could argue further that eventually this leads to Jacobs's freedom, as she escapes to the North after hiding in her grandmother's attic for seven years.

As we have seen, this consumerism is not just about attaining riches for enslaved black women. It is directed towards one end—the family. Through her industry Aunt Martha is able to provide her children with food and clothing. She is also able to purchase the freedom of one of her sons, Phillip, for $800. In this way she is a model for Harriet, who says "my life was bound up in my children" (155). Indeed, her grandmother is willing to risk her house to procure Harriet's freedom. Harriet says however, "I resolved that not another cent of her hard earnings should be spent to pay rapacious slaveholders for what they called their property" and resolves to run away, not surprisingly, to the safety of her grandmother's home (228).

As we have seen, in contrast to Franklin and Douglass, Jacobs's narrative is characterized by interdependence as opposed to masculine notions of rugged individualism. In addition to the rugged individualism which characterizes his autobiography, however, to write his story along patriarchal lines, Douglass has to reject the maternal influences in his life. For instance, he says of his grandmother:

> She had served my old master faithfully from youth to old age. She had been the source of all his wealth; she had peopled his plantation with slaves. She was nevertheless left a slave—a slave for life—a slave in the hands of strangers…and her present owners finding she was of little value, her frame already racked with the pains of old age…they took her to the woods, built her a little hut, put up a little mud-chimney, and then made her welcome to the privilege of supporting herself there in perfect loneliness. (37)

For Jacobs, however, her grandmother is an inspiration and the dominant figure within her family. Indeed, her parents fail to be protectors and providers in the way that Aunt Martha does. Her father attempts to play the traditional role of provider for his family of four and as a young girl it seems that he has been successful. She begins her narrative by recalling, "I was born a slave, but I never knew it till six years of happy childhood had passed away (11). Her father was a skilled carpenter and like Frederick Douglass, hired his time. Jacobs writes, "My father, by his nature, as well as by the habit of transacting business as a skillful mechanic, had more the feelings of a freeman than is common among slaves" adding "and though we were slaves, I was so fondly shielded that I never dreamed I was a piece of merchandise" (11-12).

Indeed, Jacobs's father had an internal sense of his worth, but he could not make the outside world conform to this. For instance, the whites in the community are frustrated by the fact that her father teaches his children that they are human beings as opposed to property. However, when her brother Willie is torn between responding to the call of his father and their mistress he responds to their mistress. Even as a child, Willie realizes that though their father's "strongest wish was to purchase his children" he has not been able to free his offspring from the grasp of their owners (11). Indeed, despite all of his efforts, when her father dies, just as Douglass speaks of his grandmother, Jacobs writes that her father was regarded as "merely a piece of property" (18).

Just as her father wants to replicate traditional gender roles in European-American culture, given the realities of slave life for women, Jacobs's mother is also able to replicate traditional notions of femininity. Jacobs describes her as "noble and womanly" and "a slave merely in name" who makes a "comfortable home" for her children (14). However, this bubble is burst when her mother passes away. Jacobs had been free from the burdens of slave labor but when her mother dies she must serve her mother's mistress and "foster sister" (14). When this mistress dies Jacobs says that "she had promised my dying mother that her children should never suffer for anything; and when I remembered that … I could not help having some hopes that she had left me free" (15). Instead she is bequeathed to her mistress's five year old niece. Jacobs's mother seems to adhere to the belief that if she plays her roles perfectly, this will lead to her children's liberation. Indeed, Jacobs's mother and grandmother are contrasted. Her grandmother, who is not able play the traditional role of dependent wife, is able to help Jacobs procure her freedom. As noted earlier, at the outset of her narrative Jacobs interrupts her description of her parents to tell her grandmother's story whom she describes as "a treasure" and

"remarkable" (12). Her grandmother has value because she has agency. As Jacobs writes, "after working hard all day for her mistress, she began her midnight bakings….. The business proved profitable; and each year she laid by a little, which was saved for a fund to purchase her children" (12-13). Her mother has the outward trappings, the appearance of worth by European-American standards, but not true value. Jacobs's mother puts her hopes in the whims of her mistress, but Jacobs's grandmother works to make her dreams a reality. In this way she is portrayed as the true matriarch, the dominant figure within their family structure.

"The lowest Hottentot"

As has we have seen, the dominant role that Aunt Martha played in her family is in opposition to the passive, dependent status of European-American women. Therefore, at first glance, it might seem surprising that it was European-American women who were most enthusiastic about the boycotts that characterized the non-importation movement of the 1760s and 1770s (Witkowski 174). However, this is not so surprising given the patriarchal context in which European-American consumer culture emerged. Most white women in colonial America married and men had legal authority over their wives and were the family's primary breadwinners. A woman could not own property and whatever a woman brought into the marriage became her husband's. In the eighteenth century, credit was granted to men and they were the primary store customers. Women however, did influence consumer decision making within the home, and this public/private divide became increasingly gendered over the course of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, with white men as providers and white women as consumers. As Terrence Witkowski asserts, "as early as two hundred years ago American

society began to define the buying and using of domestic goods as being within a woman's domain" (174).

Thus, white women were dependent on their husbands for their economic condition but were responsible for the family's consumption habits. Maintaining a home with the finest goods and maintaining their wives and children in the finest attire was a way for white men to assert their role as the dominant figure in the family and to compete with other white men.

Not surprisingly then, while white men used clothing to display their prosperity through their wives' expensive attire, white women used clothing as a form of defiance. Witkowski writes that:

> As material wealth accumulated rapidly after the mid-1700s, dress became increasingly extravagant for both sexes, but women's clothing and hairstyles aroused particularly strong feelings. Letters printed in newspapers and magazines ridiculed women for their excesses, partly as a criticism of perceived female pridefulness and also, perhaps, because of a perceived threat to male dominance. (174).

Witkowski goes on to assert that, "the wider variety of consumer goods that began to flood the market after 1750 may have enabled women to attach their own, independent meanings to things" (174). In this way, European-American women used fashion to challenge white men, and to demonstrate dominance over their perceived female inferiors; lower class white women and women of color. Thus, for white women, clothing was a symbolic mixture of display, defiance and dominance.

Clothing was also a site of desire for those female inferiors of color, however. In the *Signifying Monkey: A Theory of African-American Literary Criticism*, Henry Louis Gates explains how blacks came to be regarded as inferior in the European and European-American philosophical imagination in the eighteenth century:

> The urge toward the systemization of all human knowledge, by which we categorize the Enlightenment…led directly to the relegation of black people to a lower rung on the Great Chain of Being, an eighteenth century metaphor that arranged all of creation on the vertical scale from animals and plants and insects through man to the angels and God himself. By 1750, the chain had become individualized; the human scale rose from 'the lowest Hottentot' (black South Africans) to 'glorious Milton and Newton.' (Gates130)

Even as whites were consolidating the consumer economy, the Great Chain of Being was becoming individualized as a social system was being created to justify an economic system.

Europeans first encountered the Hottentots in the 17th century. By 1715, smallpox had virtually wiped them out. Whites defined them as the lowest of the low, and numerous words referencing Hottentot came into the English vocabulary, all with negative connotations, such as stupid and uncivilized.

In another striking example of the tensions which characterized European-American consumer culture, even as whites used negative words to describe Hottentots, they created a clothing style which was modeled on the Hottentots' physical anatomy—the Hottentot bustle.

The most famous member of the Hottentot tribe was Saartjie Bartman, who went to England in 1810 and became known as the Hottentot Venus. She was promised lucrative work

as an entertainer, but like Jacobs's grandmother, these promises were broken. She was put on display in England and France and the main attraction was her large backside, known as the Hottentot bustle.

Even as whites expressed disgust at her large posterior, the images and fashions they created tell a more complicated story. In "Flesh Made Fantasy", Rachel Holmes describes a nineteenth century British cartoon by Thomas Rowlandson, in which amply proportioned white women are depicted trying to plump their already big bottoms in imitation of Saartjie, who proudly presides over them all (14).

Moreover, this desire to possess the Hottenot Venus's posterior led Europeans to create fashions based on her physique. The English invented the female bustle and the French the le faux cul: the false bum (Leland 209). The nineteenth century *Dictionary of Slang, Jargon and Cant* describes the bustle as "an artificial appendage intended to produce the impression that the wearer had a full gluteus x maximus or slant. Of late it has assumed enormous dimensions, far surpassing anything characteristic of the most fully developed Hottentot Venus"(Leland 209).[19]

In this way, ostensible repulsion and latent desire reflected itself in European sartorial preoccupations/development. In *God, Gulliver and Genocide*, Claude Rowson writes of "the unspoken ways in which the sexual interest in savages penetrated and governed the aspirations and fantasies of those who thought themselves their betters" (136). The popularity of the Hottentot bustle among white women is a sartorial reflection of tensions in European and European-American consumer culture.

[19] The Grenville family was know for their large bottoms. In 1810 William Heath produced an engraving of Lord William Grenville dressed as the Hottentot Venus. Lord William Grenville was the son of George Grenville who was responsible for the Stamp Act of 1765.

Though Baartman was not a slave, negative stereotypes like those which surrounded her display were used to justify slavery in the United States. By the 1830s Americans had created a performance industry, minstrelsy, which allowed whites to become "rich on black fun" or black stereotypes (Roediger 119). Minstrel performances consisted of three parts. The first part of the three part show consisted of songs, the second part featured performances such as stump speeches and comic dialogues and the third part was a narrative skit set in the South (Campbell 26). In this way, whites did not just use black bodies as people-commodities as slaves or to display like the Hottentot Venus. As with the bustle inspired by the Hottentot Venus, they also became black bodies by putting on blackface. Writing in the abolitionist newspaper he founded, *The North Star*, Frederick Douglass wrote that these blackface imitators were "the filthy scum of white society, who have stolen from us a complexion denied to them by nature, in which to make money, and pander to the corrupt taste of their white fellow citizens" (Lott 15).

We should not be surprised that minstrelsy begins with a white person stripping a black person of their clothes. According to legend, Thomas Dartmouth Rice, known as T.D. Rice, saw a crippled black man named Jim Cuff doing an exaggerated version of a dance called Jim Crow. Slaves in Georgia and the Carolinas created the Jim Crow dance when dancing was outlawed in 1690 (Asim 78). Since dancing was defined in law as crossing one's feet, the slaves created a dance which involved moving from side to side. As was the case with clothing, blacks demonstrated defiance in creating this dance. The original lyrics were:

> Where you going, buzzard?
>
> Where you going, crow?
>
> I'm going down to new ground

To knock Jim Crow. (Asim 77-78)

Rice took Cuff's tattered clothes and went onstage and imitated him. He distorted the lyrics to:

For I wheel about an' turn about

An' do just so

An ebery time I turn about

I jump Jim Crow. (Asim 78)

The performance was an instant success and was imitated by other white performers who donned ragged clothing or "Negro costumes" and performed Rice's imitation of Cuff. Thus, blackface became a way of managing African-American defiance, through exaggerated speech, movement and importantly, clothing. The Jim Crow dance, complete with ragged clothes, represented blacks in their proper place and would become a symbol for the laws meant to keep blacks in their inferior position after the Civil War.

In addition to Jim Crow, one of the first and long-lasting images to appear on the minstrel stage were "cross dressed 'wench' performances" which were a part of the second act. These performances were a way for whites to manage the threat of black women who dressed out of their station. It is not surprising that white men would create images that attempted to justify an economic system that included enslaving their own offspring. In fact, through minstrelsy they used these images for profit. In *The Wages of Whiteness: Race and the Making of the American Working Class,* David Roediger writes that "songs showing promiscuous Black women were

probably more popular than those emphasizing the sexuality of Black men, with the fairly ribald 'wench' song 'Lucy Long' being among the most performed antebellum minstrel tunes" (121).

The wench or prima donna character was made famous by the minstrel performer George Christy who sang the song "Miss Lucy Long". The lyrics to George Christy's 1842 version of this song were:

> Oh! Miss Lucy's teeth is grinning
> Just like an ear ob corn,
> And her eyes dey look so winning!
> Oh would I'd ne'er been born.
>
> I axed her for to marry
> Myself de toder day,
> She said she'd rather tarry
> So I let her habe her way.
>
> If she makes a scolding wife
> As sure as she was born
> I'll tote her down to Georgia
> And trade her off for corn. (R. Lewis 71)

Here a white man, in blackface, asserts Lucy Long's desirability. The line "she said she'd rather tarry" is open to interpretation. Tarry can represent her reserved nature, since she is delaying marriage. If we take tarry to mean to agree to sex without marriage, as Eric Lott interprets it, it

reinforces stereotypes of black women's sexual assertiveness. In either case, this female figure has power: the power to withhold or grant sexual access and she must be put in her place. Finally, the male figure asserts his power over her and her value by saying that he will sell her if she attempts to assert any authority over him (including the power of her tongue). While it is clear how this ending to the song would be satisfying for the male audience, it would also reassure white women of their superior position. As Anne Marie Bean writes, "Lucy Long and characters like her were women who were assured in their value as sexual objects and they occasionally needed to be reminded that they had the status of property, not personhood" (247).[20]

Jacobs writes her narrative between 1845 and the late 1850s, when minstrelsy is the dominant form of entertainment in the United States. We can see Jacobs's narrative as a response to these negative performances. For instance, she wishes to marry a black man who is a carpenter and free born. Not surprisingly, when she tells Dr. Flint of her desire to marry this free black man he responds "I would shoot him as soon as I would a dog" (63). She sums it up by saying, "He thought…to make me feel that I had disgraced myself by receiving the honorable addresses of a respectable colored man, in preference to the base proposals of a white man" (63). While white men like her master compare black men to dogs, she calls her desire to marry this carpenter a "love-dream" (60). She laments, "why allow the tendrils of the heart to twine around objects which may at any moment be wrenched away" (58). Indeed, this episode is strikingly reminiscent of the Lucy Long song. Dr. Flint threatens to put her in jail, to "take some of your high notions out of you" (62). Like the subject of the song, she is "uppity" because she

[20] This notion of the scolding wife is reminiscent of Aunt Martha's scolding of Mr. Flint.

expresses agency, rejecting him for a black man. Thus, her narrative speaks back to the commodification of black culture through minstrelsy.

"A useful woman and a good mother"

The display of Saartjie Baartman and the development of minstrelsy in the United States exemplify the tensions at the heart of European-American consumer culture as it relates to race, particularly black women, and consumerism. Tension can be defined as a strained state or condition resulting from forces acting in opposition to each other. Living at the heart of European-American tensions, blacks managed to create synthesis, or the combination of components or elements to form a connected whole.

Indeed, Black women had to confront and imagine different possibilities. While marriage was the rule for white women, it was the exception for black women. Slaves did marry, but these marriages were always threatened with dissolution through the sale of either partner. While white women were dependent on their husbands for their economic status, black women's economic status was defined primarily by their relationship with their owners. While white women did contribute to the family's economy when it was necessary, the exigencies of family life consistently demanded that enslaved black women, too often without their male partners, had to work. In brief, in European-American culture, men were providers and women were consumers. For black women, this was tenuous, and out of the tenuous nature of traditional male-female relationships under slavery they created other possibilities. While patriarchy certainly did exist in black slave families, as we have seen in the example of Jacobs parents, this unique situation allowed for unique configurations as it relates to gender and consumption both

within the family and as it related to the relationship between slaves and masters. In brief, black women became provider-consumers.

As Phillipa Kafka asserts, gender relationships between white men and women were shaped by the Cinderella myth, in which a prince enters a woman's life and provides for her material needs. Because they were not Cinderellas enslaved black women had to become their own Prince Charmings, but as we have seen, they used the non-traditional role of provider-consumer to achieve a traditional end, to nurture their families. As discussed earlier, the dominant impulses in European-American consumer culture were display, pleasure (as all those boxes Thomas Jefferson returned from France with attest to), competition, and defiance (against the British colonizer, women against white men). For black women, while display and pleasure certainly played some role, the dominant impulses in their participation in consumer culture were defiance and nurturance. Black women wanted to care for the material needs of their family and they dreamt that their children would have full lives. The accumulation of goods is always about the intangible. For whites the intangibles were display and pleasure. As one observer articulates it, "teapots, books, forks and dancing ability had little or no intrinsic value; their worth lay in what they could communicate about the people who owned them"(Howell). For black women the intangibles were defiance and freedom; life and liberty. Out of this desire to defy the system and nurture their families they created something new.

Blacks resisted European-American consumer culture during the antebellum era while fashioning a distinct culture of their own. As it relates to clothing, Shane and Graham White assert that "although it is likely that many slaves were aware of the import of their actions in the white world, they also were wearing such clothing in the context of another set of values" (163). White and White go on to say:

> Among many blacks there appears to have been little if any sense that such an item should co-ordinate in style, colour or anything else with the rest of their garb; it was precisely this characteristic of wearing what appeared, to white eyes, to be odd combinations of clothing, of lumping together, say an elegant jacket with a pair of trousers fashioned out of coarse, drab, material, that whites found risible. Yet at the same time, whites were probably aware that their own behaviour was being held up to gentle (albeit often very public) ridicule" (163).

Living at the crucible of America's moral, economic, and social contradictions, blacks developed an aesthetic that was based on contradictions. White and White describe this as "an act of cultural bricolage" and assert that "what lay behind these differences was an African-American aesthetic, the use not only of varied materials and patterns, but also of contrasting colours in a manner that jangle white sensibilities"(165, 169).

Various commentators have remarked on this uniquely African-American aesthetic. In "African-American Women's Quilting: A Framework for Conceptualizing and Teaching African-American Women's History," Elsa Barkley Brown quotes Maude Southwell Wahlman and John Scully's "Aesthetic Principles of Afro-American Quilts." They write that African-American quilters "do not seem to be interested in a uniform color scheme….Comparisons are made between similar and opposing colors at the same time in the same quilt. Contrast is used to structure and organize" (923).

In addition to African-American women's quilts, this aesthetic can also be seen in sweetgrass baskets of the South Carolina low country. Even as the 1769 observer in Charleston, South Carolina expressed his uneasiness with black and mulatto women who were "*elegantly*

dressed" in European fashions, black women were creating items that reflected their own cultural aesthetic. African-American craftsmanship of sweet grass played a critical role in South Carolina's profitable rice economy. When Europeans came to the South Carolina low country they made several unsuccessful attempts at a cash crop. The slaves they imported from Africa's Rice Coast, which includes modern countries such as Sierra Leone, began growing rice for their own consumption. Their white owners soon realized that this was the cash crop they had been seeking. In addition to their skill at growing rice, these slaves brought with them the skill of weaving fanners out of sweet grass to winnow the rice. They also employed these techniques to create baskets for personal use. During slavery, men made the baskets for public use, for work on the plantation, and women made the baskets for use in the home. While this speaks to the public/private, masculine/feminine divide in the dominant culture, it also speaks to another approach to gender, in that both men and women sewed the baskets. In this way, both men and women sold their labor and skills.

Using palmetto and black rush to enhance the color of the baskets, variety is seen within and between the baskets. Patterns of darker shades may be repeated in a basket, but not with an equal number of bands or at symmetrical distances. As with African-American women's quilts, there is not a uniform color scheme. Underscoring the African-American emphasis on variety, no two baskets are alike. Even as black women wore the clothes of the European upper classes as a form of resistant self-fashioning, quilting and sweet grass basket weaving techniques reflect black women's simultaneous development of an alternative aesthetic.

Elsa Barkley Brown writes that "A people's cultural aesthetic is not different from their economic or political aesthetic; it is just visible to us in different form" (926).

This cultural aesthetic is seen in Jacobs's narrative through her relationship with her grandmother. Jacobs fears her grandmother's reaction when she must tell her she is pregnant by another white man in the community, Mr. Sands, for she has willingly had sex with another man outside of marriage. When Aunt Martha learns of Jacobs's pregnancy she responds, "I had rather see you dead than to see you as you now are" (87). Aunt Martha wants Jacobs to remain chaste, consistent with the norms of the dominant culture as it relates to the Cult of True Womanhood of the late nineteenth century which emphasized piety, purity, submissiveness and domesticity. However, this option is not available to the enslaved woman as it is to their white sister, as Jacobs makes plain in her narrative. When she reveals that she is pregnant her grandmother is upset, but ultimately accepts her. Jacobs recounts, "She did not say 'I forgive you' but she looked at me lovingly, with her eyes full of tears" (89). Her grandmother initially says, "Go away…and never come to my house again (88). By the end of the chapter she says, "I forgive you" (89). In this way, Aunt Martha enacts contradictory values. More than accepting her, Jacobs's grandmother allows her to seek refuge in her attic for seven years.

In her grandmother's cellar she thinks, "Alone in my cell, where no eye could see me, I wept bitter tears. How earnestly I prayed to him to restore me to my children, and enable me to be a useful woman and a good mother" (Jacobs 133). As Virginia Cope points out, Jacobs's life reflects bricolage as it relates to gender as she "conflates the male role of breadwinner (the 'useful') and the female role of domestic icon" (16). Cope goes on to emphasize that "her lack of a husband has freed her to pursue the masculine dream of self-ownership unencumbered" (16). In this way too, she uses her grandmother's life as a model.

Her grandmother also enacts contradictory values when she gives Jacobs money before she flees to the North. Though she does not want her to run away, Jacobs's grandmother presses

money into her hand to prepare her for life as a free woman, "She insisted, while her tears were falling fast, that I should take the whole [bag]. You may be sick among strangers, she said, and they would send you to the poorhouse to die" (235).

In the famous lines that end the novel Jacobs says, "Reader, my story ends in freedom; not in the usual way, with marriage. I and my children are now free! We are as free from the power of slaveholders as are the white people of the north; and though that, according to my ideas, is not saying a great deal, it is a vast improvement in *my* condition" (302). This "*my*" contrasts her with her white middle class female readers. It also compares her to her grandmother, who was able to improve *her* condition, which had a critical impact on her granddaughter's life. She goes on to say "the dream of my life is not yet realized. I do not sit with my children in a home of my own"(302). She acknowledges that the traditional way, in mainstream culture, is marriage and a home. Yet, she can imagine and hope for another possibility—supporting her children as a single woman, a possibility that was modeled by her grandmother, a possibility that runs counter to the dominant culture.

It is while supporting herself as a nanny in the North and encouraged by the abolitionist and women's rights activist, Amy Post, that Jacobs decides to write and publish her story. Like her grandmother, she writes her slave narrative after her daily duties are completed, not composing "a single page by daylight"(Letter to Amy Post). Like her grandmother too, she demonstrates thrift, consistently putting money aside not to free her children, who are already in the North, but to publish her story. Like her grandmother, she encounters racism and her efforts are frustrated by white people's poor business practices.

