

ABSTRACT

Title of Dissertation: GIRLHOOD IN AFRICAN AMERICAN LITERATURE,
1827-1949

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This dissertation examines African American literature through the social construction and the allegorical function of girlhood. By exploring the figure of the black girl between 1827—when the nation’s first black newspaper, *Freedom’s Journal*, was published and slavery was abolished in New York—and 1949—the publication date of *Annie Allen*, Gwendolyn Brooks’s Pulitzer Prize-winning collection poems, I argue that representations of the girl in African American literature are based on behavioral codes that acquired political meaning in print culture before and after Emancipation. In the canonical and rarely-read texts I examine, the varied images of the black girl as orphaned and unruly, educated and mothered, functioned as models for black citizenship.

The Introduction argues that Lucy Terry and Phillis Wheatley become foundational models of intellectual achievement through their growth from slave girl to poet. Chapter One, “Antebellum Girlhood in African American Literature” argues that articles selected by black male editors of *Freedom’s Journal* and *Colored American*, and works by black women writers, such as Maria Stewart’s “The First Stage of Life” (1861), Harriet Wilson’s *Our Nig* (1859) and Harriet Jacobs’s *Incidents in the Life of a Slave Girl* (1861) adopted

the black girl from the Lucy Terry/ Phillis Wheatley paradigm and appropriated her image to represent their own, specific citizenship pursuits. In Chapter Two, "Black Girlhood Post-Emancipation," the racially-indeterminate girl figure in *Christian Recorder* stories, Mrs. N. F. Mossell's advice columns published in the *New York Freeman*, and Frances Harper's depiction of Annette in *Trial and Triumph* (1888-1889) represented the newly emancipated black girl figure and her grooming for racial uplift efforts.

Chapter Three, "Race Girls in *Floyd's Flowers*," argues that in Silas X. Floyd's conduct book, *Floyd's Flowers; or Duty and Beauty for Colored Children* (1905), black girl figures return to the domestic sphere and defer to black male leadership due to an increase in violence at the turn of the century. Chapter Four, "Black Girlhood in Gwendolyn Brooks's *Annie Allen* (1949)," argues that Gwendolyn Brooks's modernist poems offer an alternative to the conduct manual by privileging the black girl's interiority and freeing her from an instructive role.

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by

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N. S. W.

INTRODUCTION

Girlhood in African American Literature, 1827-1949 examines the social construction and allegorical function of black girlhood in African American literature. By exploring the archetypal figure of the black girl between 1827—when the nation’s first black newspaper, *Freedom’s Journal*, was published and slavery was abolished in New York—and 1949—the publication date of *Annie Allen*, Gwendolyn Brooks’s Pulitzer Prize-winning collection of girlhood poems, I argue that representations of the black girl in African American literature are based on behavioral codes that acquired political meaning in print culture before and after Emancipation. Calculated to encourage the inclusion of African Americans into the body politic, these behavioral codes sought to dismantle popular characterizations of black people as immoral and without ancestry. In the texts I examine, the varied images of the black girl as orphaned and unruly, educated and mothered, functioned as models for black citizenship.

In this dissertation, my definition of “citizenship” shifts according to the fluctuations in the historical progress of the black race. For example, in the antebellum period, I define “citizenship” as the relationship between an individual and a particular community. For free black men living in the antebellum north, citizenship is associated with property ownership, voting, and one’s ability as a man to protect his home and family. Conversely, free black women in the North seek *recognition* of their lives and experiences as residents of the state. In their narratives, the mention of *place* in relationship to the growth and experience of free black girl figures living in the North insists on recognition of their lives and existence as subjects of the state. For example, in an article titled “The

Little Black Girl,” published in the *Liberator* in 1834, the anonymous author describes the story of Sylvia, a poor black girl whose surrogate white mother figure, Mrs. F., enables her to become educated and refined through teachings from the Bible. The author writes that Sylvia “lives in a very respectable family in this city, and is, no doubt, growing up to be a most valuable member of society, beloved by Mrs. F. and respected by all who know her.” Additionally, to insist on recognition of her own experiences growing up poor and enduring physical abuse as an indentured servant in the North, Harriet Wilson expresses how Frado’s experiences in *Our Nig* take place in the specific location of “a two-story White House, North.”

At post-Emancipation, African Americans acquire formal citizenship rights through Reconstruction amendments. However, resistance by whites through grandfather clauses, literacy tests, poll taxes, and violence prevent their full access to rights as citizens. Thus, African Americans seek citizenship through informal means. To demonstrate their worth as citizens, African Americans gain an education and consolidate black families with two-parent households and extended family to teach lessons on how to dress, act, and talk to participate politically in uplift concerns and navigate the public sphere safely. At the turn of the century, I define “citizenship” by African Americans’ awareness of the increase in violence in the form of lynching and rape, and their efforts to adopt codes of behavior to prevent violence towards their bodies. Post World War II, citizenship goals become less focused on collective conformity toward dominant codes. Instead, personal and individual decisions and experiences directed one’s achievement.