She first tries to have her narrative published in England, and depletes half of her savings in the process. She then attempts to have it published by the Boston house of Phillips and Samson, but the publishing house fails and she is not able to secure the preface by Harriet Beecher Stowe that they required. She then approached the publishing house of Thayer and Elridge who agreed to publish it if she could secure a preface from the abolitionist activist Lydia Marie Child. In sharp contrast to Stowe, Child agreed to edit the book, write an Introduction and work as Jacobs's agent. Child secured a contract with Thayer and Elridge. Her book was supposed to come out in December of 1860, but Thayer and Elridge was failing. Before they went bankrupt, Thayer and Elridge had the book stereotyped and Jacobs used the rest of her savings to purchase the plates and to have her book published and bound. The book was printed by the Boston Stereotype Foundry and ready in January of 1861. Jacobs's path to publication demonstrates the lessons she learned from her grandmother. Her thrift allows her to fulfill her dream of publication when she is disappointed by white publishing companies. She works hard to promote the book and receives numerous positive reviews and the book is reprinted in several publications.

Her grandmother's lessons also hold Jacobs in good stead when she tries to publish her book again in England. Buoyed by her success in America, now, at the outset of the Civil War, she felt it was important to persuade the British to support the Union. As she wrote to Amy Post, "…I don't give up as I used to. The trouble is I begin to find out we poor women have always been too meek" (Yellin 151). Like her grandmother, she used her own resources to bring her book to the market. This time, instead of using white intermediaries in England as she did in the past, she wrote directly to Frederick Chesson of the London Emancipation Society. She sent him

the stereotype plates and he had the book published by William Tweedie. The book was such a success that a pirated edition appeared from the London firm Hodson and Son.

Finally, Jacobs had achieved her dream and published her book in America and England. She does so to help enslaved African-Americans, to be a "useful woman" and to support her children. She wants to own her own home and to put her children through college. Now that they have achieved their liberty, however circumscribed, she wants her children, particularly her daughter, to have full lives and to pursue happiness.

The following chapter examines the emergence of Booker T. Washington as *the* mediator between newly freed African-Americans and European-American consumer culture. It also explores how black female writers such as Ida B. Wells and Pauline Hopkins responded to this new, controversial presence even as they reconfigured Harriet Jacobs's producer-consumer/family-community-model into a new formulation that would recur in black female literature for generations to come.

Chapter Two

Restraint, Resistance and Unruly Desires in the post-Bellum

Works of Booker T. Washington, Ida B. Wells and Pauline Hopkins

Harriet Jacobs's life story, published in January, 1861, was overshadowed by the outbreak of the Civil War in April of that year. During and after the war Harriet Jacobs continued to be a "useful woman" for the members of her race. She and her daughter, Louisa, moved to Alexandria, Virginia to assist blacks seeking refuge behind Union lines in and around Washington, D.C., raising money to provide them with food and clothing and even starting a school, the Jacobs Free School. After the Civil War she persisted in her efforts on behalf of the former slaves, relocating to Savannah, Georgia where she began another school. In an 1866 letter to friends in the North, Louisa rejoices that some of the former slaves have received land and are successfully growing crops, and she expresses dismay that blacks are unfairly imprisoned without proof of guilt (Letter from Savannah). Indeed, this letter reflects the promise and disappointment of the Reconstruction Era.

Jacobs and her daughter joined thousands of men and women, black and white, who assisted the former slaves in the aftermath of the Civil War. Though the work was daunting, the period after slavery was a time of possibility for African-Americans, some of it realized. Federal troops worked to maintain order in the South. The Freedmen's Bureau, established in 1865, set up thousands of schools and distributed land to the former slaves. The Thirteenth Amendment (1865) to the Constitution had freed the slaves and the Fourteenth Amendment (1868) gave

blacks equal protection under the law. In 1870 the Fifteenth Amendment gave black men the right to vote, resulting in the election of scores of black legislators.

As Louisa writes in her letter, despite these successes, it was clear that it would "be a long time before things can be righted for the colored man South" (Letter from Savannah). As Nell Painter indicates in *Standing at Armageddon*, before federal troops officially withdrew from the South in 1877, blacks faced many challenges. Several white abolitionists had grown disenchanted with establishing an egalitarian society in the South, with one going as far as asserting, "I was, in the days of slavery, an enemy of slavery, because I thought slavery inconsistent with the rights, the dignity, the highest well-being of free labor. That might have been a mistake" (Painter 1). Calming violence in the South proved a daunting task for the federal government. A mini-war erupted between Democrats and Republicans in Mississippi and mobs of whites attacked blacks in states such as Louisiana and South Carolina. The Supreme Court made matters worse with its *Reese* and *Cruickshank* decisions regarding anti-black political violence in 1876. The court scaled back the protection provided by the Fourteenth and Fifteenth Amendments, stating that the federal government was not obligated to protect blacks from individual infringements of their civil rights, ruling that the federal government only had to intervene when states curtailed equality under the law. In addition, negative images of black politicians, carpetbaggers (white politicians from the North) and scalawags (poor white Southern politicians) convinced many Americans that it would be best if the South was again ruled by its "best" citizens. Moreover, the Panic of 1873 led to an economic depression in the 1870s and in response many Americans wanted to limit federal spending. These sentiments were reflected in President Rutherford B. Hayes's decision to remove federal troops from the South in 1877 as the nation wished to move on from the Southern question. This decision was the official

start to the period that Rayford Logan has dubbed "the nadir" of African-American history: the post-Reconstruction era in which blacks were lynched by the thousands and oppressed politically, economically, and socially.

Out of the ashes of these victories and devastating disappointments, Booker T. Washington, enslaved in Franklin County, Virginia and freed by the Civil War at the age of nine, sought to position himself as *the* leader of the African-American community. In *The Great White Way: African-American Women Writers and American Success Mythologies*, (1993) Philippa Kafka argues that black female writers have:

> followed American male success mythology [sic] which valorized two American success myths. The first, 'hard economics,' was primarily in the form of how-to-manuals. These manuals gave tips on how to achieve economic success through educational and vocational work-study programs (such as Booker T. Washington and Frances E.W. Harper advocated), and to a lesser extent, political success myths (identified with the likes of Frederick Douglass, Harriet Jacobs, Ida B. Wells Barnett, and W.E.B. DuBois). (81)

I would argue that just as we must look at Benjamin Franklin within the context of his historical moment, we must do the same with Booker T. Washington in order to understand his deviation from the template established by his male predecessor, Frederick Douglass. While Kafka discusses the struggles that African-Americans faced during this era, we must examine the changes that occurred in European-American economic culture in order to fully understand Booker T. Washington's emphasis on "hard economics" at the expense of politics. Moreover, I would argue that Ida B. Wells deserves much fuller treatment than she receives in Kafka's study

of African-American women writers and the American Dream, as she was a key rival to Booker T. Washington as the heir apparent to Frederick Douglass's leadership. Moreover, black female writers of this era also responded to their female predecessor, Harriet Jacobs. Therefore, this chapter also explores how black female writers of the post-slavery era such as Wells and Pauline Hopkins reflect and deviate from Harriet Jacobs's produce-consumer/family-community model as new, unruly representations of black female consumption emerge in their works.[21]

"Store hats" and a homespun cap

It is no coincidence that Booker T. Washington's surname is the same as that of the nation's first president. As a boy he chooses this name for himself. In his autobiography he recalls that when he entered school:

> I noticed that all of the children had at least two names, and some of them indulged in what seemed to me the extravagance of having three…. By the time the occasion came for enrolling my name, an idea occurred to me which I thought would make me equal to the situation; and so, when the teacher asked me what my full name was, I calmly told him 'Booker Washington,' as if I had been called by that name all my life. (21)

Washington chooses the surname of one of America's founding fathers and more than making him the equal of his fellows, this choice will make him *the leader* of his fellows. It presages the role he will play in lives of the newly freed slaves, akin to the role of Benjamin

[21] The passage quoted above is the only time that Wells is mentioned in Kafka's study. Kafka focuses on the work of Phillis Wheatley, Harriet Jacobs, ,Zora Neale Hurston and Alice Walker. In terms of the post-slavery era, she briefly discusses Frances Harper's *Iola Leroy* (93-97).

Franklin during the Revolutionary Era. Indeed, Booker T. Washington will use the Benjamin Franklin model to become an American success story: by disciplining his mind, body and relationship to consumer culture.[22]

In his autobiography Washington recounts that following the Civil War, his family relocates from Virginia to West Virginia and Washington is sent to work in a salt-furnace. Washington's stepfather removes him from school so that he can help support the family, just as Benjamin Franklin's father removed him from school at the age of ten so that he could assist in his family's candle and soap making business. Washington asserts that "from the time I can remember having any thoughts about anything, I recall that I had an intense longing to learn to read" (18). His stepfather agrees to allow him to work for several hours before school begins and after the school day is over. However, because the school was some distance from the salt-furnace, he never reaches class on time. To solve this dilemma, Washington sets the clock back a half-hour, to 8:30am, so that he can reach school on time at 9:00am. He recounts, "This clock, of course, all the hundred or more workmen depended upon to regulate their hours of beginning and ending the day's work…. I did not mean to inconvenience anybody. I simply meant to reach that schoolhouse on time" (20). This incident demonstrates the primacy of education in Washington's young life as well as his determined spirit. More than a cog in the factory machine, he asserts his individuality. When the boss at the salt furnace realizes that someone is changing the clock and locks it, Washington continues to attend day school erratically and then must stop altogether. However, he continues his lessons in night school, walking several miles to do so. Despite these challenges he is set on pursuing an education writing, "There was never a time in my youth, no matter how dark and discouraging the days might be, when one resolve did not

[22] Washington received his middle name, Taliaferro, from his mother when he was born, but it wasn't used. He revived it once he learned of it.

continually remain with me, and that was a determination to secure an education at any cost" (22).

One day Washington overhears two other workers discussing the Hampton Institute in Virginia, one of many institutions of higher education begun for African-Americans following the Civil War. He determines to attend the college. To save money for this endeavor he takes a job cleaning for the wife of the owner of the salt-furnace, Mrs. Ruffner. Mrs. Ruffner encourages Booker T. Washington's education and allows him to attend school for one hour during the day and at night. Just as Benjamin Franklin did as a boy, he spends his money on books, recalling, "It was while living with her that I began to get together my first library. I secured a dry-goods box, knocked out one side of it, put some shelves in it, and began putting into it every kind of book that I could get my hands upon, and called it my 'library'" (25).[23]

While other boys lasted only a few weeks with the demanding Mrs. Ruffner, Washington comes to understand that "she wanted everything kept clean about her, that she wanted things done promptly and systematically….nothing must be sloven or slipshod" (25). Mrs. Ruffner is from the North, and her requirements reflect the Puritan tradition of cleanliness and exactitude. In *Foul Bodies: Cleanliness in Early America*, Kathleen Brown writes that for Puritan ministers in New England, "Cleanliness in the moral sense depended on female virtue, expressed in the dedicated performance of domestic labor necessary to produce civilized European bodies" (60). In brief, she teaches him to use his body to achieve mastery of his environment.

Despite the fact that much of his income goes to his family, Washington sets out to enroll at Hampton Institute and it is during his travels to Hampton, Virginia that he takes control of his

[23] Franklin writes, "From a child I was fond of reading, and all little money that came into my hands was ever laid out in books" (9).

body. Strapped for cash, by the time he reaches Richmond he has no money and must take drastic measures:

> I must have walked the streets till after midnight. At last I became so exhausted that I could walk no longer. I was tired, I was hungry. I was everything but discouraged. Just about the time when I reached extreme physical exhaustion, I came upon a portion of a street where the board sidewalk was considerably elevated. I waited for a few minutes, till I was sure that no passers-by could see me, and then crept under the sidewalk and lay for the night upon the ground, with my satchel of clothing for a pillow. (27)

To earn money to continue on his journey, he gets a job unloading cargo. He does this for several days and when he realizes he is not saving enough to travel to Hampton he decides, "In order to economize in every way possible, so as to be sure to reach Hampton in a reasonable time, I continued to sleep under the same sidewalk that gave me shelter the first night I was in Richmond" (27). His willingness to withstand the extreme discomfort of sleeping under the sidewalk demonstrates his growing mastery of his physical self to achieve his goal of securing an education.

His initial appearance at Hampton Institute is strikingly similar to Franklin's famous ignominious entrance to Philadelphia. When Booker T. Washington presents himself to the school's head teacher, Miss Mackie, he recalls, "without proper food, a bath, and change of clothing, I did not, of course, make a very favourable impression upon her" (28).[24] In an

[24] Franklin recalls, "I have been the more particular in this description of my journey, and shall be so of my first entry into the city, that you may in your mind compare such unlikely beginning with the figure I have since made there…. I was dirty from my journey; my pockets were stuffed out with shirts and stockings. I was fatigued from

unorthodox college entrance examination, Washington must demonstrate mastery over his body and surroundings to gain entry to Hampton Institute. He is admitted to the school after thoroughly cleaning the recitation room. He:

> swept the recitation room three times. Then I got a dusting cloth and dusted it four times. All the woodwork around the walls, every bench, table and desk, I went over four times with my dusting-cloth. Besides, every piece of furniture had been moved and every closet and corner in the room had been thoroughly cleaned. (28)

The woman who approves this work, Miss Mary Mackie, Hampton's head teacher "was a Yankee woman who knew just where to look for dirt" (28). He demonstrates that he can attain to the highest physical standards set by America's founders, English Puritans, by tapping into the Protestant work ethic distilled by Franklin. Using the lessons he learned from another Yankee woman, Mrs. Ruffner, he is able to impress the Institute's head teacher and pass this remarkable college entrance examination.

To pay his fees Washington is hired as a janitor and he recalls, "The work was hard and taxing, but I stuck to it. I had a large number of rooms to care for, and had to work late into the night, while at the same time I had to rise by four o'clock in the morning, in order to build the fires and have a little time in which to prepare my lessons"(29). Here too, he echoes Benjamin Franklin, rising early to study and doing so after he has finished work. Using the Franklin model, he has achieved mastery over his body and mind.

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traveling and rowing and want of rest. I was very hungry and my whole stock of cash consisted of a Dutch dollar and about a shilling in copper" (20).

Now that he has mastered his mind and body, Washington must master his relationship to consumer culture. It is his mother who is his model of thrift. In addition to lacking a full name, when he first enters school he feels inferior to the other boys because they wear "store hats … a rather new institution at that time among the members of my race and was considered quite the thing for young and old to own" (20). When he laments to his mother that he lacks a "store hat" she tells him that she cannot afford to buy one and sews him one out of two pieces of "homespun" or jeans (20). He says, "I have always felt proud that she refused to go into debt for that which she had no money to pay for" (21).

Using the lessons he learned from his mother, as a student at Hampton Institute he economizes by recycling his clothing recalling, "For some time, while a student at Hampton, I possessed but a single pair of socks, but when I had worn these till they became soiled, I would wash them at night and hang them by the fire to dry, so that I might wear them again the next morning" (31).

Even with this frugality, after his first year he owes the school sixteen dollars. He says that "I felt that this was a debt of honor, and that I could hardly bring myself to the point of even trying to enter school again till it was paid. I economized in every way I could think of—did my own washing, and went without necessary garments—but still found my summer vacation ending and I did not have sixteen dollars" (34). To underscore his financial restraint, while working that summer in a restaurant, he finds ten dollars, but gives it to the owner, who decides to keep it. This blow not withstanding, he is pleased to come to campus early to prepare the campus for the new semester and to "secure credit in the treasurer's office" (37). Through hard work and thrift, he is able to pay off his debt to the college.

When he graduates from Hampton Institute, Booker T. Washington is a man who has mastered his mind, body and relationship to European-American consumer culture. More than this, however, Booker T. Washington wants to be a model for all African-Americans. After completing his studies, the founder of the Hampton Institute, General Samuel Chapman Armstrong, asks Booker T. Washington to begin a school in Tuskegee, Alabama, following the same industrial model as the Hampton Institute—emphasizing academics and manual labor such as carpentry, brick making and domestic service for women. Washington's efforts at Tuskegee and his speeches on race relations will catapult him to national fame, even earning him the support of captains of industry such as Andrew Carnegie and John D. Rockefeller.

When he publishes the second version of his autobiography in 1911, *My Larger Education*, Washington is literally the picture of success as defined by Benjamin Franklin. In the photograph on the front cover he cuts a strong, robust figure, demonstrating control over his body. He holds a newspaper, demonstrating that he is well-read. Moreover, he wears a fine suit, demonstrating that he is a successful consumer. As we have seen, Frederick Douglass, the leader of the ante-bellum era, paints a similar picture of himself with language in his autobiography, declaring that the pen he is using to write his slave narrative could fit into the gashes he suffered as a slave. One imagines Douglass in a snug home in respectable attire. A generation later, Booker T. Washington presents the reader with a literal depiction of his American and African-American success story, using the Benjamin Franklin template. Likewise, in light of the challenges they face in the post-Reconstruction era, he wants freed African-Americans to use his model of self-mastery to achieve full American citizenship.

As discussed earlier, the problems African-Americans faced were demoralizing. Violence against African-Americans, which had been repressed in the early 1870s by federal

legislation, became virulent in the late 1870s with the removal of federal troops. Between 1885 and 1900 over 2,500 African-Americans were lynched. By 1883 the Supreme Court had declared the Civil Rights Act o f 1875 unconstitutional. The *Plessy* v. *Ferguson* decision of 1896 was the final nail in the coffin for equality for African-Americans, as the Supreme Court made "separate but equal" the rule of the nation.[25]

Louisiana passed the Separate Car Act in 1892 and Louisiana's black citizens decided to challenge the law by having Homer Plessy, who was one-eighth black, sit in a car designated for whites on the East Louisiana railroad. Plessy's lawyer argued that the Separate Car Act violated the Thirteenth and Fourteenth Amendments. The Supreme Court ruled against Plessy seven to two, and the writer of the majority opinion, Justice Henry Brown, asserted that "A statute which implies merely a legal distinction between the white and colored races has no tendency to destroy the legal equality of the two races." This ruling set the precedent for the creation of separate facilities for blacks and whites as long as they were equal, but facilities for blacks were almost always inferior.

Plessy v. *Ferguson* put a federal stamp on Jim Crow laws enacted in the South. As discussed earlier, Jim Crow was a dance made popular by the minstrel performer Thomas "Daddy" Rice. In fact, by the 1850s the dance was standard in minstrel performances and the term Jim Crow became a derogatory one associated with African-Americans, leading to the phrase Jim Crow laws. Jim Crow laws consisted of rules regarding etiquette, such as blacks referring to whites with titles of respect such as Mr. and Mrs., Sir and M'am, and "giving whites

[25] The Civil Rights Act of 1873 read "Be it enacted, That all persons within the jurisdiction of the United States shall be entitled to the full and equal enjoyment of the accommodations, advantages, facilities, and privileges of inns, public conveyances on land or water, theaters, and other places of public amusement; subject only to the conditions and limitations established by law, and applicable alike to citizens of every race and color, regardless of any previous condition of servitude."

the wall" by stepping off the sidewalk when a white person passed. In terms of laws, black were prevented from voting through grandfather clauses, which dictated that one could only vote if their grandfather had voted and poll taxes which only blacks were required to pay. As it relates to accommodations there were separate schools, prisons, cemeteries, bathrooms and water fountains. In practice, sometimes there were no facilities for blacks. These laws were supported through the threat of violence and because institutions, such as the police and courts were all white.

In addition to violence, political and social repression, African-Americans also confronted economic exploitation. Though some blacks received tracks of land from the federal government and other purchased land, many blacks were trapped in the sharecropping system. Under this system blacks worked on land owned by whites in return for a share of the profits. Using credit, they purchased supplies and other goods from the landowner's store. Once the crops were settled the sharecropper invariably owed more to the owner for supplies and goods than the crops were worth. In this way, blacks were kept in perpetual debt. Successful African-American entrepreneurs were subject to intimidation through methods such as white capping in which secret societies of white males, known as White Caps, used violence to intimidate blacks who had prosperous enterprises.

These are the challenges blacks faced during the post-Reconstruction era as the nation got on with the business of business. And business was booming. In the latter part of the nineteenth century the nation entered the Industrial Revolution. As Nell Painter notes, industrial output increased exponentially:

> In 1889 the United States produced 1,705,000 tons of rails; in 1900, 2,672,000 tons. In 1889 factories, mines and railroads used 23,679,000 horsepower; in 1900, 37,729,00, not counting the use of the popular new electric motors. Between 1889 and 1900 the production of raw steel doubled, from 5,865,000 tons to 11,227,000 tons. Total manufacturing capital soared from $5,697,000,000,000 in 1889 to 8,663,000,000,000 in 1900. (xvii)

American mines produced steel and coal. American factories produced clothing, processed food, furniture and knick-knacks for the home. America had progressed from a nation that sent raw goods such as cotton, rice and tobacco to the world, to one which sent manufactured goods to the world. Indeed, by 1919 "the United States out produced the rest of the world in agriculture, manufactured goods, and credit" (Painter xviii).

Millions of workers were needed to keep the mines and factories running and they came in droves from China and Eastern and Southern Europe, soon outnumbering native-born Americans who traced their roots to Northern and Western Europe. Thousands of Chinese men built the Western section of the transcontinental railroad, completed in 1869. Immigrants from Russia, Poland and Southern Italy worked in American factories in cities such as New York, Chicago and Philadelphia. According to the Census Bureau, the populations of New York City, Philadelphia and Chicago were 515,547, 121,376 and 29,963 respectively in 1850. By 1890 New York had 1,515,301 citizens, Philadelphia had 1,046, 964 and Chicago had 1,099,850. By 1920 New York City had a population of 5,620,048, Chicago had a population of 2,701,705 and Philadelphia's population had ballooned to 1,823,779. In rural areas in Ohio and Pennsylvania immigrants worked in the coal, iron and steel mines.

Immigrants came to America seeking upward mobility, but they too often found that life in America was characterized by long hours and low wages in the factories and mines that employed them. As a Polish worker for U.S. Steel put it, "Just like horse and wagon. Put horse in wagon, work all day. Take horse out of wagon—put in stable. Take horse out of stable, put in wagon. Same way like mills. Work all day. Come home—go sleep. Get up—go work in mills—come home" (Painter 371). In 1900 coal miners made an average of $500 per year, when $800 constituted a comfortable working class salary. To make up the difference, families sent their children to work and took in boarders.

For their part, the managers of the mines and factories considered workers cogs in America's industrial machine. If one worker quit, another immigrant worker would take his place. As a stockholder of a textile mill in Lawrence, Massachusetts asserted, "if [a manager] can secure men for $6 [a week] and pays more, he is stealing from the company" (Painter xxxvi). And industrial profits soared, increasing America's GDP (which rose from $15 billion in 1890 to $78 billion in 1919) even as income disparities increased, with 12% of families owning 86% of America's wealth in 1890 (Painter xx). Men such as John D. Rockefeller (oil), Andrew Carnegie (steel), and Cornelius Vanderbilt (railroads) dubbed themselves captains of industry as they consolidated their businesses and reaped huge profits. To workers and other critics, these men were robber barons and workers used their collective muscle to battle against long hours and low wages through unions and strikes.