Representations of the black girl in African American literature seem to cohere around thematic tendencies that contribute to her utility as a political weapon in the fight

for citizenship. For example, the black girl's characterization as an unruly orphan was a significant image especially during the antebellum period when black and white activists employed it for specific political purposes. In narratives by white authors, white women clothed, educated, and reformed the unruly black girl through teachings from the Bible—all acts reinforcing the image of the benevolent white female. Such a stereotype is presented in the figure of Topsy in Harriet Beecher Stowe's *Uncle Tom's Cabin* (1852). In the novel, when Miss Ophelia asks Topsy from where she originated, Topsy replies that she "jes' growed" without any claim to parentage. Miss Ophelia becomes the white, surrogate mother figure who reforms Topsy. Through tutelage in religion and manners, Topsy matures from an unruly girl to a missionary who eventually leaves the U.S. to teach abroad in Africa.

Conversely, black activists in the nineteenth century adopted the orphaned black girl as the exemplum of racial progress. In the antebellum years in the North, citizenship was synonymous with manhood. The ideal citizen was a propertied, virtuous, and independent man, most often the patriarch of the family. Given their inability to achieve full manhood in the antebellum period, black males who administered the early black press appropriated the unruly, willful black girl figure and the Republican black mother figure as compensatory strategies and central citizenship models. Rather than an assertion of manhood through violence, black men in the North attempted to acquire respectability through refinement of character. To achieve this goal, the black press printed articles with the black woman figure as a nurturing presence for the unruly black girl, who becomes refined through her mother's lessons in proper dress, manners, and education.

Once the black girl figure became a central figure in black citizenship efforts, black women writers followed the lead of black men, but insisted on telling their own stories. In their literary and journalistic representations, the black girl's unruliness became not a trait of deviant behavior, but a necessary resistance to feminine convention that gave her the will to fight oppression and gain independence. In Harriet Wilson's *Our Nig* (1859), the black, orphaned girl, Frado, protects herself from repeated beatings when she raises a weapon, a piece of firewood, against her northern, white, surrogate mother/tormentor, Mrs. Bellmont. In Harriet Jacobs's *Incidents in the Life of a Slave Girl* (1861), Linda Brent breaks feminine convention when she engages in a relationship with a white man, Mr. Sands, in order to orchestrate her children's escape to freedom. In both cases, unruliness became a necessary trait for abused black girls working in the North as well as for enslaved black girls in the South fighting against their oppressors. Wilson and Jacobs ended their stories by having Frado and Linda Brent act in accordance with dominant social mores, yet the two women authors remained activists in their actual lives.

After Emancipation, works by African American activists foregrounded the reformation of the unruly black girl, thereby aligning her training to become a public, political figure in the increasingly political role black women activists gained in the late nineteenth century. Black women wrote serialized novels such as Frances Harper's *Trial and Triumph* (1888-1889), and advice columns in the black press such as Mrs. N. F. Mossell's "The Women's Department," published in the *New York Freeman*, that expanded the role of the nurturer to include the black community and institutions. In these works, teachers, neighbors, schools, churches, and newspapers all contributed to the

unruly black girl's training and reformation. This communal effort in racial uplift taught the black girl how to re-route her willful unruliness into the focused determination needed to work in the public sphere. In addition, black women writers became increasingly interested in exploring the development of the girl's mind and deemphasizing her body through many lessons including etiquette, parenting, history, politics, and sexual awareness. This tutelage prepared the black girl figure for her future public role as an agent of racial uplift.

Instructional manuals published during the early decades of the twentieth century included prescriptive messages to black girls in response to increased violence against African Americans. Figures of black girls were constructed in manuals as dutiful, self-sacrificial, and obliging representations of ideal models of uplift. Instructions directed the black girl to defer to black male authorities such as preachers and teachers, who were endowed with powerful enough leadership status to defend against the Jim Crow system of violence.¹ Manuals promoted dignity in a girl's resigned corporeality, and encouraged modesty, silence, and stillness rather than willfulness, loudness, and unruliness. Even if educated and self-aware, girls were confined to the domestic space in the name of service to the race.² While black men mobilized and formed political groups to secure voting rights, prescriptive literature reminded black women and girls of their duty to the home in

¹Jim Crow was the calculated campaign by elite whites to circumscribe all possibility of African American political, economic, and social power. Jim Crow emphasized the power of white supremacists and took form in violence, economic oppression, electoral fraud, and an overall manipulation of the social structure. Please see *Jumpin' Jim Crow: Southern Politics from Civil War to Civil Rights*, eds. Jane Daily, Glenda Elizabeth Gilmore, and Bryant Simon (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2000), 4.

²The Niagara Movement occurred in 1905, the same year as the publication of a conduct book which I discuss later, titled *Floyd's Flowers, or Duty and Beauty for Colored Children* (1905). The first meeting of the Niagara Movement, which occurred in Canada, was comprised of black male leaders including W. E. B. DuBois. The group was committed to gaining the right for black male suffrage. Please see John Hope Franklin and Alfred A. Moss, *From Slavery to Freedom: A History of African Americans*, 7th ed. (New York: McGraw Hill, 1994).

support of these male efforts.