In the 1880s Andrew Carnegie supported workers' right to strike. However, by the 1890s he had taken a harder line. It was during this time, 1892, that the Amalgamated Association of Iron, Steel and Tin Workers, a division of the American Federation of Labor, begun in 1886, organized over 24,000 members to demand higher wages at Carnegie's Homestead,

Pennsylvania mine. Carnegie's manager, Henry Clay Frick, locked the workers out and by July of 1892 Frick had dismissed all of the workers, replacing them with cheaper, non-union employees. Frick hired a police force, the Pinkerton National Detective Agency, to protect the non-union workers. This resulted in violence, and nine steelworkers and seven Pinkerton agents lost their lives. Pennsylvania's governor, William Stone, sent in a militia of 8,000 men, which quelled the violence. Many Americans were sympathetic to the union, but this changed when Frick was shot by Alexander Berkman, a union sympathizer. In the meantime, even though workers in other mines struck in sympathy with the Homestead union, work at the mine continued smoothly with non-union workers. Carnegie had successfully broken the union.

Though other unions won other battles, the AFL eventually decided it would be more effective if it shifted its focus to politics. After all, they had to keep pace with the robber barons or captains of industry, who were infamously influencing state officials and Congressmen. As Nell Painter articulates it, "The Senate functioned as an extension of the business relationships that controlled state politics because state legislatures elected U.S. senators, and senators thereby owed their political power to various moneyed interests" (187). In just one example, in response to public pressure, Congress passed the Sherman Anti-Trust Act in 1890 to limit the consolidation of companies that squeezed out competition and made men like Carnegie and Rockefeller billionaires. By 1890 Rockefeller's Standard Oil controlled close to 88% of the industry. The Sherman Anti-Trust Act stated that "Every contract, combination in the form of trust or otherwise, or conspiracy, in restraint of trade or commerce among the several States, or with foreign nations, is declared to be illegal." However, the language of the Act was vague and political pressure from the trusts so great that it was rarely used against monopolies. In fact, it came to be used against unions that were accused of being illegal combinations that interrupted

commerce. In response to the political influence of the robber barons, the unions came together to form the People's Party or Populists in 1892. They supported reforms such as government ownership of railroads, the graduated income tax (so that the wealthy would be taxed more heavily than the poor) and the eight hour work day (Painter 98-99). They managed to get their members elected, and while success was not immediate, elements of their radical platform eventually became the law of the land.

"A dollar down and a dollar a week"

Industrialization put millions of immigrants and native-born Americans to work and spawned a proliferation of goods, ranging from ceramics to food, which could now be purchased in individual packages as opposed to bulk. This shift in packaging gave rise to the brand. In just one example of how buying and selling changed during this period, in 1870 there were 121 trademarks registered in the United States and by 1906 that number had reached 10,000 (Mullins 171). Brands that have become iconic in American life, such as Ivory Soap (1878), Kellogg's Corn Flakes (1894) and Jell-O (1897) had their start at the end of the nineteenth century.

The ethos of thrift that Americans embraced during the Consumer Revolution, which became the American Revolution, continued to reverberate in the ensuing decades of the nineteenth century. However, American industrialization at the end of the nineteenth century meant that there was an explosion of goods which had to be sold to the public. Though industrialization meant that goods were cheaper to buy, they were still too expensive for many Americans to purchase instantly. Therefore, this period witnessed the birth of a new way of buying goods through debt—the installment plan.

Coperthwaite and Sons, a furniture store in New York City, was the first company to provide customers with an installment plan in 1807. The company was discriminating about who they extended credit to, which led to few defaults. Other large furniture stores in big cities followed them and the practice spread to other goods, such as pianos. To purchase a piano, for instance, the buyer had to put one-third down, which meant that these buyers were affluent.

By the end of the nineteenth century this practice had become widespread. For example, one innovation of the industrial revolution was the sewing machine. Before this innovation, it took a woman fourteen hours to sew a shirt by hand, but just one if she used a sewing machine. Isaac Singer began selling sewing machines on the installment plan in the 1850s. By 1890 they cost between $30 and $40 and a woman could buy one for a dollar down and a dollar a week. More and more American women purchased sewing machines on the installment plan and there were more defaults because the customers were less well off than those who used the plan for more expensive items at the beginning of the nineteenth century, but it remained profitable for the Singer Corporation and they continued the practice. This form of debt spread to other industries as Americans used the installment plan primarily for durable goods such as automobiles, furniture, pianos, phonographs and washing machines (Murphy).

In the late nineteenth century, poor immigrants from Eastern and Southern Europe who came to work in American factories and flooded American cities began using the installment plan to buy the goods they needed on the streets of the ghettoes. Peddlers took advantage of these immigrants, selling them lower grade goods at inflated prices. In this way, the installment plan became "'symbolic of poverty, prodigality [and] gullibility'" (Murphy). In a 1926 study which reveals the stigma attached to the installment plan, one economist commented:

> During the nineteenth century, things that a thrifty, self-respecting American family would buy on the installment plan were a piano, a sewing machine, some expensive articles of furniture, and perhaps a set of books. People who made such purchases didn't talk about them. Installment buying wasn't considered quite respectable. (Murphy)

Indeed, the reality of the stigma attached to the installment plan is seen in a short story by Abraham Cahan, a Jewish immigrant from Russia and founder of the *Jewish Daily Forward* in 1897. Like other realist writers, Cahan sought to portray the social and economic realities of American life at the turn of the century. In "A Sweatshop Romance" (1895), Cahan tells the story of Eastern-European immigrants working in a small sweatshop in a tenement apartment on the Lower East Side. When the wife of the shop's owner, Zlate, asks her sole female employee, Beile, to go to the store to fetch sodas for friends from the old country that Zlate wants to impress, another employee, David, comes to Beile's rescue and embarrasses Zlate by telling her guests, "She wanted to brag to you…. She showed off her parlor carpet to you, didn't she? But did she tell you that it had been bought on the installment plan, and that the custom-peddler threatened to take it away unless she paid more regularly?" (1668). Following this declaration, Beile and David leave the shop in search of employment elsewhere.

The stigma attached to the installment plan is consistent with the notion that after the Consumer Revolution, thrift was valued in mainstream American culture. However, this negative perception changed when General Motors Acceptance Corporation (GMAC) began its installment plan for purchasing cars in 1919. This proved to be a watershed moment, and the installment plan became more common for both newer items and older items which had previously avoided this approach to buying and selling.

The ideas of thrift embodied by Benjamin Franklin were also replaced by a new model set by the owners of the factories and mines that defined the Industrial Revolution. Instead of a gospel of thrift, these men preached a "Gospel of Wealth," a term coined by Carnegie. According to the Gospel of Wealth, "unrestrained capitalism will reward the best and most virtuous people, who will then use their fortune to benefit all of society. The duty of the virtuous industrialist, then, is to seek as much profit as possible by whatever means necessary" (Arnold 465).

Consistent with the idea of sharing their wealth, these men gave to schools, libraries, and hospitals. Indeed, this was consistent with the Puritan notion that one was obliged to "to use one's fortune…in public service" (Levin 338). However, some argued that they did this solely for self-glorification and even if this wasn't the case, these contributions could not compensate for the unscrupulous business practices they engaged in to gain their wealth: low pay, long hours, dangerous working conditions, and bribing politicians, to name a few. In brief, the ends did not justify the means.

Though disparaged on the one hand, these captains of industry had a powerful impact on the imagination of Americans, both old and new. Many of these men came to be regarded as American royalty, and missed no opportunity to remind people that they represented Benjamin Franklin's American Dream in that they rose from poverty and obscurity to wealth and prominence. Indeed, Zlate, the wife of the owner of the small sweatshop in "A Sweatshop Romance" refers to her small, dingy apartment with four workers as "our factory" when showing it to her guests (Cahan 1666). Americans were aware of how these men attained their wealth and the fruits of their riches, such as the mansions built by Cornelius Vanderbilt and other industrialists in Newport, Rhode Island and on Manhattan's Fifth Avenue. For Americans both

old and new, these men came to represent the American Dream during the late Victorian era, and their glittering accomplishments—the pursuit of wealth and its accoutrements at any cost—led to the coining of the term "The Gilded Age."

Therefore, while workers protested against their working conditions and pay, though it was stigmatized in its early phase, Americans came to embrace the emergence of the installment plan, the new form of debt that enabled conspicuous consumption in the late nineteenth century. As we see in "A Sweatshop Romance," David and Beile are Americanized in that they protest the unfair treatment of their boss. However, Benjamin Franklin's ideals of thrift had been left behind in the Gilded Age, as the pendulum had swung back to the profligate ways that characterized life in the American colonies in the eighteenth century, during the prosperity of the Seven Years War. Indeed, Americans would not embrace notions of thrift again until they were forced to, following the stock market Crash of 1929.

Slaves in a box

Like the installment plan, the proliferation of brands in the late eighteenth century meant that more and more Americans could approximate upper class refinement as embodied by the captains of industry. While the installment plan offered this in practical terms, brands offered it in the ideological realm. As I assert in the previous chapter, one tension left unresolved by the Consumer and American Revolutions was the commodification of African-American bodies and labor. Indeed, the ownership of black slave labor on Southern plantations was a powerful symbol of wealth and refinement in the European-American imagination during the ante-bellum era and remained so after the Civil War. As Jackson Lears asserts in *Fables of Abundance*, the

growth of industrialization and urbanization in American life produced a paradoxical yearning for pre-industrial farm life and companies tapped into this desire to promote their products in the post-bellum era.

An overview of the history of the Aunt Jemima pancakes brand is emblematic of the kinds of advertising images of African-Americans that began circulating in the late 1800's. In *Slave in a Box: the Strange Career of Aunt Jemima*, M.M. Manring discusses how this mammy figure made her way from the 19th century minstrel stage to General Mills Pancake Boxes. In brief, Chris Rutt and Charles Underwood perfected their ready mix in St. Joseph, Missouri in 1889. They were seeking a brand name catchier than "Self-Rising Flour" when a minstrel show came to St. Joseph. The final segment in this performance was a plantation skit which included slapstick, song and dance. This segment featured a song about Aunt Jemima that reflected post-Reconstruction images of an idyllic plantation South which also appeared in the sentimental fiction of Joel Chandler Harris, for instance. Indeed, during this period mammies were depicted fondly in novels, personal reminiscences and on stage, and Rutt hoped to capitalize on this. There were various songs performed during this segment about Aunt Jemima that highlighted her loyalty to her white masters. Lacking a distribution network and knowledge of how to advertise their product, Rutt and Underwood sold their company to the R.T. Davis Milling Company. Davis knew how to market consumer goods in the expanding national market, and decided to hire a woman, Nancy Green, to portray Aunt Jemima at the World's Columbia Exposition of 1893. Green proved to be a popular attraction and sales took off. General Mills Company retained the Aunt Jemima trademark when they purchased the company in 1925.

Aunt Jemima is but one example of the proliferation of black images in advertising in the late 19th century, images that shaped white consumers. Through brands such as Gold Dust

Washing Powder, Darkie Toothpaste, Sambo Chocolate Milk, and Longwood Plantation Syrup, black bodies and labor remained available for figurative consumption in the post-slavery era.

Importantly, by the late 1800's white women had become primarily responsible for making purchases for the family. Kathy Peiss discusses this shift in "American Women and the Making of Modern American Consumer Culture." She notes that between 1885 and 1910 magazines for women were created such as such as *Ladies Home Journal*, *Good Housekeeping* and *McCall's*. In the *Ladies Home Journal*, the editor, Edward Bok, "urged women to buy brand-name, packaged products, in a period when most groceries, hardware and other goods were unbranded and sold in bulk qualities" (3). She writes that "by the 1910's, advertisers and manufacturers had begun to see women as the 'chief purchasing agents' for their families, buying most of the household's food, clothing, appliances, and other goods" (3). Therefore, products such as Aunt Jemima pancakes became a way for advertisers to offer white women "the traits of the elite life" in that they could figuratively own black servants (Manring 88). In this way, the hailing of white women as consumers during the late Victorian era was dependent upon stereotyped images of African-Americans.

These images assured white consumers that the old order was still alive. As Janette Dates and William Barlow assert in *Split Image: African-Americans in the Mass Media*, "the mass media produce rituals and myths that explain, instruct and justify practices and institutions…linking symbols, formulas, plot and characters in a pattern that is conventional, appealing, gratifying…in tales that show how order is restored" (4).

In the midst of all of these changes in American culture generally and consumer culture in particular: the growth of the installment plan, urbanization, the influx of millions of Eastern

and Southern European immigrants to labor in America's factories and mines, the ascent of the captains of industry, the rise of the brand and stereotypical images of African-Americans attached to the same, the promises of the Reconstruction era and the disappointments of post-Reconstruction, Booker T. Washington positioned himself as *the* mediator between American consumer culture and African-Americans.

"One fork, and a sixty dollar organ!"

As we have seen, black consumption was stigmatized during the slavery era, as evidenced in the law, runaway advertisements, the growth of minstrelsy and the slave narratives. Indeed, in the post-slavery era, whites continued to express anxiety at the sight of prosperous African-Americans. As Paul Mullins writes, whites responded to examples of genteel consumption on the part of African-Americans with a marked anxiety which revealed their fears that "African-American consumption of mainstream goods provided a foothold in American society" (176). As one black female resident of Washington D.C. put it, "just generally, if you were black, you were not supposed to have either time or money, and if you did, you ought not to show it" (Chambers).

This anxiety is reflected in Mark Twain's classic novel composed during the late-Victorian era, *Huckleberry Finn* (1885), as exemplified by the reaction Huckleberry's father has to a well to do black man. He complains:

> Oh yes, this is a wonderful govmnent, wonderful. Why, looky here. There was a free nigger there, from Ohio; a mulatter, most as white as a white man. He had the whitest shirt on you ever see, too, and the shiniest

> hat; and there ain't a man in that town that's got as fine as clothes as what he had; and he had a gold watch and chain, and a silver-headed cane….they said he was a professor in the college…And that ain't the wust. They said he could vote, when he was at home. Well that let me out. Thinks I, what is the country a-coming to? (39)

Twain began composing his classic in 1876, the first centennial of our nation's founding, and the novel is concerned with the way the legacy of slavery continues to resonate in the post-bellum era. Huck's father begins his tirade against the mulatto by reflecting on his own clothing. He says, "look at my hat—if you call it a hat—but the lid raises up and the rest of it goes down till it's below my chin, and then it ain't rightly a hat at all" (39). Huckleberry Finn and his father are working class white characters and Huck's father must find a way to explain how a man of African descent can be so much higher than him in America's social hierarchy in terms of affluence and occupation. The visceral reaction that Huck's father has in response to the small, free black population before the war, only underscores the response many whites had to blacks after the war. As Robert Weems notes, after the Civil War, "apprehension of consumer culture's democratizing promises [were] amplified by a pervasive white apprehension of African-American desire and eroding racial boundaries" (157). [26]

It is in this context that Washington positions himself as the leader of freed African-Americans. In a passage that is reminiscent of Father Abraham's negative response to European-American consumption at a fair in Benjamin Franklin's "The Way to Wealth", Washington is appalled by the conspicuous consumption he witnesses when he briefly attends another

[26] Edward Kemble, the famous illustrator of *Huckleberry Finn*, also created the illustration for the Gold Dust Twins, who appeared in advertisements for Fairbanks Washing Powder, distributed by Lever Brothers (313). Interestingly, Kemble's illustrations for the novel are a key aspect of the debate about whether or not Twain's novel challenges or reinforces stereotypes of African-Americans.

institution of higher learning for blacks, Wayland Baptist Seminary in Washington D.C.. Relative to the students at Hampton Institute, he "found the students, in most cases, had more money, were better dressed, wore the latest style of all manner of clothing, and in some cases were brilliant mentally" (43). Generally, he says of African Americans in Washington D.C.:

> I found that while among them there was a large element of substantial, worthy citizens, there was also a superficiality about the life of a large class that greatly alarmed me. I saw young colored men who were not earning more than four dollars a week spending two dollars or more for a buggy ride on Sunday to ride up and down Pennsylvania Avenue in, in order that they might try to convince the world that they were worth thousands. I saw other young men who received seventy-five or one-hundred dollars per month from the Government, who were in debt at the end of every month. (44)

Not only does he disapprove of the consumption he witnesses by educated blacks in Washington D.C., he is also troubled by consumption patterns on the part of poor blacks when he ventures out to assess their needs before beginning Tuskegee Institute in Alabama. He writes:

> In these cabin homes I often found sewing machines which had been bought, or were being bought, on installments, frequently at a cost of as much as sixty dollars, or showy clocks for which the occupants of the cabins had paid twelve or fourteen dollars. I remember that on one occasion when I went into one of these cabins for dinner, when I sat down to the table for a meal with the four members of the family, I noticed that, while there were five of us at the table, there was but one fork for the five of us to use. Naturally, there was an awkward pause on my

> part. In the opposite corner of that same cabin was an organ for which the people told me they were paying sixty dollars in monthly installments. One fork, and a sixty dollar organ!
>
> In most cases the sewing machine was not used, the clocks were so worthless that they did not keep correct time--and if they had, in nine cases out of ten there would have been no one in the family who could have told the time of day—while the organ, of course, was rarely used for want of a person who could play upon it. (54)

With these words, Washington taps into various stereotypes as it relates to black consumption. As noted in the previous chapter, one of these stereotypes is that blacks are inherently irrational, an idea that can be traced to Thomas Jefferson's *Notes on the State of Virginia* when he writes that African-American "existence appears to participate more of sensation than reflection" (187-188). Washington reinforces the notion that blacks are irrational consumers, buying sewing machines that they do not use and organs that they could not play.

Moreover, in "'A Nation of Thieves': Consumption, Commerce and the Black Public Sphere," Regina Austin asserts that "Shopping and selling by blacks…are in essence considered deviant by many whites and blacks as well" (229). More specifically, Austin argues that *the* unspoken discourse concerning black consumption is that blacks are thieves. As discussed in the previous chapter, we can see the roots of this notion of blacks as thieves in runaway advertisements, which fore-grounded stolen clothing. By the time Washington writes his autobiography, the link between African-American consumption and deviance had been

consolidated through minstrel performances which featured images of slaves stealing chickens from their masters.

In Washington's narrative he perpetuates these stereotypes from the minstrel stage. In his famed Atlanta Compromise Speech he states that those in the audience must remember that blacks started "thirty years ago with ownership here and there in a few quilts and pumpkins and chickens (gathered from miscellaneous sources)" (101). Indeed, not even his mother, who is presented as a model of frugality, is exempt from this ugly stereotype. At the outset of his autobiography Washington writes that "One of my earliest recollections is that of my mother cooking a chicken late at night and awakening her children for the purpose of feeding them. How or where she got it I do not know. I presume, however, it was procured from our owner's farm" (10). As Houston Baker observes in "Booker T. Washington's Mastery of Form," "we are two pages into the narrative when we are confronted by a 'chicken stealing darky'…. How soothing and reassuring such a formidably familiar image of 'Negro behaviour' must have been to Washington's white readers!" (244).

We must also remember that in addition to the popularity of minstrel performances, Washington writes his autobiography at a time when advertising images reflected European-Americans' yearning for pre-industrial abundance, images of plantation life—in brief, for a time when white consumption was based on free black labor. Washington seems to respond to this by expressing a desire to remove Washington D.C.'s African-Americans from urban life and return them to the Southern countryside. He states:

> How many times I wished then, and have often wished since, that by some power of magic I might remove the great bulk of these people into the country districts

> and plant them upon the soil, upon the solid and never deceptive foundation of Mother Nature, where all nations and races that have ever succeeded have gotten their start,--a start that at first may be slow and toilsome, but one that is real nevertheless. (45)

Consistent with stereotypical images from products such as Aunt Jemima Pancakes and the Gold Dust Twins, Washington wants to remove these blacks from the "artificiality" of their participation in American urbanization, higher education and the professions, and place them in a context and in occupations that will appeal to his white readership, as he urges blacks to be content to work with their hands in the rural South, "to dignify and glorify common labour and put brains and skill into the common occupations in life" (100).

Washington goes beyond this, however, and explicitly links black consumption to black degeneracy. For instance, of the boys who teased him for wearing a homespun cap he writes, "I need not add, that several of the boys who began their careers with 'store hats'…have ended their careers in the penitentiary" (21). Of black women in Washington D.C. he writes:

> In Washington I saw girls whose mothers were earning their living by laundrying…. Later, these girls entered the public schools…. When the public-school course was finally finished, they wanted more costly dresses, more costly hats and shoes. In a word, while their wants had been increased, their ability to supply their wants had not been increased to the same degree. On the other hand, their six or eight years of book education had weaned them away from the occupation of their mothers. The result of this was in too many cases that the girls went to the bad. (45)

He never says what he means by "the bad" but it suggests that these women became prostitutes. To sum up, African-American consumption is correlated to stereotypical notions of irrationality, theft and even dissoluteness in Washington's autobiography. In this way, Booker T. Washington's narrative represents a significant departure from the autobiography of his African-American male predecessor, Frederick Douglass, who used his slave narrative to defy these negative notions of blacks' relationship to consumer culture.

Also, we must remember that by the end of the nineteenth century Father Franklin's lessons regarding thrift were a distant memory as white Americans, old and new, embraced the installment plan as a new form of debt. Indeed, to the extent that African-Americans were using debt to buy examples of bourgeois gentility such as organs, sewing machines and clocks, like all Americans, they were caught up in the spirit of the Gilded Age. This reality makes Washington's comments particularly troubling.

Indeed, it is in this way that Booker T. Washington stands in stark contrast to European-American leaders of the Revolutionary Era. Benjamin Franklin certainly criticized white Americans for over-indulging on consumer items and urged them to use his life as a model of discipline. Moreover, during the Consumer Revolution thrift became a way to protest oppression. For Washington also, thrift is indeed a way to counter oppression. He famously urges blacks to become economically independent, even espousing an economic nationalism, as he urged African-Americans to purchase land (as opposed to sharecropping) and patronize black business.

However, the European-American leaders a century before him also critiqued their oppressor—the British. As noted in the previous chapter, in their founding document, *The Declaration of Independence*, they are explicit in their criticism of King George, and demand

liberty, proclaiming that "all men are created equal." Washington takes a different tack, however, arguing that black Americans must *earn* full equality through industry and thrift. In 1895 he is invited to speak on the progress that blacks had made since emancipation before the Atlanta Cotton States and International Exposition. Instead of demanding equal rights in the tradition of Frederick Douglass, Washington criticizes blacks for exercising their right to vote and entering the political arena. He tells those assembled:

> ... The opportunity here afforded will awaken among us a new era of industrial progress. Ignorant and inexperienced, it is not strange that in the first years of our new life we began at the top instead of at the bottom; that a seat in Congress or the state legislature was more sought than real estate or industrial skill; that the political convention or stump speaking had more attractions than starting a dairy farm or truck garden. (99)

Washington urges blacks to focus solely on one half of the Benjamin Franklin equation, mastering their mind, body and relationship to American consumer culture. As August Meier writes in "Booker T. Washington: an Interpretation:"

> While whites had some responsibility, the most important part in the Negro's progress was to be played by the Negro himself; the race's future recognition lay within its own hands. On the negative side this emphasis on self-help involved a tendency to blame Negroes for their condition. Washington constantly criticized them for seeking higher rather than practical education, for their loss of places in the skilled trades, and for their lack of morality and economic virtues, and for their tendency toward agitation and complaint. (196)

However, it was this agitation and complaint upon which our nation was built, as European-Americans engaged in a Consumer Revolution *and* a Revolutionary War to gain their liberty from the British and it is this aspect of the Franklin equation that Washington avoids. As Phillipa Kafka argues, this is what distinguishes him from Frederick Douglass, who demanded "civil and human rights" for blacks until his death on February 20, 1895, seven months before Washington's famous or infamous "Atlanta Compromise" speech in September of that year (67).

However, one could argue that Washington was a man of his age, the Gilded Age, and the captains of industry certainly used their largesse to influence the political sphere, including bribing politicians to achieve their ends. Indeed, though Washington denounced political action on the part of African-Americans, behind the scenes he used his clout to push for full equality for blacks, for instance, supporting test cases against disenfranchisement in states such as Maryland (Meier 198). While these whispers in corner offices are important, Washington posited himself as *the* public voice for African-Americans in the post-slavery era, and he preached a gospel that many blacks found troubling. He encouraged blacks to be economically independent, but did not speak to the racial ills that led to practices such as white capping and sharecropping that thwarted the African-American "struggle" for economic achievement. He encouraged America's post-bellum labor structure in which educated black men could aspire to become Pullman car porters or waiters and educated black women were to be content to work as maids or laundresses. These issues he would not "force," at least in public, advocating gradualism instead. This approach was controversial in the black community in Washington's day and would remain so for generations to come.

Blacks were among several groups seeking equal rights in the late nineteenth and early twentieth century: workers, immigrants, and Native Americans. Though white women were ardent participants in the Consumer Revolution they played a limited role in the American Revolution. However, middle and upper-middle class white women, emboldened by their participation in the abolitionist struggle, advocated for their own rights in the second half of the nineteenth century. In 1848 they came together at Seneca Falls, New York and drafted a Declaration of Sentiments, modeled on the Declaration of Independence, in which they argued for full equality, including the right to vote and to keep the money they earned. Even as they advocated for the right to caste their ballots, in the late nineteenth century they used their new status as consumer citizens to protest the unfair treatment their working class sisters received in the workplace.[27]

One of these women, Florence Kelley, was associated with Hull House, the settlement house begun in 1889 in Chicago to help immigrants adjust to life in America. The women of Hull House sought to clean up the sweatshops, and make sure the children of the workers received universal public education. They also provided English classes for their parents. Kelley became a factory inspector, and in 1890 she started the New York Consumer's League with Leonora O'Reilly and Josephine Shaw Lowell. The League spread to other cities and soon became the National Consumer's League with Kelley as its executive secretary. The women of the League came up with a white list of companies that met their requirements for wages and working conditions. They also advocated for female sales clerks at department stores, demanding that they receive at least $6 per week and work a maximum of a twelve hour day.

[27] Middle and upper class white women were beginning to make limited headway in the professions. For instance, to increase her credibility as a factory inspector Florence Kelley attended law school at Northwestern University and passed the bar exam.

They encouraged women to buy products that had the "White Label," the National Consumer League's seal of approval. Realizing that flexing their economic muscle was not enough, the women of the League turned their attention to politics, advocating for a minimum wage, and limiting the hours of women workers and children in factories. Uniting with unions and other progressive organizations, with time their reforms were implemented.

Though black women could shop at department stores, they were not hired as sales clerks. White native-born American women were the only ones hired for these jobs in the late Victorian era. Indeed, a job as a sales clerk was at the top of the pecking order for working class women, followed by factory work and at the lowest rung domestic work, the only option available to the majority of black women.[28]

As noted earlier, this status at the lowest rungs of the female labor force was reinforced by advertising images. Though black women did not have a voice in America's growing advertising industry, they used their pens to challenge these images in fiction and non-fiction.

They also used their pens to challenge the self-appointed leader of this epoch in African-American life, Mr. Booker T. Washington. One of the most prominent of these women was Ida B. Wells. In the tradition of the writers of the slave narratives, Frederick Douglass and Harriet Jacobs, Ida B. Wells will follow the full model set by Benjamin Franklin in her autobiography: she will master herself and challenge her oppressor. However, unlike Douglass, Jacobs and Washington, her public writing will point towards and her private writing will reveal a relationship to American consumer culture that is less than immaculate, a theme that will also be explored in the fiction of one of America's first black female novelists, Pauline Hopkins.

[28] This hierarchy explains Beile's reaction to being treated like a domestic servant in "A Sweatshop Romance."

"Darky Damsel Gets Damages"

In her autobiography, *Crusade for Justice*, Ida B. Wells recalls that she and her siblings attend Shaw University, founded by the Freedmen's Aid Society in Holly Springs, Mississippi in1866. Of her youth she says simply, "Our job was to go to school and learn all we could" (9).[29]

However, this changes when her parents die in the Yellow Fever epidemic. She must leave school to support her four younger siblings and secures a job teaching in a rural area of Mississippi. Reminiscent of Benjamin Franklin, when her formal education ends she pursues a path of independent intellectual self-improvement. She writes:

> My only diversion was reading and I could forget my troubles in no other way. I used to sit before the blazing wood fire with a book in my lap during the long winter evenings and read by firelight. I had formed my ideals on the best of Dickens stories, Louisa May Alcott's, Mrs. A.D.T. Whitney's and Charlotte Bronte's books, and Oliver Optic's stories for boys. I had read the Bible and Shakespeare through, but I had never read a Negro book or anything about Negroes. (21-22)

Just as Benjamin Franklin finds a public voice when he anonymously submits a piece to his brother's newspaper as a teenager, it is Wells's writing ability that distinguishes her. When she leaves the rural school in Mississippi for a more lucrative teaching position in Memphis she joins a lyceum for black public school teachers. At each meeting a black newspaper, the *Evening*

[29] Shaw University changed its name to Rust University in 1882.

Star, is read aloud. When the editor of the *Evening Star* leaves Memphis he asks Wells to take over the paper and "the lyceum attendance was increased by people who said they came to hear the *Evening Star* read" (23). Soon the pastor of a large Baptist church begins reprinting her pieces in his publication, *The Living Way*. Still in her teens, and despite her filial responsibilities, Wells takes control of her intellectual development and writes that "newspaper work gave me an outlet through which to express the real 'me' and I enjoyed my work to the utmost" (31). In this way, she uses the Franklin model to take control of her mind.

As we have seen, Benjamin Franklin takes control of his body through diet and exercise, Frederick Douglass through physical combat and Booker T. Washington through cleaning and sleeping on the streets. As a black woman, however, Ida B. Wells must do this by taking control of the discourse around her body. While promoting the newspaper she edits in the Mississippi Delta, *The Free Speech*, she boards with a preacher and she and another young female visitor are called upon by the eligible young men of the town. The preacher's wife is from the North, and he extols the virtues of Northern women during Wells's stay. After Wells leaves he tells mutual friends that "morally there were no virtuous Southern girls" (43). As evidence, he points to a letter he retrieved from the trash following Ida B. Wells's visit. When Wells learns of this she demands a meeting with him because:

> I wanted him to know that virtue was not at all a matter of the section in which one lived; that many a slave woman had fought and died rather than yield to the pressure and temptations to which she was subjected. I had heard many tales of such and I wanted him to know at least one southern girl, born and bred, who had tried to keep herself spotless and morally clean as my slave mother taught me. (44)

Though slavery is over, the rhetoric about undisciplined black female sexuality abounds in the dominant culture and even within black culture. For instance, when she determines to keep her family together at the tender age of 14, a rumor spreads in Holly Springs's black community that she is exchanging sexual favors with white men for money after she is visited by a white doctor in the wake of her parents' demise. What the blacks in her community do not know is that she asked the doctor to put $300 of her father's money in a safe downtown. Therefore, Wells must defend her own sexuality and that of all black female bodies, past and present. Though, as she says earlier, she may not have read anything about Negroes, her response to this pastor demonstrates that she is steeped in tales of black female sexuality by black women, and she uses these tales to counter this Reverend's rhetoric. She may not have read Harriet Jacobs's slave narrative, for instance, but she knows "the story" of a slave woman defending herself against the advances of her master and she uses this narrative as her own defense. She pens a note for the pastor to read to his congregation: "To Whom It May Concern: I desire to say that any remarks I have made reflecting on the character of Miss Ida B. Wells are false. This I do out of deference to her as a lady and myself as a Christian gentleman" (44). In this way, she takes control of her body by taking control of the negative dialogue around herself in particular and black women in general. She is not a loose woman, and she will not tolerate accusations of the same.

Having taken control of her mind and body, according to the Franklin formula, she must master her relationship to American consumer culture and she does so by suing the Chesapeake and Ohio Railroad. When traveling by train from Shelby to Memphis, Tennessee in 1884 she is asked to leave the ladies car, a car in which she has always traveled. Though the train does not have Jim Crow cars she writes that, "ever since the repeal of the Civil Rights Bill by the United

States Supreme Court…there had been efforts all over the South to draw the color line in railroads" (18). When the conductor tries to make her move to a car where other blacks are seated, the smoking car, she fights him—even biting his hand, and is removed from the train at the next station. She sues the railroad and receives $500, but the ruling is reversed by the State Supreme Court, which feared setting a precedent for other states. In brief, she is not willing to accept inferior accommodations for the same price white Americans pay. In this way she exhibits a spirit of defiance consistent with the ethos of Benjamin Franklin, Frederick Douglass and Harriet Jacobs.

Wells also gains control of her relationship to the market as a seller. In particular, she must decide what skills she will develop and sell to the labor market. As a black woman, the most lucrative career option is teaching, a career for which she is not suited. As she articulates it, "I never cared for teaching, but I had always been very conscientious in trying to do my work honestly. There seemed to be nothing else to do for a living except menial work, and I could not have made a living at that" (31). Though she is not happy with teaching, her work ethic makes her competent at the task and she is able to secure and retain employment. As we have seen, she finds true happiness when she begins writing. Through journalism, she goes from surviving to truly thriving in her vocational choice.

When she is asked to write for the *Free Speech* in Memphis in 1889, she casts a keen eye on the business aspect of this proposition. She asserts, "I refused to come in except as equal with themselves, and I bought a one-third interest. I was editor, Mr. Fleming was business manager, and Rev. Nightingale was sales manager" (35).

After losing her job as a teacher for speaking out against the poor conditions in black public schools in Memphis in the pages of the *Free Speech*, she works to extend the circulation of the paper into the Delta. She is a success, in part because of her novelty as a female publisher. One imagines too, that she is a persuasive communicator. She says, "In nine months time I had an income nearly as large as I had received teaching and felt sure that I had found my vocation. I was very proud of my success because up to that time very few of our newspapers had made any money" (39). In addition to being a talented writer, she is shrewd businesswoman—a tough negotiator when it comes to joining the *Free Speech* and a capable, hardworking seller. Indeed, it is during her travels through the Delta when she responds to the pastor who makes negative comments about black Southern women. In these ways, as a young woman in her mid-twenties, she has taken control of her intellect, the discourse around her body and her relationship to American consumer culture. As we have seen, unlike Booker T. Washington, this control is not only characterized by mastering internal forces, but by fighting against external forces—the preacher in the Delta, the Chesapeake and Ohio Railroad—that would subjugate her.

"As sharp as steel trap"

When Wells begins her writing career with the *Evening Star* and *Living Way*, like Booker T. Washington, she does so with the intent of being a leader of her fellow African-Americans. In this regard she is influenced by her father, a carpenter and leader in Holly Springs's black community. As Miriam De Costa-Willis puts it, "she received her political and civic training from her father and other black Holly Springs men" (7). As we have seen, by choosing the surname Washington, Booker T. Washington imagines himself a leader of black Americans as a

boy. Ida B. Wells, by using her father and men like him as models as a youth, also imagines herself in a leadership role, and when she begins writing for the *Evening Star* and *Living Way*, she does so with the intent of assisting rural blacks in negotiating their lives as freed men and women. She writes:

> I had an instinctive feeling that the people who had little or no school training should have something coming into their homes weekly which dealt with their problems in a simple, helpful way. So in weekly letters to the *Living Way*, I wrote in a plain, common-sense way on the things which concerned our people. (23-24)

Indeed, she fashions the *Evening Star* and *Living Way* into a kind of *Poor Richard's Almanac* for African-Americans. She has already distinguished herself in the black community by fighting back against the railroad company and her influence grows as her articles are copied in newspapers throughout the country. She is determined to be a leader despite her gender.

Indeed, Wells is often portrayed in masculine terms. Using Wells's pen name, "Iola,"one commentator asserts, "She has become famous as one of the few our women who handle a goose quill with diamond point as easily as any man in newspaper work. If Iola were a man she would be a humming independent in politics. She has plenty of nerve and is as sharp as a steel trap" (33). A Miss Lucy Smith writes of her:

> Miss Ida B. Wells, 'Iola' has been called the Princess of the Press, and she has well earned the title. No writer, the male fraternity not excepted, has been more extensively quoted; none struck harder blows at the wrongs and weaknesses of the race. Her readers are equally divided between the sexes. She reaches the men by dealing with the political aspect of the race question, and the women she meets

> round the fireside…. By the way, it is her ambition to edit a paper. She believes there is no agency so potent as the press in reaching and elevating a people. (33)

These quotes speak to the leadership she has already attained in the black community and the leadership she is seeking. They acknowledge her credibility in the public realm dominated by men and that she is suitably feminine, in that she can speak to women in the private realm. Reminiscent of the way Frederick Douglass gained power over his body, by fighting his overseer, the language used to describe Wells's role as a journalist evokes weaponry. She handles a feminine, soft, "goose quill" with a "diamond point." She is "sharp" as "steel." She has "struck blows" at white racism and the weaknesses of the race. In terms of leadership, she is quoted more than any man, which means that her words carry significant weight in the black community. As other observers have noted, her pen is her sword.

But it is not just her pen that is her sword. Like Harriet Jacobs's grandmother, Aunt Martha, Wells is prepared for a physical confrontation. After she begins to write articles condemning lynching she says:

> I had bought a pistol the first thing after Tom Moss was lynched, because I expected some cowardly retaliation from the lynchers. I felt that one had better die fighting against injustice than to die like a dog or a rat in a trap. I had already determined to sell my life as dearly as possible if attacked. I felt if I could take one lyncher with me, this would even up the score a little bit. (62)

Like her foremothers during slavery she must imagine different possibilities as a woman than what was typical for European-American women, who were just beginning to organize themselves to fight for equality towards the end of the nineteenth century. Without a father or

husband for protection, she uses her tongue and pen as a defense against the inflammatory words of the Reverend in the Delta, and she is willing to use a gun to protect herself from the murderous possibilities of white racism.

She is also willing to take on an emerging leader in the black community, Booker T. Washington, just as he is "beginning to get recognition for the success of his work at Tuskegee," when he writes an article in the *Christian Register*, a white publication, in which he criticizes black preachers as unqualified and immoral (41). Though Wells is also critical of the excesses of black ministers, "When the people needed such criticism, I felt he ought to have done as we did—tell them about it at home rather than tell our enemies abroad" (41). She writes an article in which she condemns Washington for this. Both of their careers are on the ascent, and she does not cower to him because he is a man or because of the support he receives from influential whites for his non-combative approach. Without a doubt, she sees him as an equal. He responds to her article by inviting her to a farmer's convention, but she does not attend, perhaps an early repudiation of his emphasis on economics at the expense of political agitation.

As we have seen, the black public, male and female, was receptive to her leadership. For instance, Frederick Douglass, with whom she develops a close friendship, writes the Preface to her pamphlet on lynchings in the South, *A Red Record* (1895). Reminiscent of the authenticating documents that were placed at the beginning of slave narratives, in which a white leader of the abolitionist movement vouched for the authenticity of the narrative, Frederick Douglass's endorsement of *A Red Record* acts as a kind of authenticating document, crowning Wells an heir, if not *the* heir of activist black leadership in the post-slavery era. He writes:

> Let me give you thanks for your faithful paper on the lynch abomination now generally practiced against colored people in the South. There has been no word equal to it in convincing power. I have spoken, but my word is feeble in comparison….. Brave woman! You have done your people and mine a service which can neither be weighed nor measured. (11).

This leadership role is underscored, perhaps, when she is invited to speak about lynching in England by Mrs. Isabelle Fyvie Mayo, a writer, and Miss Catherine Impey, who agitated against British imperialism in India. She is at Douglass's home when the letter arrives asking her to speak in England and Scotland. She recalls, "They knew Mr. Douglass was too old to come, and if for that reason I could not come, to ask him to name someone else. I gave him the letter to read and when he finished he said, 'You go, my child; you are the one to go, for you have the story to tell'" (86). Though various scholars have noted the impact of Douglass's slave narrative on Washington's autobiography, there is no such meeting of this nature between these two men. Indeed, for Frederick Douglass it is Ida B. Wells who represents the next generation of uncompromising leadership—her gender not-withstanding.

In this way, Wells's life as a black woman in the post-slavery era continues to reflect the legacy of bricolage as seen in Harriet Jacobs's slave narrative, *Incidents in the Life of a Slave Girl*. From the tensions of her personal life—an orphan at the age of 14—she creates synthesis in that she manages to support herself and her siblings while pursuing her vocation. Moreover, just as Harriet Jacobs could imagine herself "a useful woman and a good mother"— fulfilling a traditional role for women, that of mother and an active participant in public life as it related to the liberation of African-Americans, Ida B. Wells acts as a maternal figure for her siblings and

becomes one of the most prominent activists in the black community in the post-bellum period. She is indeed, an independent woman.

"Keep on Staying off the Cars"

Though she does not attend Washington's farmer convention, her close friend, Thomas Moss, embodied Washington's ideal of advancement through economics. She says of Thomas Moss, "he owned his little home, and having saved his money he went into the grocery business with the same ambition that a young white man would have had" (48). Though he is in competition with a white-owned grocery store on the same street, his business, which he shares with two other black men, Calvin McDowell and Henry Stewart, thrives.

These "peaceful, law-abiding citizens and energetic business men" who, consistent with Booker T. Washington's advocacy of black economic empowerment, believed that the race problem "was to be solved by eschewing politics and putting money in the purse," are confronted by their white competitor and when they fight back they are jailed, released by a mob and lynched (36-37). This incident helps Wells to see that lynching is not only a response to black enfranchisement, but also to black economic success. She says that the lynching of the owners of the People's Grocery Store "opened my eyes to what lynching really was. An excuse to get rid of Negroes who were acquiring wealth and property and thus keep the race terrorized" (64).

Instead of reifying stereotypes related to black consumption, Wells challenges them in her autobiography. As stated earlier, Regina Austin asserts that the undercurrent in the rhetoric around black consumption is that blacks attain goods through illicit means—that blacks are thieves. Wells, however, portrays blacks as victims of white theft. For instance, after putting the

owners of the store in jail, she reports that "This mob took possession of the People's Grocery Company, helping themselves to food and drink, and destroyed what they could not eat or steal" (51). Indeed, this scene is reminiscent of the one in Harriet Jacobs's slave narrative, in which poor whites invade the slave quarters annually and steal the slaves' possessions. In this way, she challenges the notion that blacks are thieves as she portrays whites as guilty of this crime.

As I have argued, another aspect of the unspoken discourse relating to black consumption is characterized by the inherent irrationality of African-Americans. Wells also counters this in her narrative. After the lynching of Moss and his business partners Blacks in Memphis stop patronizing the street cars. The superintendent and treasurer of the City Railway Company meet with Wells to implore her to encourage blacks to begin riding them again. They patronizingly assert that "they had heard that Negroes were afraid of electricity" and she reminds them, "They were doing so until six weeks ago, yet you say you don't know the cause of the falling off. Why, it was just six weeks ago that the lynching took place" (54). What Wells realizes and what the representatives of the City Railway Company come to realize is that less than 30 years after gaining their freedom Memphis's African-Americans are in the midst of a consumer revolt, and she plays a key leadership role in this agitation. She writes the interview up in the *Free Speech* and goes to the two largest black churches in Memphis and "urged them to keep on staying off the cars" (55).

She writes:

> For the first time in their lives the white people of Memphis had seen earnest, united action by Negroes which upset economic and business conditions. They had thought the excitement would die down; that the Negroes would forget and

> become again, as before, the wealth producers of the South—the hewers of wood and drawers of water, the servants of white men. But the excitement kept up, the colored people continued to leave, businesses remained at a standstill, and there was still a dearth of servants to cook their meals and wash their clothes and keep their homes in order, to nurse their babies and wait on their tables, to build their houses and do all classes of laborious work. (63)

Their actions are a repudiation of Washington's emphasis on subservience, as well as contemporary advertising images of blacks as docile, content Southern servants. As she writes later, "Mr. Washington's theory had been that we ought not to spend our time agitating for our rights; that we had better give attention to trying to be first-class people in a Jim Crow car than insisting that the Jim Crow car should be abolished" (265). Spurred by Wells and other African-American leaders however, blacks in Memphis have abandoned their roles in the South's racialized labor structure.

Moreoever, they abandon their roles as consumers. Wells writes:

> Besides, no class of people like Negroes spent their money like water, riding on streetcars and railroad trains, especially on Sunday excursions. No other class bought clothes and food with such little haggling as they were so easily satisfied. The whites had killed the goose that laid the golden egg of Memphis prosperity and Negro contentment; yet they were amazed that colored people continued to leave the city by scores and hundreds. (64)

While Wells is critical of black consumption, she does not condemn the same in the manner of Washington. As we have seen, Wells is critical of the faults she finds in the African-

American community, but like the founding fathers, she also uses her voice against their oppressor.

Perhaps another reason why Wells is more tolerant can be found in her diary, as she constantly struggled with her own spending. As Miriam De Costa-Willis notes:

> Money was a problem for Wells, partly because of family obligations: $10.00 a month support for her two sisters, Annie and Lilly, who lived in California with their Aunt Fannie; and occasional assistance to her brothers, Jim and George. Wells used her diary as an account book, in which she meticulously recorded expenditures for rent, carfare, clothing and lessons… Her one extravagance was clothes. She spent, for example, $23.00—almost half a month's salary—on one dress, paying $15.80 for materials and $7.60 for labor. Like diarist Alice Dunbar-Nelson, Wells was determined to dress well (58).