Post-World War II constructions of black girlhood revised early models of appropriate conduct, with emphasis on her intimate, personal life. In Gwendolyn Brooks's girlhood poems published in *Annie Allen*, her second collection of poems published in 1949, for which she was the first black person to be awarded the Pulitzer Prize, the author represents Annie's interior voice through interactions with her mother. In the poems, Annie rejects her mother's teachings and warnings in order to cultivate her own awareness of racial discrimination through her personal experiences. Brooks writes *Annie Allen* to convey the experiences and the inner voice of one black girl as she comes of age on the Southside of Chicago in the 1940's. In contrast to earlier models of progress, Brooks frees the black girl from an instructive role, and creates a collection of poems that insists on nurturing a girl's interiority as important to progress, especially in a racist world.

Brooks permits Annie to indulge her imagination and gain her lessons through her own lived experiences, which Brooks expresses through modernist poetic devices. Because of her position as a modernist, Brooks is constantly refuting conformity to tradition. Her expression of the black girl's inner voice uninformed by dominant codes of behavior offers a new direction in black girlhood that breaks from a nineteenth century tradition of progress grounded in propriety, decorum, and duty to parental figures. Thus, Brooks's girlhood poems offer an alternative to the conduct manual.

Defining Childhood

My interpretation of the black girl as a figure of racial progress draws from a pre-established field of critical inquiry that evaluates the politics of childhood and race in

constructions of the American body politic.³ Caroline Levander, Karen Sanchez-Eppler, and Mary Niall Mitchell examine how the child's image contributes to constructions of nation in early America. Levander argues that narratives of U.S. history and national identity are revealed through images of childhood. The child, she states, embodies both an ephemeral and essentialist construction of identity that automatically complicates its meaning. The image of the child "refutes the constancy of individual identity even as it represents its most essential premise that each self is stable" (1).⁴ Levander further draws from the scholarship of Jay Fliegelman and Russ Castronovo, whose work discusses the image of the white child in popular narratives from the Revolutionary War to the Civil War. These authors compare the political separation of the colonies from England with a child's inevitable separation from its parent and show how the child became a powerful icon of the new nation in U.S. political rhetoric (223).⁵ Levander moves beyond their representations of the white child to consider how the black child registered the extent to which the narrative of the nation's political origins "had been shot through with a racial subtext that constantly threatened to undermine, even as it enabled, a unified account of

³See also Catherine Driscoll, who offers a useful historical context for conduct manuals (*Girls: Feminine Adolescence in Popular Culture and Cultural Theory*); Carolyn Steedman, who discusses the changing attitudes towards children and childhood as shown in the fields of the social sciences, law, literature, and medicine (*Strange Dislocations: Childhood and the Idea of Human Interiority, 1780-1930*); and Anne Scott MacLeod, who provides a framework in which to read children's literature (*American Childhood: Essays on Children's Literature of the Nineteenth and Twentieth Centuries*).

⁴See Levander's study (*Cradle of Liberty: Race, the Child, and National Belonging from Thomas Jefferson to W. E. B. DuBois*) on how the child figures as the link between anxieties of race and national identity, a work that contributes new meaning to how national and racial discourse cohere around the image of the child.

⁵Jay Fliegelman explores how representations of children in early American novels constituted a central preoccupation in eighteenth-century culture because children symbolized the larger political problems of the age and articulated powerfully "the fundamental cultural values and anxieties of the early republic" (333). Fliegelman appropriates the figure of the child and its relationship with its parents to address the concerns that assail a new nation: "The new nation and its people had become of age, had achieved a collective maturity that necessitated them becoming in political fact an independent and self-governing nation" (333). The tension between authority and freedom were fixed onto the body of the child.

U.S. nation formation” (223).⁶ She asserts that the black child operates as “an ideological site for representing the shifting conceptual place of race in the new nation” (223). It constitutes and complicates U.S. identity. Its image functioned, according to Levander, as “a particularly rich discursive site authorizing a distinct national identity and, in its depiction of the integral, complicating place of ‘colour’ in that identity, revealing the conceptual instabilities embedded in the nation since its inception” (223).

Karen Sanchez-Eppler builds on Levander’s notion that the child “refutes constancy,” as she describes how children in the nation are in “a dependent state” in that a child relies on another body for care. In return, this other body, whether it is an institution or a person, turns to the child figure to understand concepts of citizenship, national reform, and national identity. Sanchez-Eppler writes, “Children are often presented as not fully human, so that the figure of the child demarcates the boundaries of personhood, a limiting case for agency, voice or enfranchisement. Hence, for people who are not male, or white, or American, or considered sufficiently sane or sufficiently rich, exclusion from civil rights has often been implemented through analogies to the child” (Sanchez-Eppler, *Dependent States*, xxiv).⁷

Similar to Sanchez-Eppler, Mary Niall Mitchell agrees that the black child’s liminal social identity aligned with the nation’s growth. For example, the first generation of African Americans to grow up in the post-Emancipation era as “Freedom’s Child”

⁶See Levander, *Cradle of Liberty* 1. In United States social and political policy debates, the figure of the child remained an important index on which to base policy decisions because the child’s welfare was directly related to the health of the nation. Levander argues for the child’s longstanding significance in the democratic process through organizations that center the child as a benchmark to the nation’s democratic progress (14-15). See also Karen Sanchez-Eppler’s review of Levander’s book in “Book Reviews” in *Legacy* 24.2 (2007): 333-334.

⁷Sanchez Eppler cites Diana Fuss, ed., *Human, All Too Human* (New York: Routledge, 1996) and Anna Mae Duane in *Suffering Childhood in Early America: Race, Nation and the Disciplined Body* (Diss. Fordham University, 2004).

symbolized “the possibility of a future dramatically different from the past, a future in which black Americans might have the same privileges as whites, such as land ownership, equality and autonomy” (Mitchell, *Raising Freedom’s Child*, 6). Through the prism of “Freedom’s Child,” Mitchell argues, “we see the uncertainty of the nation’s future, the untidy sum of projected hopes and fears, as slavery gave way to freedom”(6).

Unlike these studies, my dissertation focuses solely on the black girl figure in African American literature and culture. Despite the attention paid to representations of the black child in American politics, a gap remains which this dissertation hopes to fill. Few scholars have examined the degree to which African American cultural and intellectual discussions of girlhood have factored into American identity politics.⁸ One exception is Joyce Ladner’s pioneering work, *Tomorrow’s Tomorrow: The Black Woman* (1971), in which she examines the developmental process of the black girl to discern the sociological factors that determine the kind of woman she will become. Ladner argues that the black girl is conditioned to survive in a hostile, oppressive society and becomes socialized into womanhood as early as seven or eight years old. Ladner’s foundation for her analysis draws from nineteenth-century childhoods in slave histories, Sojourner Truth’s autobiography, and the autobiographies of Fredrick Douglass and Booker T.

⁸Histories of childhood during slavery and throughout the twentieth century provide a cultural context for children, including black girls, growing up in these centuries. Wilma King examines the daily lives of boys and girls during slavery. Harvey J. Graff and Steven Mintz offer histories of childhood in America with specific sections on ideologies of girlhood in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. They argue that girls are models of responsibility for their country. A facsimile reproduction of the first *American Girl Scout Handbook* published in 1913 describes how girls can contribute to their country by learning such ideals as preparing for marriage, maintaining a household, and caring for the environment. Also see Jacques Roethler, “Reading in Color: Children’s Book Illustrations and Identity Formation for Black Children in the United States”; Valerie Sander, *Records of Girlhood: An Anthology of Nineteenth-Century Women’s Childhoods*; Wilma King, “Within the Professional Household: Slave Children in the Antebellum South” and “No Bondage for Me: Free Boys and Girls within a Slave Society” in *African American Childhoods: Historical Perspectives from Slavery to Civil Rights*; Harvey J. Graff, *Conflicting Paths: Growing up in America*; Steven Mintz, *Huck’s Raft: A History of American Childhood*; and W. J. Hoxie, *How Girls Can Help Their Country*.

Washington. In addition to expanding Ladner's work by contributing analyses of black girlhoods in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, my dissertation responds to scholars who note the absence of mainstream fictional texts based on the lives and experiences of black girls. Ruth Rosenberg refers to this absence of black girls in literature for children, claiming that "Black girls did not exist as far as the publishers for school anthologies were concerned" (335). In her discussion, she includes a quote from Toni Morrison who says she wrote *The Bluest Eye* (1970) to give voice to those on the periphery: "Little black girls who were props, background, those people were never center stage and those people were me" (335).⁹ In an interview with Beverly Guy-Sheftall, Toni Cade Bambara, author of *Gorilla, My Love* (1970), a collection of short stories on black girls, agrees that the black girl's maturation process often remains unnoticed: "The initiation or rites of passage of the young girl is not one of the darlings of American literature. The coming of age for the young boy is certainly much more the classic case. I wonder if it all means that we don't put a value on our process of womanhood" (247).¹⁰

My intervention in this scholarly field of childhood studies suggests that the black girl figure as a raced *and* gendered body occupies a space of liminality, and in this social space, she represents inconsistency. The work of Levander, Sanchez-Eppler, and Mitchell has helped me to view the black girl as representative of the race's inconsistent growth and as a projection of its future progress. The black girl figure becomes the exemplar of racial progress because she is a "dependent" and vulnerable, yet courageous and resilient subject, qualified to project the possibility of citizenry. The black girl as a liminal figure

⁹Ruth Rosenberg, "Seeds in Hard Ground: Black Girlhood in *The Bluest Eye*." *Black American Literature Forum* 21.4 (Winter 1987): 435-445.