Indeed, Wells constantly writes of being in debt. For instance, she says of her aunt, "feel it to be doing her an injustice when she is bearing all the load. I was not able to buy that dress but did so & now I am to be drawn into something else expensive & profitless against my will" (63). Another entry reads, "I am very sorry I did not resist the impulse to buy that cloak. I would have been $15 richer" and in yet another she despairs, "It seems as if I should never be out of debt" (26, 59). Responsible for her younger siblings, she is torn between her filial duties and her own desire for consumer goods. Like many other Americans she often paid for these good using the installment plan. Miriam De Costa-Willis notes that Wells frequented two department stores in Memphis, Menken's Palatial Emporium and B. Lowenstein and Brothers (47). In her

diary there are several references to making payments on clothing purchased at Menken's. Clothing was her weakness.[30]

In *Ladies Pages: African-American's Women's Magazines and the Culture that Made Them*, Noliwe Rooks discusses the pressures faced by women like Wells, who were involved in the black women's club movement which pushed for racial and gender equality in the late nineteenth century. In her diary Alice Dunbar-Nelson, one of the leaders of the club movement, wrote that another black club woman "looked tattered, unmended and ungroomed" (62). Rooks notes that, "not only did Dickinson's unkempt state speak to her personal condition, but also her class status and membership in [an] elite group of African American women" (62). Unlike some other black women in this elite group, Wells did not have wealthy parents, so she strained to keep up with the sartorial expectations of this influential group of black women.

Therefore, while Ida B. Wells fights back against the railroad company and successfully promotes her newspaper, the *Free Speech*, her mastery of her relationship to consumer culture is directed outward, not inward. In contrast, Washington's account is characterized by strong internal control of his consumer desires (i.e. going without necessary garments and re-using socks while a student at Hampton to save money). Indeed, these accounts of frugality are also seen in the slave narratives of Frederick Douglass and Harriet Jacobs. There are no accounts of frugality in Wells's autobiography however, and her personal diary reveals why this is the case—it reveals her to be a woman who struggles with fiscal responsibility, particularly as it relates to supporting her family and her desire for consumer goods. Like all African-Americans Wells was certainly responding to the pressures of the dominant culture, which had turned from

[30] De Costa-Willis states that an Ida Wells is listed as a sales clerk at Menken's Department Store in the 1890s, but she indicates that this could not have been the same Wells because as I indicate earlier, black women were excluded from these positions.

notions of thrift forged during the eighteenth century and embraced the installment plan as a new form of debt to obtain clothes, furniture and musical instruments—the signs of being a successful American in the late nineteenth century. For her foremothers during the slavery era, consumption was a matter of defiance, as they wore clothes above their station to protest their status as slaves. This impulse was also at work among black club women in the post-slavery era, who used clothing to protest their status as second-class citizens. As we have seen too, during slavery African-American women's relationship to consumer culture reflected bricolage, as they took on the non-traditional role of provider-consumer to achieve a traditional end—nurturing their families. It is in this way, that Wells's desires are disruptive, in that they interfere with her ability to nurture her family. In short, her relationship to American consumer culture is less than pristine. Perhaps this is why she is critical, but less judgmental of the consumption of other African-Americans.

This lacuna in Wells's autobiography, this absence of accounts of her parsimony, opens up a new space in the writing of black women. In brief, we have moved from consumption as a site of defiance and bricolage in writing produced during the slavery era to consumption as a site of undisciplined desire in literature of the post-slavery period, including the emergence of the black female literary tradition in fiction, as exemplified by Pauline Hopkins's *Contending Forces* (1900).

"The refinements of living"

Though the main characters in *Contending Forces* use the Benjamin Franklin template to become American success stories, the opening paragraph of Hopkins's novel is the direct

opposite of the opening paragraph of *Benjamin Franklin's Autobiography*. Franklin begins his autobiography by pronouncing that he "emerged from the poverty and obscurity" into which he was "born and bred to a state of affluence and some degree of reputation in the world" (1). In other words, he went from being poor and unknown to rich and famous. Hopkins, however, begins her Preface with the words, "In giving this little romance expression in print, I am not actuated by a desire for notoriety or for profit, but to do all that I can in an humble way to raise the stigma of degradation from my race" (13). Hopkins is not interested in money or fame for herself, but in uplifting the black community. In this way, her motives are in the tradition of Harriet Jacobs, whose desires are all directed towards supporting her family and elevating her fellow African-Americans. However, like black autobiographers such as Frederick Douglass, Harriet Jacobs, Booker T. Washington and Ida B. Wells, Hopkins will create characters who replicate the Franklin model of self-discipline to achieve success. Her novel is an indictment of those who are motivated solely by selfish concerns, and she will create a character that deviates from the model depicted in Harriet Jacobs's slave narrative: black women who take on the non-traditional role of producer-consumer towards the traditional end of nurturing their families. Indeed, she contrasts two independent black women, both widows, one of whom replicates the Jacobs model and another who does not. In doing so, Hopkins initiates a literary tradition of depictions of black female desire and consumption which are unruly.

Contending Forces tells the story of the Smiths, a black family living in Boston at the end of the nineteenth century. Through hard work and thrift, Henry Smith, "a free-born Southern Negro—a Virginian" and his wife, "a handsome Mulatress from New Hampshire," secure a home for their two children, William and Dora, in Boston's South End (82-83). When the family patriarch passes away, Mrs. Smith rents rooms in their home to pay down the mortgage. Henry

Smith follows the Franklin model of success and through industry hopes to secure a better life for his children. Hopkins writes, "Like many colored men living in large cities, his life had been a continual struggle with poverty and hard work, combined with a desire for advancement for his children, and a clean, self-respecting citizenship for himself" (82). Henry Smith also, "imbibed, along with copious draughts of salt air, an unwavering desire for all the blessings of liberty, and strong notions that a man must depend upon himself in great measure and carve out his own fortune to the best of his ability with such tools as God had furnished him" (82). In this way Henry Smith represents the fullness of the Benjamin Franklin model of the ideal American citizen: he is self-reliant and believes in fighting for full equality.

Following the demise of the family patriarch, the members of the family continue to follow the Franklin model of American success. In one scene, Dora visits with Sappho, a young single boarder in the Smith home, and implores her to eat a piece of pie. Sappho exlaims "What, again!...That's the fourth time this week, and here it is but Friday. You'll be as fat as a seal….think of your fate, Dora, forty inches about the waist and only scraggy snags to show me when you grin" (120). Though they both give in to temptation and eat the pie, this passage reveals their concern with maintaining the beauty standards of the day, which was defined by the Gibson Girl, the "all-American girl" of the late Victorian period. Created by Charles Dana Gibson in pen and ink illustrations for magazines such as *Harper's*, *Collier's Weekly* and *Life*, the Gibson Girl had an hourglass figure and an aristocratic air. That Dora has the means to obtain to the Gibson Girl image is evidenced in her response to Sappho, "Thank heaven I'll never come to that while there's a dentist in Boston! I'll eat all the bonbons I want in spite of you, Sappho…" (120). Despite her protests, it is clear that like Sappho, Dora is a young woman who cares about maintaining her appearance.

The Smith family also values education. When we are introduced to the family we learn that, "A few years before the opening of our story the father had died, leaving a delicate wife, a young daughter and son just ready to go to college" (82). Young Will defers his studies, getting a job as a bell-boy to contribute to the family income until the mortgage has been paid, while "Dora was kept at her studies until she graduated from high school" (84). Despite their economic struggles, Hopkins writes that black families such as the Smiths:

> manage to…educate their children and give them the refinements of living—such as cultivating a musical talent, gratifying a penchant for languages, or for carving or for any of the arts of higher civilization, so common among the whites, but supposed to be beyond the reach a race just released from degrading bondage. Whatever grace or accomplishment may be the order of the hour, it is copied or practiced among some portion of the colored population. (86)

These refinements of living are reflected not only in their thirst for knowledge and their leisure pursuits but also in the objects in their home. The Smith home reflects cultured parsimony—the objects are not many, but tastefully selected. Hopkins writes, "In the parlor there was a handsome piano lamp, which was only used on special occasions; it was lighted, and threw a soft, warm glow over the neat woolen carpet, the modest furniture and few ornaments. In a corner stood Dora's piano, given her on her sixteenth birthday by her brother" (103-104). As Claudia Tate argues in *Domestic Allegories of Political Desire: The Black Heroine's Text at the Turn of the Century*, "as descriptions of middle-class decorum, professionalism, family economy and tasteful consumer consumption…these novels are allegories of desire—specifically domestic allegories of black political desire" (101). Specifically, I would argue that the Smith's mastery of body, mind and consumption demonstrates that they deserve full citizenship.

Importantly, however, Hopkins challenges Booker T. Washington's gradual approach to achieving full citizenship in that full African-American citizenship is characterized not only by subscribing to Benjamin Franklin's model of self-mastery, but also by fighting against European-American oppression.

"…into the prosperity she desired"

This necessity of fighting back is seen when the black community comes together at a meeting of the American Colored League to voice their anger and decide on a course of action after a black man is lynched in the South. During the meeting a man named Luke Sawyer stands up and recounts his experience growing up as a boy in Lousiana. In a story that is strikingly similar to that of the owners of the People's Grocery Store in Memphis, Luke Sawyer tells the story of his father, who opened a thriving store in Louisiana. Indeed, "he soon had the largest business and as much money as any man in the county" but "he didn't care to meddle with politics, for, with the natural shrewdness of many of us, he saw that might be made an excuse for his destruction" (256). When a white man decides to open a competing store on the same street the customers continue to support Luke's father, and he receives threatening letters. In short order, a group of white men come to the Sawyer home, set it ablaze, hang his father and murder his mother and siblings. His tale is an example of the murderous manifestations of European-American greed and covetousness in the post-slavery era.

Importantly, however, he has a second story to tell, which also involves the potential terrors of European-American desires, though this time of a sexual nature. Luke escapes and is taken in by a mulatto family in Louisiana. Here he witnesses the rape of the family's fourteen

year old daughter by her uncle, her father's white half-brother, which results in the birth of a child. As Ida B. Wells asserts in *On Lynching*, tales of black men raping white women as a defense of lynching masks the reality that black women continue to be raped by white men in the post-slavery era.

Luke concludes these tales by declaring that African-Americans must fight their oppressor, for, "A tax too heavy placed on tea and things like that, made the American colonies go to war with Great Britain to get their liberty. I ask you, what you think the American colonies would have done if they had suffered as we have suffered and are still suffering?" (262).

Importantly, just as white men were the prime instigators of the American Revolution, only men speak at the meeting of the American Colored League. As critics such as Ann DuCille have asserted, this is but one example of how patriarchy is evident in Hopkins's novel. However, as Claudia Tate argues, the women in the novel, specifically the widows, transform patricentric authority into matricentric influence (162). Therefore, when the women of Boston's black community gather at a sewing circle at the Smith home to raise funds to pay down their church's mortgage, "it's 'real' business is to talk about the affairs of the race" (Tate 163).

Mrs. Smith is an ideal widow in that she replicates the model set by her literary foremother, Aunt Martha, a figure that Harriet Jacobs foregrounds in her slave narrative, *Incidents in the Life of a Slave Girl*. Aunt Martha is impregnated by her master and manages to nurture her children, grandchildren and great-grandchildren. As a free woman, she becomes a successful businesswoman in her Edenton, North Carolina community as a purveyor of crackers. Her success allows her to provide material support to her family and she is the emotional bedrock for the family as well. Likewise, Mrs. Smith is without a partner, but successfully

provides for her family by taking in roomers who refer to her as "Ma" Smith (84). Indeed, we never learn her given name, as all the young people call her Ma Smith, emphasizing the maternal role she plays in her family and the community. Like Aunt Martha, her desire to be a successful seller (in her case, letter of rooms) is animated by her desire to nurture her family and the community.

The inverse of Ma Smith is Mrs. Willis, who organizes the sewing circle. Claudia Tate asserts that with Mrs. Willis, widowhood is made problematic in that Mrs. Willis eschews conventional female traits of "reticence and modesty," traits that Mrs. Smith embraces (164). While this is true, I would add that Mrs. Willis is also problematic because she represents a new model of black woman as producer-consumer, in that her actions are only partially animated by a desire to nurture her family and community.

In contrast to Mrs. Smith, who was a devoted wife, Mrs. Willis "loved her husband with a love ambitious for his advancement" (145). She "urges" him to become a politician, an ambition that "was not a dream to this man" (146). Despite his reluctance he "grew richer, more polished, less social, and the family broadened out and overflowed from old familiar 'West End' environments across the River Charles into the aristocratic suburbs of Cambridge" (146). In this way, she manipulates her husband into increasing the fortunes of their family.

When he dies, however, he leaves her without money, perhaps a way of repaying her for sucking the life out of him, in that he advanced materially, but was not able to pursue his own dreams. Left without resources by her husband, she is able to raise enough money as a speaker on the women's movement to "boast that she had made the fortunes of her family and settled her children well in life" as white feminists "sought to use her talents as an attraction for a worthy

charitable object, the discovery of a rare species of versatility in the Negro character being a sure drawing-card" (147). As Claudia Tate asserts, that she "boasts" of her children's accomplishments certainly demonstrates that she is not the ideal, humble Victorian woman. More than this, however, she uses malevolent means, feigning interest in a political movement, to achieve a traditional end for black women—supporting her family.

Now that her children are "settled…well in life" she is focused solely on her own prosperity and decides that the black women's club movement will be "the new problem in the woman question that should float her upon its tide into the prosperity she desired" (147). Hopkins writes that though her plans are "conceived in selfishness, they yet bore glorious fruit in the formation of clubs of colored women banded together for charity, for study, for every reason under God's glorious heavens that can better the condition of mankind" (147). What is significant is that Mrs. Willis uses black women to achieve prominence and wealth for herself, particularly as this maneuver is magnified by her relationship to Sappho.

More than a boarder in the Smith home, Sappho is a character who is pivotal to the action of the novel. Indeed, she is the young woman that Luke Sawyer describes in his second story, and she comes to Boston because her son is being cared for by a relative there. Sappho carries great shame about this, and during the sewing circle, she considers unburdening herself to Mrs. Willis. She asks Mrs. Willis if black women should be ashamed of the sexual sins committed during slavery, and she assures the young women assembled that one is not responsible for sins committed by compulsion. After the discussion ends Mrs. Willis beckons the young woman to her side and Sappho "longed to lean her head on that motherly breast and unburden her sorrows there" (155). However, Sappho's instincts tell her not to, for "Just as the barriers of Sappho's reserve seemed about to be swept away, there followed, almost instantly, a wave of repulsion

toward this woman and her effusiveness, so forced and insincere" (155). In this way, Mrs. Willis is connected to John Langley, the other character who wants to exploit Sappho.

John Langley is engaged to Dora Smith, but primarily because he hopes to get his hands on the Smith home. He is attracted to Sappho and when he discovers that Sappho has come to Boston to be near her son, Langley tries to solicit sex from her in exchange for keeping her secret. Langley is also a politician, and accepts a bribe from a white man in return for quelling the unrest in Boston's black community after the lynching which prompted the meeting of the American Colored League. In this way, he is presented as a selfish, desiring figure in terms of material goods *and importantly,* sexuality. As Hopkins puts it:

> He liked his ease, and enjoyed himself in every luxury that his modest means would allow. He had, moreover, a carefully concealed strain of sensuality in his nature, which as yet had never been aroused to an overindulgence in illegitimate and questionable pleasures; and with it all he had a mercenary streak, which made love of money his great passion. (91)

Like Mark Twain in *Huckleberry Finn*, past is prologue for Pauline Hopkins as she is concerned with the impact of slavery in the post-bellum era, and she begins her novel in Bermuda and South Carolina in 1790. Importantly, John Langley is the mixed-race descendant of Anson Pollock who sells his land to Charles Montfort, a prosperous planter from Bermuda. Montfort relocates to South Carolina to avoid freeing his 700 slaves when England outlaws slavery. Following the sale Charles Montfort continues to prosper, and he "gathered all the treasures which could possibly add to the comfort and pleasure of his lovely wife. Beautiful rugs covered the floors, fine paintings adorned the walls, gleaming statuary flashed upon one from

odd nooks and corners" (43). However, "into this paradise of good feelings … came Anson Pollock with his bitter envy and his unlawful love, and finally with his determination to possess the lovely Grace Montfort at all hazards" (45).

One day while visiting the Montfort family, Pollock witnesses their son playing with golden eagles. This astonishing sight, accompanied with the fact that Grace Montfort has refused his advances, strengthens his resolve to destroy Charles Montfort and possess his earthly treasures and wife. He does so by spreading rumors that Montfort is considering freeing his slaves and that his wife has black blood. Pollock uses this fact to take Montfort's land and to possess his wife and children, but Grace Montfort commits suicide soon after coming into his possession. These are the actions of a man whose "ruling passion was covetousness" (49). In this way, Hopkins traces the roots of American greed to the slavery era. Indeed, Charles Monfort is being repaid for if he "had been contented to accept the rulings of the English Parliament…although poorer in the end, he would have spared himself and family all the horrors which were to follow his selfish flight to save that property" (65).

Thus, John Langley is analogous to his desirous European-American ancestor. Like Anson Pollock, he will do anything to get money, possessions and sex. With the exception of John Langley, Mrs. Willis is the only character that Sappho feels is out to take advantage of her. For the first time, there is the intimation that a black woman will exploit another's painful life story of sexual exploitation under slavery. As we have seen, Ida B. Wells uses this story as a resource to stand up for herself, but Mrs. Willis will use this story to possibly take advantage of another black woman, just as she uses the black woman's club movement to gain wealth and possessions. Importantly, in her willingness to exploit another black woman's tale of sexual exploitation, Mrs. Willis's desires are obliquely tied to sexual covetousness, a possibility in black

female literary representation that will be explored by the next generation of writers during the Harlem Renaissance.

As we see in *Contending Forces*, as black women are beginning to create a literary tradition, they present black women whose desires are outside the bounds of the configuration established with Harriet Jacobs's *Incidents in the Life of a Slave Girl*: consumer-producer/family-community. For the first time, a black female author presents a black female character that is a less than immaculate consumer. Indeed, Mrs. Willis's motives and actions connect her to the terrors that European-American covetousness and cupidity visited upon African-Americans in general, and enslaved black women in particular.

The next chapter explores America's blossoming consumer culture in the 1920s. Within this milieu we will continue to see black female characters, single primarily as a result of widowhood, navigating their self-interested desires against the expectation that their desires be directed towards family and community. Chapter Three explores these themes in Nella Larsen's classic Harlem Renaissance novel, *Quicksand*.

Chapter Three

"The Colonel's Lady and Judy O'Grady:" Consumption, Race and Gender in the Harlem Renaissance

The history of Ford Motor Company, perhaps, is emblematic of the shifts that occurred in industry and advertising in the first decades of the new century. Henry Ford grew up on a farm in Michigan but disliked farm life, and like many Americans moved to the city, working as an engineer for the Edison Illuminating Company in Detroit. He began to work on his automobile in the 1890s. After years of tinkering, he built his first automobile, the Quadricycle, in 1896. He continued to improve his invention and began the Ford Motor Company in 1903, with the goal of building automobiles that were affordable for the average American, as opposed to those already on the market that were targeted towards wealthy consumers. As he famously asserted, "when I'm through, everyone will be able to afford one, and about everybody will have one" (500). In 1908 he produced the Model T, which at $850 was reasonably priced and durable, able to handle the nation's rough roads. However, Ford was able to lower the price even further when he introduced the assembly line in 1914, which relied on principles of scientific management and technological innovations such as electricity. John D. Rockefeller gushed that Ford's Highland Park was, "the industrial miracle of the age" (O'Sullivan 149). By 1914 the price of Ford's Model T was down to $490 for the basic model, making it even more accessible to Americans who made an average salary of $627 a year. Within two years half of all the cars in the United States were model Ts and by the 1920s Henry Ford was admired as America's premier capitalist.

In the early twentieth century industry continued to grow apace, and was spurred by World War I. During the War the Division of Advertising was formed under George Creel's Committee on Public Information. Advertising agency leaders "mounted campaigns to enlist army and navy recruits, enhance worker morale, and promote conservation of food and resources" (Marchand 6). Now even more convinced that advertising agencies could help push their products, companies were willing to place their prospects in the hands of these advertising men.

By the 1920s America's premier capitalist was also one of the last hold-outs against the value of advertising. The Model T was selling so well that Ford didn't see any reason to spend money on advertising and stopped advertising in national magazines. In 1917 the company dropped advertising altogether. Henry Ford did not begin advertising again until 1923. Indeed, from 1908 to 1927 he did not change the design of the Model T and is famously rumored to have said, "You can paint it any color, as long its black."

He was prompted to introduce a new model because of competition from the General Motors Company, which offered more choices, such as convenience features and cosmetic customization. In 1927 Henry Ford introduced the Model A, which came in four standard colors, excluding black.

To unroll the Model A, Ford chose the N.W. Ayer and Son advertising agency, one of five agencies that made bids for the account. With increased competition, the man who once claimed "If you really have a good thing, it will advertise itself," decided to launch the Model A by committing himself to a large scale advertising campaign (L.D. Lewis 126). Indeed, Henry Ford engaged in an unprecedented advertising campaign to launch the Model A, spending $1.3 million dollars to place advertisements in every English language national magazine in the

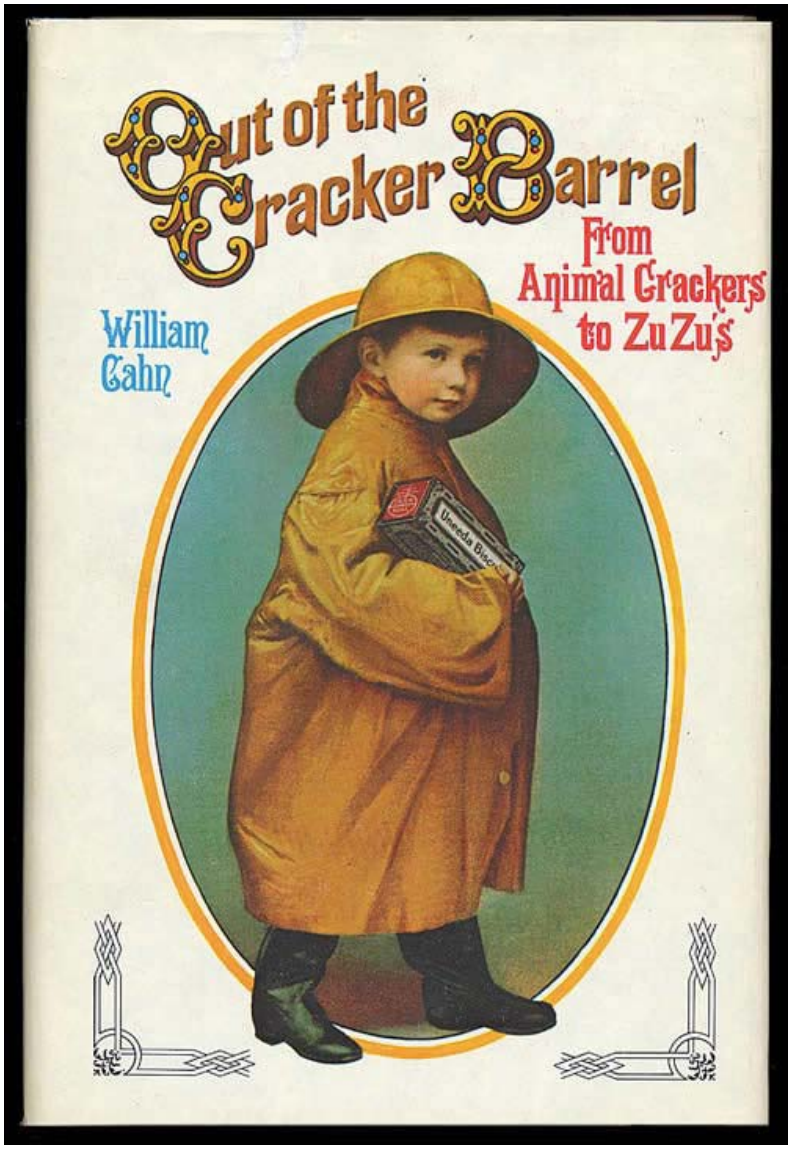
country, which amounted to 2,000 newspapers. The president of the Advertising Club of New York called it, "the most soundly coordinated advertising campaign in America's advertising history" (L.D. Lewis 202).

Ford hired the oldest advertising agency in the country to create advertisements for the Model A, N.W. Ayer and Sons, which began in Philadelphia in 1869. As we have seen, in the colonial era advertisements for runaway slaves and slave auctions were placed in newspapers such as Benjamin Franklin's *Pennsylvania Gazette*. The newspaper also featured advertisements for goods being sold by individuals. These advertisements were on the back pages of early American newspapers, in regular print and no more than a column in width.

This continued into the next century, until the purveyors of patent medicines began running colorful advertisements which made bold claims. Until this point advertising agencies were brokers, responsible for selling advertising space in newspapers and a few national magazines. However, N.W. Ayer and Son was the first agency to provide full services to its customers, providing them with content for their advertisements. Some of Ayer's early clients were John Wanamaker Department Stores and Singer Sewing Machines.

Advertisements of the late 1800s were content driven and often stated the facts about a product, as one would expect to find in a patent application. However, advertisers increasingly created slogans and characters to push products. For instance, N.W. Ayer created the slogan, "Lest you forget, we say it yet, Uneeda Biscuit" for the National Biscuit Company's first prepackaged biscuits in 1898. In 1899 N.W. Ayer introduced the Uneeda Biscuit Boy in Boots, which featured a boy of about five in a yellow raincoat, yellow hat and black boots with a

package of Uneeda Biscuits tucked under his arm. By 1900 the National Biscuit Company was selling over 10,000 packages a month, over 20 times the amount of its competitors (Twede 78).



Following World War I, the content of advertising went through another shift. As Roland Marchand notes in *Advertising the American Dream: Making Way for Modernity, 1920-1940*, prior to the 1920s advertisements offered "objective information about the product" rather than "subjective information about the hopes and anxieties of the consumer" (11). Indeed, early advertisements for the Model T described the qualities of the car. For instance, a 1908

advertisement is technical in its description of the automobile: "FORD HIGH PRICED QUALITY IN A LOW PRICED CAR: The Ford Four Cylinder, Twenty Horse Power, Five Passenger Touring Car $850.00 Fob. Detroit: We defy anyone to break a Ford Vanadium steel part with any test or strain less than 50% greater than is required to put any other special automobile steel entirely out of business." This black and white advertisement includes a picture of the Model T at the top, which covers one-fourth of the page. The remaining three-fourths of the page is text.


·LIFE·

The Ford Four Cylinder, Twenty Horse Power, Five Passenger Touring Car $850.00 Fob. Detroit

Ford Motor Company

Detroit

Ford

In contrast, a 1924 advertisement reads: "COMPANION OF HER HOLIDAYS: Anticipation of a joyous, carefree vacation are abundantly realized when a Ford closed car provides easy access to town or country. An increasing number of women who prefer to drive their own cars, are selecting the Ford Fordor Sedan …" In the latter advertisement the picture is in color and the car figures prominently behind two women who greet each other in a suburban setting, followed by a young man carrying a suitcase. The picture is three-fourths of the page and the text constitutes one-fourth of the page. Moreover, the text does not list the objective qualities of the Model T, but the subjective aspects of car ownership, as it suggests that to own the car is to have access to leisure time and the finances necessary to take a vacation.

COMPANION OF HER HOLIDAYS

Anticipations of a joyous, carefree vacation are abundantly realized when a Ford closed car provides easy access to town or country.

The attractive upholstery and all-weather equipment of the Fordor Sedan suggest comfort and protection on long trips, while the simple foot-pedal control assures ease of operation in crowded city traffic.

An increasing number of women who prefer to drive their own cars, are selecting the Ford Fordor Sedan for their personal use, knowing it to be an outstanding value as well as a possession in which they can take pride.

TUDOR SEDAN, $590 FORDOR SEDAN, $695 COUPE, $525 (All prices f. o. b. Detroit)

In a 1929 N.W. Ayer and Sons advertisement for the Model A, a picture of the car covers three-fourths of the page. The green Model A figures prominently in the picture, parked in front of a large suburban home. A man stands in front of the car and a woman behind it. The woman behind the car is having a conversation with a maid. Like the Model T, the Model A emphasized affordability, but affordable luxury. Advertisements for the Model A assume that the average customer not only vacationed, but also had servants and played golf on the weekends.

June, 1929 LADIES' HOME JOURNAL

Spring brings beautiful colors for the new Ford car

Mayflowers the fresh brilliance of Spring itself are the beautiful colors of the new Ford. They are rich in tone, yet carefully chosen, with a quiet good taste that endures.

There are eleven different Ford body types and all, with the single exception of the Station Wagon, are finished in a changing variety of colors.

You have the privilege of selecting from among these the color harmony that best suits your motoring needs and personal preference. Such choice is of course unusual in a low-price car and is one of the very special features of the new Ford.

Interior finish, upholstery and appointments are in keeping with this beauty of color and the trim, substantial lines which are so characteristically Ford. To the last least little detail, you can see evidence of the sincere quality that has been built into the car and the care that has been taken in its manufacture.

In all that goes to make a good automobile—in appearance—in safety—in comfort—in reliability—in economy—in alert, satisfying performance—the new Ford is an unusual value at a low price. Its ease-of-operation and control and its freedom from mechanical troubles make it a particularly good car for a woman to drive.

Ford

Ford Motor Company
Detroit, Michigan

With his decision to introduce the Model A in different colors, Ford embraced a shift in product promotion in the 1920s. Advertisers convinced the public that what was new was desirable, and even a major purchase like an automobile should reflect the changes in the seasons. As Roland Marchand puts it, by the 1920s advertising executives considered themselves "apostles of modernity" as they assisted the public in navigating urban skyscrapers and urban crowds, new pastimes and new lingo (1). They helped the public keep up with the fast pace of change in the 1920s, including the fast pace of production that made their role in the economy so critical. These "apostles of modernity" formed professional organizations, such as the American Association of Advertising Agencies. In 1926 President Calvin Coolidge spoke to the organization and proclaimed:

> When we stop to consider the part which advertising plays in the modern life of production and trade we see that basically it is that of education. It informs its readers of the existence and nature of commodities by explaining the advantages to be derived from their use and creates for them a wider demand. It makes new thoughts, new desires, and new actions. By changing the attitude of mind it changes the material condition of the people. (Ewen 224)

In brief, Coolidge celebrated advertisers' key role in raising Americans' standard of living by facilitating the sale of goods made possible by industrial innovations (Marchand 9).

As these advertisements reveal too, by the 1920s the primary audience for advertisements was women, who had become overwhelmingly responsible for the household purchases, marking a significant shift in the gender configuration of European-American consumer culture. Until the late Victorian era men were producers and consumers, and as late as 1860 it was unusual to see

women out on the streets, actively shopping. However, as we have seen, both the 1924 advertisement for the Model T and the 1929 advertisement for the Model A appeal to women.

As one contributor to *Printer's Ink* put it, "We must remember that most American women lead rather monotonous and humdrum lives…. Such women need romance. They crave glamour and color" (Marchand 67). Therefore advertisers offered ideal depictions of American women's lives, as busy, diverse, and action-filled, as an escape from their perceived prosaic reality. In advertisements of the 1920s women travel, shop in glitzy urban environs, play golf and go to the races. Indeed, the audience for these advertisements was characterized as either "class" or "mass" as reflected in the 1920s advertising expression, "the Colonel's Lady and Judy O'Grady," who were actually "sisters under the skin" in that they could be swayed by appealing to their anxieties and desires (Marchand 65).

However, even the mass audience was Americans who made over $1,000 per year, which excluded many Americans from being "the Colonel's Lady" or "Judy O'Grady." As noted above, when Henry Ford introduced his Model A he did so in English language publications only, excluding immigrants who had not mastered the language. As Roland Marchand points out, not only those without an easy command of English but other groups, such as tenant farmers and blacks were explicitly excluded from advertising's conception of their audience as a consumer democracy, in which one dollar equaled one vote, though some could cast far more votes (64). Others, such as immigrants, farmers and blacks were entirely disenfranchised.

"Wanted-Men for Laborers"

Therefore, even as blacks were disenfranchised politically, they were also disenfranchised in America's burgeoning consumer republic in the 1920s. However, though they were not advertised to by major brands, in publications such as The *Chicago Defender* and *Pittsburgh Courier*, blacks were acknowledged in the consumer republic in another way—as producers. The *Chicago Defender* was founded by Robert Abbott in 1905. By World War I it was the most influential black newspaper in the country, with most of its readership outside of Chicago. Its Northern location allowed it to take a strong stance on race issues and the paper was smuggled into the South by black entertainers and Pullman porters, where it was passed from person to person and read aloud in barbershops and churches. In the South it played a critical role in the Great Migration, in which over 1.5 million Blacks moved to the North, Midwest and West between 1914 and 1930. The *Chicago Defender* published job advertisements and articles which extolled life in the North and warned against the hazards of staying in the South.

With the outbreak of World War I, immigration from Southern and Eastern Europe came to a halt, even as the War increased industrial demands in areas such as the manufacturing of ammunitions and ship building. Northern companies actively recruited black workers, sending agents to the South and placing job advertisements in black newspapers such as The *Chicago Defender*. In this way, even as the advertising industry disenfranchised blacks as members of the consumer democracy, industries actively sought their labor in black newspapers such *The Pittsburgh Courier*. As James Grossman writes in "The *Chicago Defender* and Black Migration during World War I," Abbott was influenced by the ideology of Booker T. Washington, and "At first…believed progress was possible without migration…. Like Booker T. Washington, Abbott

counseled blacks to cast down their buckets in the South, and he agreed with his mentor that agricultural diversification could bring improvement" and that there were more job opportunities in the South (92). But, as job opportunities became available in the North in the midst of the War, The *Defender* began to encourage migration. In his editorials Abbott urged blacks to leave the South writing:

> Every black man for the sake of his wife and daughters especially, should leave even at a financial sacrifice every spot in the south where his worth is not appreciated enough to give him the standing of a man and a citizen in the community. We know full well that this would almost mean a depopulation of that section and if it were possible we would glory in its accomplishment. (Grossman 93)

This editorializing ran alongside advertisements such as, "Wanted—men for laborers and semi-skilled occupations. Address or apply to the employment department, Westinghouse Electric and Manufacturing Company, East Pittsburgh, PA" (Grossman 93). In this way, race leaders such as Robert Abbott, as well as major corporations advertised to African-Americans as laborers.

However, Abbott also imagined his black audience as consumers, and the *Defender* featured pictures of prosperous black Chicagoans in its pages. Moreover, though national companies refused to place advertisements in the newspaper, as Rodger Streitmatter notes, the *Chicago Defender* contained advertisements, "not only for jobs but also for a wide range of products that appealed to Chicago's swelling ranks of African-American consumers, stylish hats

and hair straightening products for women, suits and sporting goods for men" (153). However, these advertisements were placed by local companies, not national corporations.[31]

In the 1920s also, black labor remained available for figurative consumption through brands which began in the late 1800s such as Aunt Jemima Pancakes, and the Gold Dust Twins Washing Powder. Therefore, even as dishwashers and vacuum cleaners promised to diminish the drudgery of household labor, characters on products such as Uncle Ben's Rice and Rastus, the Cream of Wheat chef, promised white women in the 1920s servants in a box. In this way, as advertising consolidated itself in the late nineteenth and early twentieth century, blacks were present as laborers, not consumers in mainstream advertising.

Blacks responded to these editorials and advertisements in black newspapers, as well as encouragement from relatives who had already settled in the North, and continued to leave the South after the War ended. Though they were viewed in only one dimension by America's growing advertising industry, Black Americans were seeking full American citizenship as defined by Benjamin Franklin in his *Autobiography* some 150 years prior. They fled to the North because it offered greater educational opportunities. Southern legislatures allocated little money for black education, especially at the secondary level. Indeed, blacks were encouraged to drop out of school by the sixth grade and very few Southern blacks went to high school or college as landowners encouraged parents to put black children to work in the fields. In the North more money was allocated for education and attendance was mandatory, which made students stay in school longer. In this way, Southern migrants sought expanded educational opportunities for their children.

[31] This situation did not change until John H. Johnson convinces national corporations to advertise in *Ebony* magazine in 1945.

In the North too, their bodies were freer. African-Americans had greater anonymity in urban centers, and didn't have to worry that the wrong word, tone or action would result in arrest or worse (Crew 36). Their words and actions were not as circumscribed by Jim Crow etiquette as it was in the South.

Finally, as noted in the previous chapter, they were also escaping debt through the sharecropping system, the economic system planters embraced in the post-bellum era. In the sharecropping system the planter gave each tenant a portion of the profits from the crop. When the crop was harvested, the owner took the crop to market and after deducting the "furnishings," items purchased from the landowner's store on credit, gave the difference to the tenant farmer. The tenant's real or alleged debts exceeded the value of the crop so he could not get away from the land. In this way, just like European-Americans during the American Revolution, the Great Migration can be seen in part, as a Consumer Revolution as blacks moving to the North were escaping economic oppression, particularly as defined by debt.

In their pursuit of full American citizenship, Blacks were also emboldened by their participation in World War I, when black soldiers put their lives on the line for a nation in which they were still second class citizens. On February 17th, 1919, the Fifth Regiment of New York's National Guard triumphantly marched up Fifth Avenue, 1,300 strong. They had fought well, spending 191 continuous days in the trenches and black crowds lined the streets. Their march ended at 125th Street in Harlem, where the black population had increased exponentially, growing from 50,000 in 1910 to 200,000 in 1930. This explosion in the black Northern population and the thousands of white men returning home after the war led to the Red Summer of 1919, as blacks and whites clashed over job opportunities in Northern industrial centers.

In this way, the racial struggle in Northern centers was in large part an economic struggle. Even as they threw off the shackles of sharecropping and limited job opportunities in the South, black migrants were isolated into jobs that white workers thought they should perform in the North. African-American men did un-skilled labor, working in areas such as meat-packing, and the building trades, and as servants, working as janitors, cooks and cleaners, while white men took higher paying jobs in industries. Black women were also employed in industry, such as in the garment industry, but were primarily domestics. As Jaqueline Jones indicates in *Labor of Love, Labor of Sorrow: Black Women, Work, and Family from Slavery to the Present*, 60 percent of black women in the North were employed as domestic servants or laundresses (167). Black men made higher wages than they could in the South, but less than their white counterparts. Therefore, they relied on their female partners to supplement their incomes.

However, as Jay Kleinberg remarks in "Women in American Society, 1880-1920," poverty alone does not account for black women's higher rates of employment. Kleinberg notes the work of Elizabeth H. Pleck, who observed that black women's employment levels were higher than those of Italian immigrants of comparable income levels. Italian families relied upon the labor contributions of their children, particularly their sons, to offset the low incomes earned by their men. Black families had a different survival strategy, utilizing women's labor in the face of uncertain employment for men and the narrow range of opportunities for young black workers.

Importantly, this gender/income dynamic was the case even before blacks headed northward. Katherine White notes that the wives of black farmers often worked in town as domestics, and when they came home they had additional duties including field work, as well as the traditional female duties of cooking, cleaning and sewing (415). In 1910, almost six times as

many black women as white women reported an occupation outside of fieldwork (White 415). As White asserts:

> The intersection of gender and race created complex social conditions. Not only were black women afforded fewer rights and subject to greater physical threats, but their personal lives were further complicated by their participation in the labor force. Unlike white women, who were perceived as wives and mothers, black women were often viewed as laborers by the dominant white group, both before and after slavery. Further, employment for black men typically was limited and unstable. A black woman might still be employed while her husband could not find work. Although her income was economically beneficial to the household, her role as breadwinner challenged her husband's authority and the patriarchal order. Such situations were particular to black women and created much conflict within the home" (White 416).

In "Race, Gender and Marriage: Destination Selection during the Great Migration," White observes that this arrangement continued when blacks moved North:

> Several scholars have pointed out that the female role in the economic well-being of the black family has traditionally been more important than that of white families, often rivaling or exceeding the male role in the family. Given the substandard unemployment experiences of many black men, black women have historically been in the labor force as a necessity for economic survival, and black women, including black women who participated in the Great Migration, have

historically had higher levels of employment than have white women. (White, et. Al. 220).

In this way, the life of African-American women during the Great Migration of blacks from the South to the North continues to reflect bricolage, as black women were more likely to be in the workforce. They fashioned an alternative to the male-producer, female-consumer mode of male-female relationships in European-American culture. Moreover, in addition to limited work opportunities, black migrants faced a standard of living in the North that was considerably higher than in the South. In "The Great Migration of African-Americans, 1915-1940," Spencer Crew notes that Black migrants also paid more for rent, paying twice as much as white renters for comparable housing in Northern cities (36). They also paid more for food and clothing in neighborhood stores (Crew 36). To ease this expense they took in boarders and other family members. The average migrant earned about $25 for a 48 to 60 hour workweek, at a time when, according to The Bureau of Labor Statistics, a family of four needed $43 per week to maintain a decent standard of living. In this way, the North provided an improved standard of living, but less than the streets paved with gold promised in the pages of newspapers such as *The Chicago Defender*. For these reasons, black women contributed to the family's income in large numbers. While this arrangement certainly led to conflict, as several scholars have noted, we should not overlook the liberating effect it had on the lives of black women as well as relationships between black men and women, liberating possibilities that are explored by black female writers of the 1920s.

"Revaluation of the Negro"

W.E.B. Du Bois, raised in Massachusetts and the first African-American to receive a Ph.D. from Harvard University, along with Ida B. Wells, was one of Booker T. Washington's prime adversaries during the post-Reconstruction era. In 1903 he published the essay "Of Mr. Booker T. Washington and Others" in his groundbreaking collection *The Souls of Black Folk*. In the essay he sharply criticized Booker T. Washington's conciliatory approach to improving the lives of African-Americans. On August 15th, 1906, W.E.B Du Bois gathered with over fifty members of the Niagara Movement in Harper's Ferry, West Virginia. The Niagara Movement, the precursor to the NAACP, officially began one year earlier, with a meeting of 29 African-American leaders in July, 1905 on the Canadian side of Niagara Falls. They positioned themselves within the tradition of the American Revolution, composing a "Declaration of Principles," in which they demanded equality in all matters, a repudiation of Booker T. Washington's accomodationist emphasis on African-American economic empowerment at the expense of political, social, and educational equality.

In addition to disenfranchisement, lynching, Jim Crow segregation and limited educational opportunities, the members of the newly founded NAACP were also galvanized by the race riot in Springfield, Illinois in 1908. It was sparked when two black men were accused of raping white women. A white mob demanded that the men be released to them and when they learned that the men had been transferred from the local jail to a prison in Bloomington, Illinois, over 60 miles away, they exacted revenge on Springfield's black citizens. Forty homes and 24 businesses were destroyed and seven people were killed over the course of two days. While this riot echoes the familiar post-Reconstruction tale of black men, accusations of rape, lynchings and black businesses destroyed, it actually marked major shifts occurring in American life.

By 1900 Springfield, Illinois was a major industrial center, particularly in the coal industry, and scores of black residents were used as scabs during labor strikes. Indeed, the 1908 riot in Springfield, Illinois was a trickle in the flood that was to come in African-American and American life as millions of African-Americans were brought to Northern industrial centers such as Springfield as strike breakers in the ensuing decades.[32]

As blacks continued to move to the North tensions between blacks and whites often erupted in violence. In Chicago, a riot occurred in 1919 when a black boy wandered into the waters off the white section of a local beach. He drowned when whites responded by throwing rocks at him. A white man accused a black man of the murder and when the white police officers tried to arrest him, the blacks fought back and a riot ensued. The rioting continued for several days and many people were beaten. When the dust settled 38 people were killed, 23 of them black.

In the wake of this riot, Chicago's leaders asked members of the NAACP to produce a report of the incident. The NAACP grew out of the Niagara Movement, which by 1909 had fallen into disarray due to financial problems and the intervention of Booker T. Washington, who used members as spies and trouble-makers. The Niagara Movement disbanded in 1909, and Du Bois began a new organization, the NAACP, with the practical and financial assistance of liberal whites such as Florence Kelley, Mary White Ovington and Oswald Garrison Villard. The leading member of the NAACP committee that produced the report on the Chicago riot was Charles Johnson, a black sociologist at the University of Chicago. Along with white members of

[32] In fact, as early as 1892 blacks were used by Henry Clay Frick in the Homestead, Pennsylvania strike at Andrew Carnegie's steel mill, which I discuss in the previous chapter. As Nell Painter notes, "the…steelworkers of Homestead watched with resentment as new workers, many black, took their jobs. The Amalgamated Association barred blacks, and strikebreaking was one of the few avenues through which black workers could secure what were, for them, well-paid jobs in industry" (114).

the NAACP such as Joel Springarn, Julius Rosenwald and five other black leaders, the NAACP produced a report that reflected Johnson's positive approach to race relations. In "The Negro in Chicago: A Study of Race Relations and a Race Riot," they downplayed economic conflict and asserted that poor race relations were not a result of white racism. Instead they insisted that, "mutual contact and responsible conduct by authorities would reveal that, differences between the races were so minimal that sustained enmity would be impossible" (D.L. Lewis 47). For their part, African-Americans had placed too much emphasis on race pride, instead of focusing on what they had in common with whites, and the report recommended the creation of a race relations committee. These findings reflected Johnson's belief in a race relations cycle that included: contact, conflict, accommodation and finally, assimilation (D.L. Lewis 46).

In the meantime, in New York City, W.E.B Du Bois, a fellow sociologist, had another kind of race committee in mind. Du Bois became the editor of *The Crisis*, the official organ of the NAACP. Johnson also headed to Harlem to become the national director of research at the Urban League. Even as he emphasized their similarities, Johnson argued that different races had different characteristics. Blacks, in Johnson's view, were "artists, loving life for its own sake" (D.L. Lewis 46). He felt that blacks should respond to their status as second class citizens by making headway in the only arena that hadn't been closed to them: the arts. He embraced Du Bois's notion of a Talented Tenth of African-Americans who would lift the remaining ninety percent of blacks out of their inferior position. Blacks may have been blocked from the ballot box and jobs, but not from the arts, and this arena was suited to African-American elites. In this way, the best of the race would gain recognition of the whole through their artistic achievements. Race leaders like Du Bois and Johnson combined the ideas Washington and Du Bois as they played a leading role in the New Negro movement of the 1920s. Their approach represented a

shift from contentious areas such as poor economic opportunities and political disenfranchisement and a focus instead on an area that was deemed safe—artistic expression. These leaders harnessed and were challenged by forces such as the Great Migration from the South, and an influx of black immigrants from the West Indies.