¹⁰"Commitment: Toni Cade Bambara Speaks." *Sturdy Black Bridges: Visions of Black Women in Literature*, eds. Roseanne P. Bell, Bettye J. Parker, and Beverly Guy-Sheftall (Garden City: Anchor Press, 1979), 231-250.

is malleable and refuses categorization. Youth, gender, and race construct the black girl as a “not-yet” subject, “not-yet” citizen, and “not-yet” woman. Her liminal state as a “not-yet” figure disrupts the idea of a singular, cohesive, and stable racial identity and makes her an attractive figure in uplift rhetoric. Her image thus offers the possibility of an *alternative* model of citizenship.

Defining Girlhood

The black girl’s liminal state makes her an ideal subject through which to communicate the political goals of the black race. In nineteenth-century intellectual thought, the black girl functioned as cultural shorthand that communicated messages to the public. “Shorthand” in journalism operates as a compressed symbol that transmits a larger meaning. The black girl as shorthand is a strategically-compressed, narrative symbol recurring and evolving throughout literary history. Nina Baym and Jane Tompkins discuss the girl figure as shorthand in their analyses of representative female characters in sentimental, antebellum fiction. In particular, Jane Tompkins examines the cultural work located in recognizable characters and their impact on a society:

I saw that the presence of stereotyped characters . . . was what allowed them to operate as instruments of cultural self-definition. Stereotypes are the instantly recognizable representatives of overlapping racial, sexual, national, ethnic, economic, social, political, and religious categories; they convey enormous amounts of cultural information in an extremely condensed form. (xvi)¹¹

¹¹Jane Tompkins, “Introduction” in *Sensational Designs: The Cultural Work of American Fiction 1790-1860* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1985). Similar to Tompkins’s “stereotyped character,” Nina Baym identifies the girl as a common figure in women’s fiction before 1850. Such fiction “tell[s], with variations, a single tale” of “a poor and friendless child” who is “most frequently an orphan” and who comes of age amid terrible obstacles (16). Despite her troubles, the heroine manifests noble qualities, such as an unusually developed spirituality, a remarkable goodness, and the capacity to survive. Baym’s girl figure as a common character in antebellum women’s fiction and Tompkins’s stereotypical character, who is “essential to popularly successful narrative,” both operate as “*a cultural shorthand* . . . because their multilayered representative function [is] the carrier of strong, emotional associations” (emphasis added, Tompkins xvi; see Baym 35).

In the narratives I examine, the black girl's image is "a carrier of strong emotional associations" and makes this figure ideal for communicating messages to readers. (xvi).

In their appropriation of the black girl figure as a model of progress, race activists make clear distinctions between *youthful* and *knowing* girlhood. This demarcation is represented by a girl's age and offers rhetorical advantages for race activists. *Youthful* girlhood is often designated by an age under twelve; it is a popular age in uplift rhetoric because the girl as youthful and *unknowing* functions as a blank slate that holds the capacity for transformation through intellectual agency and achievement. *Knowing* girlhood is the age in which black girls become what Harriet Jacobs labels "prematurely knowing," or aware of themselves sexually, and thus able to fight strategically against unlawful acts such as physical and sexual abuse.

Descriptions of youthful girlhood in this study represent the young, black girl as poor and untutored, yet capable of self-reformation. Through nurturance at a young age, she becomes an exemplar of change through morality and her ability to create poetry, and is thus well-suited for her role as a model of racial progress. In a letter to Phillis Wheatley's publisher, John Wheatley reinforces this transformation when he describes Phillis Wheatley as a slave girl "between seven and eight years of age" who gains intellectual achievement when "in fifteen months time from her arrival, attained the English language, to which she was an utter stranger before, to such a degree, as to read any, the most difficult parts of the sacred writings, to the great astonishment of all who heard her." Similarly, a black girl learns language and writing at an early age in an article titled "The Little Black Girl," published February 15, 1834, in *Liberator*, an abolitionist newspaper. In this article, the author tells the story of "a good little black girl" named

Sylvia, who is taken into a white family at “quite an early age—I think less than twelve,” and similar to Wheatley, is wretched and poor, but learns “the principles of grammar, to apply them in her conversation and writing . . . so that very few grammarians knew more about it than Sylvia did.” Finally, an advertisement for a missing black girl titled “Missing,” published August 15, 1828, in *Freedom’s Journal*, a black newspaper, describes “a colored girl named Eliza Pisco, about 11 years of age . . . [who] speaks the English and German languages . . .” and who is found missing from her place of work. The age of these black girls—seven or eight, less than twelve, and eleven—recognizes them as *youthful* girls, yet they exhibit heightened intellectualism and achievement through their mastery of languages, and thus become models of progress.

Race leaders determine the age of fifteen or sixteen as the limitation of youthful girlhood, as the girl becomes knowingly aware of sexuality or is able to fight strategically against oppression. In “A Chapter on Our Girls,” published Saturday, March 20, 1886, in *New York Freeman*, Mossell describes how a girl enjoys youthful girlhood until the age of sixteen:

as a rule, she is allowed to live some sixteen years in this world without exciting much thought. Then for the next sixteen, if one of the fortunate ones, she is petted and flattered until she is spoiled with the idea that she is the bright particular star of her social system. When she reaches her third sixteenth she finds herself relegated to the rear. . . .

Similarly, in an article titled “Girls ‘Have at Ye All,’” published on October 10, 1828, in *Freedom’s Journal*, the author, Dick Dashell, teaches readers a few hints on a girl’s successful courtship, which he claims should begin at age fifteen: “at fifteen affect vivacity: if you are in company with the man you would like for a husband, hold your breath long enough to blush when he speaks to you. . . .” For black girls in the North, a

girl becomes “knowing” when she begins to entertain thoughts of marriage. However, for slave girls in the South, fifteen becomes a pivotal age in which youthfulness is replaced by perceptive awareness of violence and sexual threats. Fifteen is the age when enslaved Linda Brent in *Incidents in the Life of a Slave Girl* describes how she became “prematurely knowing” of sexual threats despite her moral upbringing. Brent “entered on the fifteenth year—a sad epoch in the life of a slave girl. My master began to whisper foul words in my ear. Young as I was, I could not remain ignorant of their import.” Race activists associate the *knowing* black girl in the North with conformity to dominant, societal laws, moral decorum, and marriage. For enslaved girls, knowing girlhood critiques *lawlessness*—the physical and sexual violence towards black girls in the South.

The White Woman as Civilizing Agent

Western thought holds the conviction that women function as the civilizing agent of humankind. Specifically, dominant U.S. narratives of progress have always positioned the woman as the central civilizing agent of American nationhood. Historians Janet Zollinger Giele,¹² Mary Beth Norton, Mary Ryan, and Ruth H. Bloch, among others, argue that after the American Revolution, women adapted their patriotism and democratic instincts to a domestic role. Instrumental in advocating woman’s inclusion in the political activities of the nation after the Revolutionary War through education was Abigail Adams, who wrote letters to her husband, President John Adams, requesting increased rights for women. Thus, Americans adopted the ideology of “Republican Motherhood”

¹²Janet Zollinger Giele, in *Two Paths to Women’s Equality: Temperance, Suffrage, and the Origins of Modern Feminism*, argues that women’s roles became differentiated into two streams: one, more closely allied with family and religion, which supplied precedents for the post-Civil War women’s temperance movement; the other, more secular and oriented to government and the law, which was carried forward by the women’s suffrage movement. Common to both was a fundamental belief in the strength and power of women that was drawn from everyday civil, domestic, and religious experience.

which advocated the education of women in order to raise patriotic sons and dutiful daughters, strengthen the domestic sphere, and influence the workings of the public sphere.¹³ As historian Mary Ryan notes in her work on the relationship between gender and public space, “to search for women in public is to subvert a long-standing tenet of the modern Western gender system, the presumption that social space is divided between the public and the private and that men claim the former while women are confined to the latter” (4). In *Liberty’s Daughters*, Mary Beth Norton argues that “prior to the Revolution, Americans paid little attention to the formal education of women” (256). But, after the revolution, “Americans’ vision of the ideal woman—an independent thinker and patriot, a virtuous wife, competent household manager, and knowledgeable mother—required formal instruction in a way that the earlier paragon, the notable housewife, did not” (256).

Ruth H. Bloch argues that post-revolutionary gender ideologies held that women “possessed human reason and with an advanced education would not only better fulfill their human potential and perhaps even make valuable contributions outside the home, but they would, in addition, handle themselves more rationally as mothers and pass valuable knowledge on to their children” (75). As Republican mothers, women held a dual role in shaping the nation’s image. According to Catherine Beecher’s 1841 *Treatise on Domestic Economy*, woman’s dual influence on the American home and on the public

¹³The concept of Republican Motherhood eventually increased educational opportunities and participation in political activity for American women. The abolitionist movement, which blossomed in the 1830s and 1840s, found many of its strongest and most dedicated voices in educated Northern women. The Seneca Falls Convention of 1848, which began the Women’s Rights movement in the United States, also likely owes some of its origin to the emphasis on Republican Motherhood. For more information on the history of Republican Motherhood, see Linda Kerber’s *Women of the Republic: Intellect and Ideology in Revolutionary America* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1980), and Jan Lewis’s “The Republican Wife: Virtue and Seduction in the Early Republic,” *William and Mary Quarterly* 1987.

enabled domesticity to become the active agent in conquering the “barbarous” and “foreign,” both outside and within the United States.¹⁴