Indeed, the time was ripe for blacks to express their true essence, as defined by Johnson, as white Americans were disenchanted with modern life because of the carnage of World War I and the alienating aspects of industrialization. As David Levering Lewis expresses it in *When Harlem Was in Vogue*, "if the factory was dehumanizing, the campus and office stultifying, and the great corporations predaceous, the Afro-American—excluded from factory, campus, office, and corporation—was the perfect symbol of cultural innocence and regeneration" (91). In March 1924, Charles Johnson invited younger black writers, such as Langston Hughes, Jessie Fauset, Gwendolyn Bennett and Countee Cullen to the Civic Club in Manhattan to celebrate their work. Paul Kellog, the editor of the *Survey Graphic* magazine was there, and decided to devote an entire copy to black issues.

The tome that kicked off the Harlem Renaissance, *The New Negro: Voices of the Harlem Renaissance*, an expanded version of the *Survey Graphic* magazine, was published by Albert and Charles Boni in 1925. In his "Introduction" to *The New Negro*, Alain Locke, philosophy professor and the master of ceremonies of the Civic Club dinner, asserted that the anthology represented, "the releasing of our talent group from the arid fields of controversy and debate to the productive fields of creative expression. The especially cultural recognition they win should in turn prove the key to that revaluation of the Negro which must precede or accompany any considerable further betterment of race relations" (15).

In addition to Langston Hughes, Countee Cullen and Zora Neale Hurston, another young black artist who was encouraged to till the fields of creative expression was Nella Larsen. Larsen was born to a Danish mother and a black father in Chicago in 1891. Following her father's death, her mother remarried a white man and Larsen was sent to the prestigious African-American college, Fisk University in Nashville, Tennessee. She later graduated from nursing school at Lincoln Hospital in New York City. Following her graduation she spent a year at Booker T. Washington's Tuskegee University, but quickly became disillusioned there. She returned to New York and married Elmer Imes, a prominent black physicist, in 1919. After her marriage she left nursing to work as a librarian and began writing short stories. She was encouraged in her literary endeavors by Charles Johnson and Alain Locke, whom she met when she began working as a librarian in Harlem. In 1928 she won the second prize in literature from the Harmon Foundation, which awarded emerging black talent, for her first novel, *Quicksand.* Carl Van Vechten, prominent white patron of the Harlem Renaissance, introduced her to his publisher, Alfred Knopf, which published *Quicksand* in 1928 and her second and last novel, *Passing*, in 1929.

"The things which she had now come to desire:"

In *Reconstructing Womanhood: the Emergence of the Afro-American Female Novelist,* Hazel Carby asserts that Helga Crane of Nella Larsen's *Quicksand* (1928) is "a consumer" making this "the first text by a black woman to be a conscious narrative of a woman embedded within capitalist social relations" (170). As I have asserted earlier, black women have presented

themselves as consumers since the beginnings of their literary tradition, notably in Harriet Jacob's *Incidents in the Life of a Slave Girl* (1863). Indeed, rather than being anomalous, *Quicksand* extends matters of consumption, race, gender, and sexuality explored in earlier works by African-American women.

Helga Crane, like Nella Larsen, is the product of a relationship between a black West Indian father and a Danish mother. She is sent to a black boarding school by her white Uncle Peter when her mother dies and upon her graduation she looks forward to teaching at Naxos, based on Booker T. Washington's Tuskegee Institute, with "pleasant expectancy" (23). After two years at Naxos she is discontent with "the Naxos policy of uplift" and attacks the institution as an"educational machine" that promotes uniformity (5, 17).

As Helga contemplates leaving Naxos at the beginning of the novel, Miss MacGooden, the dormitory matron, implores the students, "Don't let me hear of a single one of you being late for breakfast. If I do there'll be extra work for everybody on Saturday. And please at least try to act like ladies and not savages from the backwoods" (12). As discussed in the previous chapter, Booker T. Washington wished to be *the* model for newly freed African-Americans, just as Benjamin Franklin positioned himself as *the* model for European-Americans during the Revolutionary Era. Therefore, the men and women of Naxos must be converted from "backwoods savages" into ladies and gentlemen by taking control of their minds, bodies and finances. As Washington puts it in his autobiography when he reflects on the early days of Tuskegee with his first wife, Olivia Davidson:

> The students were making progress in learning books and in developing their mind; but it became apparent at once that, if we were to make any permanent

> impression upon those who had come to us for training, we must do something besides teach them mere books. The students had come from homes where they had had no opportunities for lessons which would teach them to care for their bodies…. We wanted to teach students how to bathe; how to care for their teeth and clothing. We wanted to teach them what to eat, and how to eat it properly and how to care for their rooms. Aside from this, we wanted to give them such a practical knowledge of some one industry, together with a spirit of industry, thrift, and economy, that they would be sure of knowing how to make a living after they had left us. (60).

As this passage indicates, just as Washington did in his own life, the students at Tuskegee must master Franklin's model of success. They must take control of their mind through a formal education. They must take control of their bodies through physical labor, regular meals and hygiene lessons, or the "gospel of the tooth-brush" as Washington puts it (80). Finally, they must become successful consumers through lessons in frugality. As Miss MacGooden barks orders at the students as they head to class, Helga reflects, "Seven o'clock it was now. At twelve those children who by some accident had been a little minute or two late would have their first meal after five hours of work and so-called education. Discipline it was called" (13).

It is this discipline which Helga finds distasteful, not only because it promotes "no individualism" amongst the student body and precludes challenging an education that emphasizes acceptance of their position within America's racialized labor structure as "hewers of wood and drawers of water—" but also because it is a discipline that is completely at odds with her temperament (Larsen 4, 3). When we first encounter Helga Crane, alone in her room at

Naxos, she has pulled a novel, Marmaduke Pickthall's *Said the Fisherman*, from its place in search of "mental relaxation," but soon discards the book in an action that is symbolic of the mental vacillation which characterizes her life throughout the text (2). As Deborah McDowell notes, she is depicted in sensual terms at the outset of the novel, as she wears a "gold negligee," which reveals her "skin like yellow satin" (2). Her eyes are "dark" and "penetrating," her lips "sensuous" and her hair "blue-black," "plentiful" and "always straying in a little wayward, delightful way" (2). However, her thoughts regarding ending her engagement to James Vayle, another teacher at Naxos, reflect her lack of control over her body, as represented by her sexuality. The "ancient appeal by which she held him pleased her" and "gave her a feeling of power," yet she "shrank from it" (8). Lastly, she is not a disciplined consumer. Larsen writes that "Most of her earnings had gone into clothes, into books, and into the furnishings of the room which held her" as she "had loved and longed for nice things" her entire life (6). As she contemplates leaving Naxos without any savings or job prospects, however, she "hated to admit that money was the most serious difficulty. Knowing full well that it was important, she nevertheless, rebelled at the unalterable truth that it could influence her actions, block her desires" (6).

As I noted earlier, by the nineteenth century, the roles of men as producers and women as consumers had been firmly established within European-American culture. In her slave narrative, *Incidents in the Life of a Slave Girl*, Harriet Jacobs represents black women who take on the non-traditional role of producer-consumer towards a traditional end—nurturing their families and their communities. During the post-slavery era black women represent themselves as less than immaculate consumers for the first time, according to the mold set by Benjamin Franklin and refashioned by Harriet Jacobs: discipline of mind, body and consumption and defiance against

one's oppressor, whether it be the British or American slaveholders. For instance, in her autobiography Ida B. Wells hints at her struggle with her desire for fine clothes even as she is financially responsible for her younger siblings after both of her parents pass away. In *Contending Forces* Pauline Hopkins presents Mrs. Willis, who exploits political movements, such as the feminist movement and the black women's club movement, to support her family in part, but also for personal gain. Indeed, Mrs. Willis is contrasted to Mrs. Smith, the matriarch of the primary family in the text. Mrs. Willis is also a widow, and she reflects the model set forth in Harriet Jacobs's slave narrative: produce-consumer/family-community. Therefore, in this context, I would argue that Helga Crane is not "the first text by a black woman to be a conscious narrative of a woman embedded within capitalist social relations," but a continuation of this tradition (Carby 170). Prior to *Quicksand*, black women represent themselves as aware of their role in and response to American consumer culture. In the post-slavery era, we see black women diverge from the control of mind, body and consumption as seen in Franklin, and its revision as the producer-consumer/family-community configuration in Harriet Jacobs's slave narrative. Indeed, Nella Larsen's Helga Crane can be seen as a continuation of this divergence from these models.

Helga flees Naxos for Chicago, where, despite her education, as a woman who is visibly of African descent, her vocational opportunities are slight. When she lists her credentials to the secretaries at the Y.W.C.A., where she is staying, they inform her that the work they have is "Domestic mostly" adding that "our kind of work wouldn't do for you" (33). Helga concedes that she is willing to accept any work but she is not able to procure a position as a maid because she lacks references.

Helga's experience in Chicago is consistent with Katherine White's findings in "Women in the Great Migration." She observes that despite educational levels or previous work experience, black female employment in the North was often limited to domestic service. Indeed, many black women took a step down the socioeconomic ladder, from teachers to laundresses, as black women did not begin to reap the benefits of education until 1940 (White 432). White writes that , "in 1920, holding all else equal, being literate increased white female migrants' SEI scores by over 13 points, but less than 1 point for black female migrants" (438).[33]

White concludes that black women "were at a greater disadvantage when it came to accessing higher SEI occupations" (440). In brief, black women were many times more likely to work than their white female counterparts but the few white women who did work had higher status jobs. She suggests that this is the result of the kinds of jobs that were "advertised" to black women through social support systems:

> Such systems ranged in degree of organization and institutionalization, from the Urban League, to women's clubs to relatives. The concentration of black women in the lower SEI occupations confirms that these network ties often served as links to low SEI occupations for black women. For instance, employers would selectively advertise low-status or only temporary jobs in black neighborhoods. While these agents provided the newly arrived migrant with much-needed direction –in the form of housing, employment, and etiquette—they too were limited in access to information and resources" (445).

[33] Duncan's Social Economic Index, which asked participants to rate the prestige of various occupations.

Even if black women had access to information and resources, for the most part, they were denied opportunities. In Chicago Helga becomes painfully aware of "the smallness of her commercial value" (Larsen 35).

"Before the whole of his suddenly acquired wealth had time to vanish"

She turns to her white Uncle Peter for financial assistance, but is turned away by his new wife. After several weeks in Chicago she finds herself without work and without financial support from her family. Her last option, trading sex for cash, is unappealing as "men, both white and black, offered her money, but the price of the money was too dear" (34). With only five dollars in her elegant purse, an older African-American woman, Mrs. Hayes-Rore, appears in her life and becomes her fairy godmother. One day she returns to the Y.W.C.A. and the secretaries inform her that a "lecturing female" desires a travel companion who will organize her speeches.

From the outset, Mrs. Hayes-Rore's physical appearance is at odds with Helga's meticulous standards. Mrs. Hayes-Rore's "slightly soiled" hands are a stark contrast to Helga's "fastidious ones" (41). Helga is also put off by Mrs. Hayes-Rore's ill-fitting and "five-years-behind-the-mode," clothing (35). Helga's clothes, on the other hand, which at their "plainest" consists of "a suit of fine blue twill faultlessly tailored, from whose pocket peeped a gay handkerchief, an unadorned, heavy silk blouse, a small, smart fawn-colored hat, and slim, brown oxfords," inspire admiration when she attends an upper class black church in Chicago, but not much else, as "the faint hint of offishness…hung about her and repelled advances" (31, 34). Moreover, Helga's funds have dwindled, in part, because she "had spent money, too much

money, for a book and tapestry purse, things she wanted, but did not need and certainly could not afford" (32).

In spending beyond her means, Helga is in harmony with the realities of European-American consumption in the 1920s. Here too, Ford automobiles are emblematic. As mentioned earlier, the assembly line made Henry Ford's cars cheaper, but most Americans did not save to purchase them, but bought them on credit. While Ford was reluctant to extend credit to buyers and did not begin his Universal Credit Corporation until the 1930s, by 1917, 25 companies such as Commercial Investment Trust of New York, and the Investment Company of Chicago were financing automobiles. In 1919 General Motors began the General Motors Acceptance Corporation to help individuals finance their car purchases, making it the first national consumer credit agency. In the meantime, individual Ford dealerships offered financing, as evidenced in a 1927 dealer advertisement for the Model A that promises the viewer that the car can be purchased for $189 down and "easy monthly payments." Indeed, the installment plan increased in popularity in the 1920s as Americans used it to buy durable goods such as furniture, pianos, sewing machines, vacuum cleaners, radios and phonographs.

Though she is not well-groomed or well-dressed, Mrs. Hayes-Rore has money and connections, the two things Helga distinctly lacks. In contrast to Helga Crane's performance of upper class gentility, Mrs. Hayes-Rore is the real deal. Indeed, in addition to making her path smoother, Mrs. Hayes-Rore is a potential model for Helga.[34]

Reminiscent of Mrs. Willis of *Contending Forces*, Mrs. Hayes-Rore acquired wealth through her husband, who was also a politician, as both men took advantage of the political opportunities made possible by Reconstruction. Mrs. Willis, however, loses this wealth when her husband dies, perhaps a way of repaying her for pushing him into a career that was not to his

[34] Just like Benjamin Franklin some 200 years prior, who, poor and without connections, came to the attention of Sir William Keith, Governor of Pennsylvania and Delaware when Keith stumbled upon a letter that Franklin wrote protesting the ill treatment he received from his printer brother to whom he was apprenticed, it is Helga's writing ability that brings her to the attention of this prominent African-American woman. Unlike Franklin, Crane struggles to find an outlet for her intellectual energy.

liking, as "a seat in the Legislature then was not the dream to this man, urged by the loving woman behind him" (Hopkins146). He "grew richer" but "less social" so that when he dies he leaves Mrs. Willis not only without money, but also without social connections (146). As Hopkins puts it, "money, the sinews of living and social standing she did not possess upon her husband's death" (146). The text suggests that Mr. Willis was a good man whose spiritual dissipation was caused by the woman who loved him "with a love ambitious for his advancement," and he repays her for this upon his death (145).

In *Quicksand*, in contrast, Larsen suggests that Mrs. Hayes-Rore's spouse was not a good man, but a crooked politician, a "dark thread" in the "soiled fabric" of Chicago politics (37). Larsen goes on to imply that Mrs. Hayes-Rore was more directly involved in her husband's demise than Mrs. Willis, as he died "hurriedly and unexpectedly and a little mysteriously, and somewhat before the whole of his suddenly acquired wealth had time to vanish" (37). If she is involved in his untimely death, she ensures that he leaves her with money and social status. What connects Mrs. Willis and Mrs. Hayes-Rore as less than immaculate consumers is a potentially mercenary streak in both women—Mrs. Willis pushed her husband into prominence, but as an independent widow must gain money and connections on her own, and uses liberation movements to do so. Mrs. Hayes-Rore is left with both wealth and connections, and the text leaves open the possibility that this is by her own design.

If Mrs. Hayes-Rore is any way implicated in her husband's death, she uses nefarious means to achieve a traditional end as defined in Harriet Jacobs's slave narrative—using her role as produce-consumer to uplift the black community. Though Helga proclaims that as a "patchwork" of speeches from Frederick Douglass, Booker T. Washington and "a peppery dash of Du Bois," Mrs. Hayes-Rore's speeches amount to "the same old thing," her motives seem to

be sincere, even if she is inspired, in part, by a desire to make up for the misdeeds of her deceased husband (38). Just as Mrs. Willis encourages another black woman, Sappho Clark, to disclose her story of rape by a white man, Mrs. Hayes-Rore has a "tart…and prying" personality (36). As they travel to New York she asks Helga, "How is it that a nice girl like you can rush off on a wild goose chase like this at a moment's notice. I should think your people'd object" (38). Unlike Mrs. Willis, who wishes to elicit Sappho Clark's story of sexual abuse in order to exploit it, Mrs. Hayes-Rore, aware that Helga is considering staying in New York, advises, "I wouldn't mention that my people are white, if I were you. Colored people won't understand it, and after all, it's your own business. When you've lived as long as I have, you'll know that what others don't know can't hurt you" (41). In addition to offering her advice about how to survive socially in New York, Mrs. Hayes-Rore offers her a recommendation for a job at a black insurance company that wants her to "put quite a tidy sum into it" (41).

Therefore, Mrs. Hayes-Rore is a continuation of a theme of independent widows, in literature by black women, begun in *Contending Forces*. These women, beginning with Mrs. Willis, are less than perfect consumers according to the template established by Harriet Jacobs: produce-consumer/family-community. Mrs. Willis is not genuinely interested in the feminist or black women's club movements, but uses the latter as "the new problem in the woman question that should float her upon its tide into the prosperity she desired" (147). Moreover, her willingness to use Sappho Clark's story against her ties her to the material and sexual covetousness of the slavery era. Consistent with the producer-consumer/family-community model of Jacobs, Mrs. Hayes-Rore seems to be genuinely interested in uplifting the race, and she acts as a surrogate maternal figure for the protagonist. However, if she is involved in her

husband's death, the text leaves open the possibility that she uses immoral means to achieve positive ends.

After learning that she is biracial and of her family's abandonment, in addition to offering Helga a job at a black insurance company in Harlem, Mrs. Hayes-Rore decides that Helga should stay with her niece, Anne Grey. Importantly, like Mrs. Hayes-Rore, Anne is "a widow, my husband's sister's son's wife" (40). Indeed, Anne represents the next generation of black female widows in literature by black women.

"My husband, you know"

Upon introducing Anne to Helga, Mrs. Hayes-Rore informs her niece that Helga's mother has died, and Anne brushes this information off with the words, "You won't talk to me about it, will you? I can't bear the thought of death. Nobody ever talks to me about it. My husband, you know" (44). However, Larsen adds, "when she knew Anne better, she suspected that it was a bit of a pose assumed for the purpose of doing away with the necessity of speaking regretfully of a husband who had been perhaps not too greatly loved" (44). Though not in any way implicated in his death, Anne Grey, like her aunt, enjoys the financial independence that comes with losing an affluent husband. We never learn about how Anne's husband acquired his wealth, but his death in World War I leaves her with a luxurious Harlem brownstone, an expensive car, fine furniture, clothes and leisure. If Helga is put off by Mrs. Hayes-Rore's unkempt appearance, she is in complete accord with Anne's "aesthetic sense" (44). Therefore, the protagonist is delighted when Anne asks her to stay with her on a long-term basis, for:

> … Even Helga Crane approved of Anne's house and the furnishings which so admirably graced the big-cream colored rooms. Beds with long, tapering posts to which tremendous age lent dignity and interest, bonneted old highboys, tables that might be Duncan Phyfe, rare spindle-legged chairs, and others whose ladder backs gracefully climbed the delicate wall panels. These historic things mingled harmoniously and comfortably with brass-bound Chinese tea chests, luxurious deep chairs and davenports, tiny tables of gay color, a lacquered jade-green settee with gleaming black seat cushions, lustrous Eastern rugs, ancient copper, Japanese prints, some fine etchings, a profusion of precious bric-a-brac, and endless shelves filled with books. (44)

This description of the items in Anne's home parallels the luxuriousness of the opening description of Helga's room at Naxos, where she is surrounded by: "a reading lamp," a "blue Chinese carpet," a "shining brass bowl" on the "low table" beside her, an "oriental silk" and "books" (1). Unlike Helga, who spends beyond her means, as a wealthy widow, Anne Grey can afford the material goods that she desires. Indeed, Helga determines to follow Anne's lead and marry one of her rich Harlem suitors. Larsen writes:

> Some day she intended to marry one of those alluring brown or yellow men who danced attendance on her. Already financially successful, any one of them could give her the things which she had now come to desire, a home like Anne's, cars of expensive makes such as lined the avenue, clothes and furs from Bendel's and Revillon Freres', servants, and leisure. (45)

One black female commentator on black women's socio-economic status in the 1920s was Elise Johnson McDougald. In the *New Negro Anthology*, Elise Johnson McDougald is described as a "teacher, social investigator, and vocational guidance expert" (419). She also was a leader in the Women's Trade Union League and the lead author of a Y.W.C.A. survey which was published in 1919 as *A New Day for the Colored Woman Worker.* In her contribution to the *New Negro Anthology*, "The Task of Negro Womanhood," she speaks of four classes of black women. The first is the elite leisure class, who enjoy "the luxuries of well-appointed homes, modest motors, tennis, golf and country clubs" (370). The second and third groups consists of "women of business, profession and trade" employed primarily in black owned business and finally "domestic and casual workers" (378). Helga is determined to marry a wealthy black man and move from the second group to the first. Indeed, though as a black woman she is not spoken to by the national advertising industry, she hears mainstream advertising's call, and wishes to move from African-American female mass, to African-American female class status, or in advertising lingo, "from the Colonel's Lady to Judy O'Grady." She believes that consumption, with its emphasis on subjectivity and individualism, will allow her to craft an identity free from the constraints of blackness. She too can experience the freedom of the white women featured in advertisements for Henry Ford's Model A.

However, Helga does not feel passion for any of these wealthy black men, but Dr. Anderson, the principal of Naxos, whom she re-encounters at a meeting about black health in Harlem. At the sight of him she is certainly sexually attracted, as "A peculiar, not wholly disagreeable, quiver ran down her spine. She felt an odd little faintness. The blood rushed to her face" (49). As they share a taxi ride she is "aware…of a strange ill-defined emotion, a vague yearning" (50). That night, "a thousand indefinite longings beset her" (51). Larsen uses

indefinite language such as “ill-defined,” “indefinite” and “vague” to describe Helga’s sexual desire, which points to her lack of control over her body, her sexuality. Dr. Anderson penetrates her ambivalence with the words, “You haven’t changed. You’re still seeking for something, I think” before she exits the cab (50).

This hesitancy to act on her true emotional and physical desires is underscored when Dr. Anderson comes to visit her three days later. She abruptly leaves for another engagement “though she longed to stay” and finds the tea she attends “boring beyond endurance” (51). Upon her return Anne informs her that Dr. Anderson is in New York permanently, having been deemed too liberal for Naxos. He is now “employed as welfare worker by some big manufacturing concern, which gave employment to hundreds of Negro men” (52).

Indeed, what Helga finds in Harlem is a black upper-class that even as it engages in “sophisticated cynical talk,” “elaborate parties” and looks “with contempt and scorn on Naxos and all its works,” is still deeply concerned with racial uplift. Though she initially feels “joy at seeming at last to belong somewhere,” after several months their talk of racism “stirred memories, probed hidden wounds” (44, 49). Indeed, even as she was introduced to Anne by Mrs. Hayes-Rore she felt “like a criminal” for hiding the fact that her mother is white (42). As she moves in Harlem’s elite social circles, she feels increasingly out of place as they discuss “the injustices…the viciousness of white people” (49). One can assume that their conversations are uncomfortable for Helga not only because she is, in a sense, passing for black, but also because it stirs memories of her family’s rejections.