While the concept of Republican Motherhood reinforced how women’s education would contribute to her *public* role in strengthening the Republic by raising boys to participate in business and government and girls to understand their duty to the home, the nineteenth-century concept of the Cult of Womanhood defined innate qualities that women must uphold to secure her *private* role in protecting the piety of the home. Historian Barbara Welter argues that “the attributes of True Womanhood by which a woman judged herself and was judged by her husband, her neighbors, and her society could be divided into four cardinal virtues—piety, purity, submissiveness, and domesticity. . . . Without them . . . all was ashes. With them she was promised happiness and power” (151).¹⁵ Welter distinguishes between the man’s public role and the woman’s private role to remain in the home and secure its stability when she claims, “while the nineteenth-century American man was a busy builder of bridges and railroads, at work long hours in a materialistic society, he could salve his conscience by reflecting that he had left behind a hostage, not only to fortune, but to all the values which he held so dear and treated so lightly” (151). To protect the private home was the True Woman’s sole duty, which, according to Welter, “was the fearful obligation, a solemn responsibility, which the nineteenth-century American woman had—to uphold the pillars of the temple

¹⁴Catherine E. Beecher, *Treatise on Domestic Economy, for the Use of Young Ladies at Home and in School* (Boston, 1841), 1-14. Quoted from Bruce Dorsey, *Reforming Men and Women: Gender in the Antebellum City* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2002), 8.

¹⁵See Barbara B. Welter, “The Cult of True Womanhood: 1820-1860,” *American Quarterly* 18.2, part 1 (1966): 151-174. The woman who followed the principles of True Womanhood protected the home from an increase in industrial production in the nineteenth century. Welter writes, “In a society where values changed frequently, where fortunes rose and fell with frightening rapidity, where social and economic mobility provided instability as well as hope, one thing at least remained the same—a true woman was a true woman, wherever she was found” (151).

with her frail white hand” (151). While educated Republican mothers might have followed the tenets of True Womanhood, their domestic roles were intended to contribute directly to the nation.

The Black Woman as Civilizing Agent

In an attempt to acquire full citizenship rights, African Americans created their own narratives of racial progress in histories, essays, religious tracts, speeches, and novels that borrowed ideals from the dominant culture. Black activists appropriated the concept of Republican Motherhood because of its accessibility to some black women. As Harriet Jacobs explains in her narrative *Incidents in the Life of a Slave Girl* (1860), the tenets that define the Cult of True Womanhood—piety, purity, submissiveness, and domesticity—were impossible for many enslaved women to follow, as a result of rape and violence in slavery. Yet, gaining an education and instilling morals in their children would contribute to citizenship goals.

In newspaper articles, essays, and novels, black activists emphasized gender role distinctions as an important component of racial progress. In his work on African American communities in the antebellum North, historian James Oliver Horton discusses the gender dynamics of African American citizenship:

During the nineteenth century . . . black liberation was often defined in terms of the ability of black women and men to become full participants in American life. Ironically, this not only meant the acquisition of citizenship rights, almost all of which applied only to men, but also entailed an obligation to live out the gender ideals of American patriarchal society. There were surely greater potential advantages in this brand of liberation for black men than for women. (116)

Uplift rhetoric in the antebellum period overwhelmingly dictated that black women defer to black men.

In the antebellum period, black intellectuals such as Martin Delany followed the

lead of the dominant culture to emphasize the role of the black woman as a moralizing agent. Her education was key to the elevation and progress of the black race. In his essay titled “The Condition, Elevation, Emigration and Destiny of the Colored People of the United States (1852),” Delany writes, “[n]o people are ever elevated above the *condition* of their *females*. . . . To know the position of a people, it is only necessary to know the condition of their *females*; and despite themselves, they cannot rise above their level” (his emphasis, 274). Delany reasons that developing a woman’s mind through education is essential for racial progress, but her lessons must be purposeful and well-guided:

let our young women have education; let their minds be well formed; well stored with light and useful information and practical proficiency, rather than light superficial acquirements, popularly and fashionably called accomplishments. We desire accomplishments, but they must be *useful*. (his emphasis, 273)

That Delany twice repeats that a black woman’s education be “useful” suggests his disinterest in her education for personal fulfillment or enrichment. The black female becomes educated to take on a wholly domestic role as nurturer to her children: “our females must be qualified, because they are to be the mothers of our children. As mothers are the first nurses and instructors of children; from them children consequently, get their first impressions, which being always the most lasting, should be the most correct” (273). This deference to black male authority, what Ann DuCille labels a “discourse of deference,” persists throughout the narratives of progress that I study.¹⁶ These narratives claim that through her intellect and influence, the black woman enriches the private, domestic realm, enabling the black man to gain character and succeed in his public role as citizen and provider for future generations.

¹⁶See Ann DuCille, *The Coupling Convention: Sex, Text, and Tradition in Black Women’s Fiction* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1993), 49-53.