Moreover, in a series of misapprehensions that characterize the protagonist, Helga feels that along with their Duncan Phyfe chairs, expensive cars and fur coats, Anne and her friends

have bought their way out of racism. Therefore, when Anne engages in what Helga deems "an orgy of protest" against American racism; Helga is annoyed by such "ardor in one so little affected by racial prejudice" (49).

However, as a black woman of means, Anne knows that this is a chimera. Despite her wealth, there are lines that she cannot cross as a black woman in the 1920s. As Helga is aware, these lines include entering certain restaurants, attending certain theaters, and entering certain occupations. Anne is peculiarly conscious of her value in America's social and political hierarchy. Even as she looks down on the culture of working class blacks, she proclaims that "The most wretched prostitute that walks One Hundred and Thirty Fifth Street is more than any president of these United States, not accepting Abraham Lincoln" (48). Moreover, like writers such as Frederick Douglass and Harriet Jacobs, Anne Grey embraces the fullness of the model set by Benjamin Franklin, who urged the colonists to control their consumption certainly, but also to fight back against their oppressors, the British.

In a sense, Anne and Mrs. Hayes-Rore are living the legacy of Booker T. Washington's ideas. In his famous *Atlanta Exposition Speech* of 1895, he argued that blacks should pursue economic mobility and civil rights would follow. He famously asserted, "In all things purely social, we can be as separate as the fingers, yet one as the hand in all things essential to mutual progress" (Washington 100). He went on to argue that:

> The wisest among my race understand that the agitation of questions of social equality is the most extreme folly, and that the progress of all the enjoyment of all the privileges that will come to us must be the result of severe and constant struggle rather than artificial forcing…. It is important and right that all privileges

> of the law be ours, but it is vastly more important that we be prepared for the exercise of these privileges. The opportunity to earn a dollar in a factory just now is infinitely more than the opportunity to spend a dollar in an opera-house. (101-102)

Thirty-five years after Washington's speech, Anne has more than a few dollars at her disposal, yet she is still denied entry to the opera house. Despite her urbane, cosmopolitan air, Anne embraces the social conservatism that characterizes Naxos, even as she vehemently rejects Washington's refusal to engage in political agitation.

"Anne, who…had more than enough"

However, Helga soon learns that Anne's "ardor" is not reserved for political protest. When she receives a gift of $5,000 from her Uncle Peter, an early inheritance since he "must terminate" his "outward relation" with her, she decides to end her discomfort in Harlem and visit her Aunt Katrina in Denmark (54). After a year in Copenhagen, a letter arrives from Anne, "telling of her coming marriage to Anderson" (81). Unlike Helga, Anne is a woman in full possession of her mind, body and consumption. Like Mrs. Hayes-Rore, her participation in racial uplift serves as an outlet for her intellectual energies. It is clear that she is doing a fine job of managing the wealth her not so dearly departed husband left behind.

Moreover, her marriage to Dr. Anderson demonstrates that she is in control of her sexual desires. As writers such as Evelyn Hammonds and Hazel Carby have asserted, black women were silent about their sexual desires in their literary tradition. As Hammonds remarks in "Toward a Genealogy of Black Female Sexuality: the Problematic of Silence," European

Americans justified slavery , "by ascribing certain inherited characteristics to blacks, characteristics that made them unworthy of citizenship; foremost among these was the belief in the unbridled sexuality of black people and specifically that of black women" (95). To refute this notion, black women of the antebellum and post-bellum eras promoted a "politics of silence" about their sexuality, and "hoped by their silence and their promotion of proper Victorian morality to demonstrate the lie of the image of the sexually immoral black woman" (Hammonds 97). Hazel Carby argues that black women of Anne Grey's social class were either silent about their sexuality, "focused on defending their morality or displaced sexuality onto another terrain" (142). However, while it seems that Anne Grey has funneled her sexual energy onto the political terrain as she engages in an "orgy of protest" against American racism, her wooing and winning of Dr. Anderson reveals her to be a woman who seeks relational and sexual satisfaction. Indeed, I would argue that for the first time, in *Quicksand*, we have the depiction of a black woman who desires not only materially, just as her literary foremothers, Mrs. Willis of *Contending Forces* and her aunt, Mrs. Hayes-Rore, but also successfully desires sexually. Unlike Helga Crane, who vacillates and is unable to fulfill her desires, Anne gets what she wants. In this way, she extends and transforms the burgeoning tradition of black female widows in literature by black women. Consistent with Harriet Jacobs's paradigm, she is an independent consumer, and though she has no children, she focuses on the needs of the community. However, she will have her cake and it eat too: money and material items, an outlet for her intellectual energies through politics, and control over her sexuality, her body.

When Helga receives Anne's letter it adds to her "indefinite discontent," her "growing dissatisfaction" in Copenhagen (81). Though she is initially relieved to be reunited with her family, she gradually realizes that she cannot escape the exigencies of race, as they and their

friends view her as “some disgusting sensual creature,” consistent with European and European-American notions that blacks are primarily physical and instinctive as opposed to rational human beings (89). Though she initially enjoys “the extravagant things with which Aunt Katrina chose to dress her” she becomes increasingly uncomfortable with the “batik dresses in which mingled indigo, orange, green, vermillion and black; dresses of velvet and chiffon in screaming colors, blood red, sulphur-yellow, sea green” (74). Indeed, the pleasure of “having so many new and expensive clothes at one time” dissipates as she realizes that the Danes see her as an exotic object, and not a rational, fully human, subject (74).

Moreover, she is still attracted to Dr. Anderson, and reflects on why he “had the power always to upset her” and muses on what could have happened if “she hadn’t come away” (81). While Helga, like Hamlet, is paralyzed by thought as it relates to her body, her sexual expression, Anne Grey is a woman of action. Helga acknowledges as much when she reflects, “Anne was really too amusing. Just why, she wondered, and how had it come about that he was being married to Anne. And why did Anne, who had so much more than so many others—more than enough—want Anderson too” (82).

Dissatisfied with her “peacock’s life” in Copenhagen, Helga decides to return to Harlem, but this time, she is determined no longer to be a racialized object, but an active agent in her own life, a woman of action as it relates to her sexual desires (81). In this regard, the black woman who acts as her model for social and sexual license in the 1920s is a character named Audrey Denney.

“Lovely, secure, wise, selfish”

Audrey Denney is a minor character in the text who serves as Helga Crane’s doppelganger or double. Helga first encounters Audrey at a cabaret and Helga watches as she dances with Dr. Anderson on the night before she is to leave the United States. Helga’s decision to wear a black and orange dress Anne Grey deems too “décolleté,” associates her with Audrey, who wears an extremely “décolleté” apricot dress (60). Crane is captivated by this young, attractive light-skinned woman who dances with Dr. Anderson with “grace and abandon” and “obvious pleasure”, and “indifferently” drinks alcohol while “precariously” smoking cigarettes. Despite their physical similarities, and the similarity of their attire, Audrey’s personality and lifestyle stand in direct contrast to Helga’s. Indeed, she is everything that Helga aspires to be: Denny is carefree, sexually open, and transgresses New York’s racial boundaries, socializing with whites and blacks and living downtown. In short, she is a middle-class woman of color who embodies the notion of a Jazz Age flapper. Denney’s daring stands in stark contrast to Helga’s reticence, and on the night before her escape from Harlem Helga feels “envious admiration…for the beautiful, calm, cool girl who had the assurance, the courage, so placidly to ignore racial barriers and give her attention to people” (62). In short, Audrey is presented as the successful consumer Helga aspires to be. This is underscored at the end of the novel when she thinks of “Audrey Denney, placid, taking quietly and without fuss the things she wanted” (129).

However, I would posit that as she does throughout the novel, Helga misapprehends Denney. Indeed, Larsen hints at the possibility that perhaps Denney is not a positive twin or doppelganger after all. Helga is unable to see the limits of this possibility. Consistent with the

notion of a doppelganger as the apparition of a living person or a ghost, the language used to describe Audrey's physical appearance is associated with death. She has a "deathlike pallor," her mouth is "somehow sorrowful" and her eyes are "veiled" by long lashes (60). Perhaps Helga has misjudged the value of Denney's carefree, decadent lifestyle. Larsen is suggesting that within black culture, and within the larger (dominant) culture, there is a price to pay for this lifestyle as a woman, a critique that another black female novelist, Jessie Fauset, will develop in her 1929 novel, *Plum Bun*, which features a young black female protagonist who passes for white. Certainly Denney pays a price for her transgressions within the black community, as Anne condemns her for hosting parties where "the white men dance with black women," to which she adds, "now you know, Helga Crane, that can only mean one thing" (61). While Audrey may take the things she wants, these things come with a price, a price that Helga, ultimately, is unwilling to pay, as she "wasn't, after all a rebel from society" (107).

However, when she returns to Harlem and spies Denney at a party, "poised, serene, certain, surrounded by masculine black and white," the newly emboldened Helga asks the host of the party to introduce them (99). This introduction never occurs, but Anne Grey and Dr. Anderson are also at the party, and when she goes upstairs to fix a loose hem on her dress, she bumps into him and they share "a long kiss" and "a long-hidden, half-understood desire welled up in her with the suddenness of a dream" (104). In the ensuing weeks she feels herself ready to make that dream a reality, "to explore to the end that unfamiliar path into which she had strayed" (106). When they finally speak of the kiss at a party a few weeks later, though his hand "trembled slightly" as he takes hers with "elaborate casualness" and she feels the "intentness of his gaze upon her," he opts not to join her on that path. He blames the kiss on "rotten cocktails" and apologizes for behaving inappropriately with her. She ends their casual conversation by

slapping him on the face when she realizes that "no matter what the intensity of his feelings or desires might be, he was not the sort of man who would for any reason give up one particle of his own good opinion of himself. Not even for her. Not even though he knew that she had wanted so terribly something special from him" (108).

Indeed, though his "gray eyes" penetrate her, ultimately they are associated with the "black, gray and brown and navy blue" students are encouraged to wear at Naxos, the social, if not the political conservatism of the institution (50, 2). This is evidenced by his marriage to Anne Grey, whose name also associates her with the social conservatism of Naxos. However, one could argue that of these three young women, Helga Crane, Audrey Denney and Anne Grey, the latter is the shrewdest consumer. She knows how to obtain and maintain a relationship with the man she desires. She realizes that Dr. Anderson is attracted to Helga, but she is "more determined, more selfish and less inclined to leave anything to chance" than Helga (94). Anne is aware of the "nameless and to him shameful impulse, that sheer delight, which ran through his nerves at mere proximity to Helga," however, Anne will "look out for her husband….Keep him undisturbed, unhumiliated. It was impossible that she could fail. Unthinkable" (95). And she does not fail. At the end of the novel Helga recalls Anne as "lovely, secure, wise, selfish" (129). She gets what she wants.

"The glory and marvel of God"

Following her rejection by Dr. Anderson, Helga stumbles into a storefront church in Harlem and after a conversion experience dense with sexual language, she is escorted home by another churchgoer, Rev. Pleasant Green. As they walk along she reflects that, "there was

nothing to hold her back. Nobody to care" and "deliberately stopped thinking" (116). She offers him a "provocative smile" and presses "her fingers deeply into his arms" causing a "a wild look" to come into his "slightly bloodshot eyes" (116). The text suggests that she has sex with him that night, and in an act of "seductive repentance" she marries Rev. Pleasant Green the next day, in the hopes that their union will lead to "stability, permanent happiness" (118, 117).

Finally, it seems, the protagonist has disciplined her mind, body and consumption. They move to the South and she engages in a project for "uplifting…her fellow men" by informing the women that "sunbonnets, no matter how gay, and aprons, no matter how frilly, were not quite proper things for Sunday wear," and "instructing the children, who seemed most of the time to run wild, in ways of gentler deportment" (119). In short, she will recreate Naxos for the residents of this small Alabama town. Finally it seems, she has found an outlet for her intellectual and creative energies.

Moreover, she has found an outlet for her sexual desires. Though she is put off by his dirty fingernails and dirty clothes, "Helga somehow overcame her first disgust at the odor of sweat and stale garments" for "night came at the end of every day. Emotional, palpitating, amorous, all that was vital in her sprang like rank weeds at the tingling thought of night" (122). Finally, she experiences "anaesthetic sastisfaction of her senses" as their relationship is sexually gratifying (118).

Additionally, she has become a successful consumer, as she realizes that "all I've ever had in life has been things" (116). Indeed, she comes to feel affection for "the bleak air of poverty" in her new home, as she embraces the natural beauty of the South as opposed to material objects. The "glittering gold sun" has replaced her brocaded mules; the "silver buds"

that sprout in “a Chinese blue sky” have replaced “the blue Chinese carpet” of her room at Naxos (120). She delights in her garden which she deems “utterly filled with the glory and marvel of God” (121). In short, she has become a successful American, disciplined, “practical:” assured of both “God and man” (117).

However, this is a fantasy. Though she thinks they embrace her lessons in uplift, behind her back her neighbors “talked with amusement, or with anger, of ‘dat uppity, meddlin’ No’the’nah” (119). Moreover, as critics such as Deborah McDowell have noted, her sexuality becomes a trap, as she gives birth to one child right after the other: three in less than two years. The children consume her, leaving her “no time for the pursuit of beauty, or for the uplifting of other, harassed and teeming women, or for the instruction of their neglected children” (124). She not only neglects “the forlorn garden,” a symbol of her rejection of conspicuous consumption, her home becomes the inverse of her graceful surroundings at Naxos, in Harlem and in Copenhagen. Soon she gazes:

> …in helpless dismay and sick disgust at the disorder around her, the permanent assembly of partly emptied medicine bottles on the clock shelf, the perpetual array of drying baby clothes on the chair-backs, the constant debris of broken toys on the floor, the unceasing litter of half-dead flowers on the table, dragged in the by the toddling twins. (124)

At the end of the novel she is extremely sick and about to give birth to her fifth child, and contemplates “the quagmire in which she had engulfed herself” (133). She thinks of “freedom and cities, about clothes and books, about the sweet mingled smell of Houbigant and cigarettes in softly lighted rooms filled with inconsequential chatter and laughter and sophisticated tuneless

music. It was so hard to think out a feasible way of retrieving all these agreeable, desired things" (135). Indeed, they are the things that Anne Grey possesses. Anne succeeds as an American according to the model set by Benjamin Franklin and modified by Harriet Jacobs, while Helga Crane is a failure. Though overlooked by critics of the novel, I posit that it is Anne who is a model for the independent women of the post-Civil Rights and post-feminist movements.

Conclusion: Independent Women Part II

When I began this dissertation at the start of the summer of 2008, women around the country were gathering their friends for *Sex in the City*'s debut on the big screen. Consistent with the success of the television show, the movie was a hit at the box office, earning $55 million during its opening weekend, the biggest opening weekend for a movie starring women, with the studio estimating that 85% of the audience was female. Numbers like these virtually guaranteed a sequel.

This summer *Sex in the City 2* debuted on the big screen, but earned only $32 million its opening weekend. The entertainment magazine *Us* declared "it's time for the ladies to lock up their Loubotins" and *USA Today* deemed it "tasteless." What happened in those two years? Box office receipts like these surely left the writers and producers of the film wondering "Where my girls at?"

Is it simply that the sequel isn't as well written? The original *Sex in the City* movie was criticized on these grounds but women came to the theaters in droves. Is it some mix of ageism and sexism? Are the leading ladies, now in their forties and fifties, simply too old to pull off all the talk of sex and Prada? Too old to gallivant in Abu Dhabi as they do in the sequel? What has changed?

One answer is that America has changed. During the years that *Sex in the City* aired on television, Americans used subprime mortgages to buy homes they could not afford. In the past two years millions of Americans have lost their jobs and their homes in the worst economic downturn since the Great Depression. The film's writer and director, Michael Patrick King, argued that he wanted the film to serve as escapism. He told the Website collider.com "I thought,

OK, it's a depression. In the Great Depression what did people do? And I thought extravagance. Let's put them on a big vacation." Indeed, audiences were more open to this escapism the first time around. When the original *Sex in the City* film premiered on May 27th, 2008 the housing bubble had already burst. Home equity in America dropped from a high of $13 trillion in 2006 to $8.8 trillion in mid-2008. Americans' next biggest asset, retirement savings, dropped 22%, from $10 trillion in 2006 to $8 trillion in mid-2008. As the value of their homes and 401K's plummeted in mid-2008, American women still embraced the materialism of *Sex in the City*'s first outing on the silver screen.

When *Sex in the City 2* premiered on May 24, 2010, the recession had become an entrenched part of contemporary American life, yet, as Michael Patrick King indicates, barely acknowledged in the film. Carrie has married Mr. Big and is esconced in a lavish apartment on Manhattan's Upper East Side. Miranda continues to successfully practice corporate law. Charlotte is a stay at home mom to two daughters—with a nanny. In one of the film's few nods to the recession, Samantha, saddened by the lack of business her public relations firm has seen in the last two years, decides to take her girls on an all expenses paid trip to Abu Dhabi to see a client.

Its lavish setting and the dozens of costume changes stands in stark contrast to the reality that 500,000 Americans lost their homes to foreclosure within the first six months of the year. It is estimated that over one million Americans will lose their homes to foreclosure this year, compared to 900,000 in 2009. In May 2010 the unemployment rate was 9.7%, translating to 14 million Americans. On Thursday, September 16th 2010 the Census Bureau reported that 44 million Americans, one in seven, were living below the poverty line in 2009. These numbers may explain why despite Michael Patrick King's hopes, American women were not as willing to

re-enter the bubble of the *Sex in the City* franchise. In August of this year *USA Today* reported on the popularity of chick lit "in which plots and relationships turn on subprime mortgages, financial scams and pink slips" (Minzensheimer 1D). Moreover, in the spirit of Benjamin Franklin, the writers of these novels are using them to teach women about economics. In this regard, *Sex in the City* is out of step with the times, as Americans are saving more and spending less. As it has throughout America's history of economic bubbles and busts, the pendulum has swung in the other direction, from spend to save.

Closer to reality, the recession has an unprecedented gender dimension. By the summer of 2009 a new word had made its way into the American vocabulary, "mancession," which reflected the fact that since their numbers are high in the fields hardest hit by the recession—construction, manufacturing, men are 2.5% more likely to be unemployed than women. For this reason, women are closer than they've ever been to composing the majority of the nation's workforce, and already at least 35% of American women bring home at least half of their family's income.

However, this is news because it is impacting white American men and women. As I argue in this dissertation, because of the precarious nature of male-female relationships during slavery and because of limited job opportunities for black men after slavery, black women have played the role of provider-consumer within their families for centuries. By the late 1800's the role of white men as producers and white women as consumers was firmly entrenched in European-American culture. The feminist movement and now, the mancession, have propelled more and more white women towards playing the role of producer-consumer. As Heidi Hartman, an economist at the Women's Policy Research Center scoffed when asked about the mancession, "It's only a problem when white men start to suffer" (Cook). However, as Nancy Cook notes in

her July, 2009 editorial on the mancession in *Newsweek*, this development is certainly problematic as families see a reduction in their incomes, but also presents an opportunity to create more equality as out of work men take on more responsibility in the home.[35]

The couple who is seen as the nation's primary model of a modern relationship between equals occupies the nation's most prominent house, the White House, and they are African-American. In 2008 America elected a tall, athletic, intellectual, black man, as president, primarily to cure its economic ills. During the campaign Barack Obama tapped into the model established by Benjamin Franklin, emphasizing that he came from poverty and obscurity (his mother had collected food stamps) and through discipline and hard work attended two Ivy League universities. Among other intellectual distinctions, he was the first African-American to head the Harvard Law Review.

His wife, Michelle Obama, is also intellectual and athletic, and as one black female scholar has noted—as tall as he is—in every way his equal. She attended Princeton University as an undergraduate and Harvard Law School as well. There were times (for instance, when President Obama was finishing law school and during his days as a community organizer) when Ms. Obama was the family's primary breadwinner (as a lawyer and hospital administrator). As Andre Leon Talley noted in his March 2009 cover story on the first lady for *Vogue* magazine, this is a first couple like no other. As he writes:

> Remember that when the Obamas first met, she was his boss and mentor at Sidley, Austin, the Chicago law firm where they both began their careers. This is a new dynamic in First Families. It's doubtful the president of the United States of

[35] Indeed, the recession has had a disproportionate impact on black men, who are 4.7% more likely to be unemployed than black women.

> America wields executive authority within his primary relationship. You can tell from the way Michelle teases Barack in interviews, the way she's not afraid to disagree with him publicly, that although she loves her husband, she isn't in awe of him…. They have maintained their autonomy and mutual respect yet clearly delight in each other's company. (428)

As I have argued throughout this dissertation, this gender dynamic did not emerge in the wake of the Civil Rights and Feminist Movements, but out of the crucible of slavery, as Harriet Jacobs became a model producer-consumer for ensuing generations of African-American female writers. In her slave narrative she plays this role to support her family and community. In the post-slavery era this configuration expands, as we encounter black women who play the role of producer-consumer to support their families and communities, but also to fulfill their own desire for material goods. During the Harlem Renaissance, this configuration expands even further to include the desire not only for material goods, but also for sexual expression in Nella Larsen's *Quicksand*.

In the following decades, leading to the onset of the Civil Rights Movement in the 1950s, black women continued to write novels that featured independent black women, particularly black female widows. Examples include Zora Neale Hurston's Harlem Renaissance classic *Their Eyes Were Watching God* (1937) and Ann Petry's Realist masterpiece, *The Street* (1946). *Their Eyes Were Watching God* would have a particularly strong impact on black feminist novelists and critics in the late twentieth century when it was rediscovered by Alice Walker in the 1970s. Set in Hurston's native Florida, the novel tells the story of Janie Crawford, who became a wealthy widow at the age of 40 and pursued a relationship with a man half her age. Janie's financial and sexual autonomy spoke to black women of the 1970s and 1980s, who in the

wake of the Civil Rights and Second Wave Feminist Movements, were taking advantage of educational and career opportunities without parallel in their history in the United States. The publication of Terry McMillan's *Waiting to Exhale* in 1992 ushered in a new era, in that it portrayed contemporary black women who were financially independent not as a result of widowhood, but through their own efforts. Moreover, it marked the beginning of frank depictions of black female sexuality. In 1997 McMillan published *How Stella Got Her Groove Back* and in a television interview she asserted that amidst the hoopla over *Stella*'s frank depiction of black female sexuality, the public missed the fact that the novel is a re-writing of *Their Eyes Were Watching God*. I would add that it is also a re-writing of the producer-consumer/family-community template of Harriet Jacobs's *Incidents in the Life of a Slave Girl*, an extension of a tradition of independent black women in literature by and about African-American women. The frank discussion of sexuality and consumerism may be new, but the story is generations old.

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