Although African Americans upheld the black woman as moralizing agent in their narratives of racial progress, they also emphasized the role of the black girl as an apprentice working alongside the black woman. The black mother became the Republican Mother to the black girl; through this tutelage, the black *girl* rather than the black *woman* grew to become the foundational stone on which black activists built their race's aspirations and expectations. Black intellectual discourse thus revises the dominant culture's citizenship model of Republican Motherhood by positioning the black *girl* as a *future*, moralizing agent.¹⁷ Because the black woman represents the oppressed past of slavery and present conditions of disfranchisement, black intellectuals label the black girl as the model of progress whose purity, education, and elevation can restore future generations of black women as agents of civilization.

The Black Girl as Civilizing Agent

Particularly in the black press, black activists expressed opinions on gender expectations for both black boys and girls. Their messages targeted a readership invested in social mobility and the acquisition of citizenship. Articles functioned as thinly-veiled conduct books that taught the reading public how best to raise their children to become valuable, useful contributors to racial progress. Countering popular perceptions of gender role distinctions among boys and girls, nineteenth-century black activists promoted the black girl as more likely than the black boy to carry out the aspirations and promises of racial progress. Black girls maintained close relationships with their black, Republican

¹⁷Black activists like Episcopalian minister Alexander Crummell describe the black girl's role as apprentice to the black woman. In his religious tract entitled "The Care of Daughters" (1898), Crummell emphasizes this apprenticeship: "if we can only secure the womanhood of our race, we are safe. Men are the regulators of the trades, the farming, the business, the crafts, the labors of the world: *women* are the conservators of the manners of society, of morals, and the home. Girls are the apprentices of the future womanhood and maternity of a race. Everything possible, then, should be done, to secure the allegiance of their apprenticeship to virtue and purity" (his emphasis, 226).

mothers and were receptive to their tutelage. They became “miniature women” and were expected to perform household chores and domestic duties rather than express themselves through play.¹⁸ Many of the articles aligned with the dominant view of black girls as “women in miniature,” and acknowledged the black girl’s contribution to molding the black race in general, and black men in particular. In contrast, writers lauded the black boy with “a grand and brilliant” role to “perpetuate the family name and enhance the family future.” Boys would gain access to the “world” and all of its allurements, while girls would learn fundamental lessons in refinement and morality to groom them for their future role of teacher to her children.

Specifically, articles by the black female journalist, Mrs. N. F. Mossell, and the editor of *New York Freeman*, T. Thomas Fortune, recognized distinct gender roles for black boys and girls. Both journalists clearly identified the black girl as more apt to act responsibly in matters of racial progress. In “Only a Girl,” published on February 13, 1886, in her weekly column titled “The Women’s Department” serialized in *New York Freeman*, Mrs. N. F. Mossell described how girls were more likely to remain accountable to the teachings gained from early lessons, while boys were more apt to fall victim to vices of the “world”:

Girls are much more likely to remain what their mothers train them to be than boys. By the time a boy has reached his sixteenth year the world has begun its work on him, and often to a great extent undoes the primary training of the mother. Not so with a girl. She is always more or less subject to home influences. The old adage, ‘a son is a son until he gets him a wife; a daughter is a daughter all the day of her life,’ often, alas, contains more prose than poetry.

¹⁸See Melanie Dawson, “The Miniaturizing of Girlhood: Nineteenth Century Playtime and Gendered Theories of Development,” *The American Child: A Cultural Studies Reader*, eds. Caroline Levander and Carol Singley (New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 2003).

While the girl figure remains “more or less subject to home influences,” the boy’s access to the “world” exposes him to the public sphere, its vices, and thus possible corruption. With proper tutelage, the black girl who remains in the domestic sphere is more apt to retain her mother’s moral teachings and achieve citizenship and inclusion in the nation.

Similarly, T. Thomas Fortune acknowledged the boy’s role in the public sphere, but recognized more so the girl’s contribution to molding male character. In an article titled “Our Girls” published on April 10, 1886, Fortune wrote,

No fond parent ever pictures for his boy any other than a grand and brilliant future. He is to perpetuate the family name; he is to enhance the family fortune; he is to be the useful member of society. . . . There is a widespread opinion abroad in the world that, in the last analysis, the boy has a higher and more important mission to fill in the world than the girl, and that, consequentially, the home treatment and education of the one should be looked after more conscientiously and scrupulously.”

Fortune recognized that the girl gained no grand treatment:

The girl, on the contrary, is regarded from her infancy as without a future outside the social and domestic circle—an ornament that could be easily dispensed with. Her education is not planned upon the same lines as that of the boy; her capacity to receive and master and utilize the higher education as would a boy is not for a moment seriously considered. The two start unequally, because of prevailing opinions on the matter, from the cradle, and the pathway in life diverge radically the moment they reach the legal age of maturity. The one is supposed to take his place in the great world as a producer and a moulder [sic] and director of opinion, while the other is supposed to settle down more than ever before the common places of domestic life.

He added that

We do not concur in the views here presented. O the contrary, we regard the work which women have to do in the world as of equal if not greater importance than that which falls to the lot of man; and we contend, therefore, that the rudiments and the finish of her education should be carefully and conscientiously superintended.

According to Fortune, the black woman “brings the man into the world; therefore, it is the black girl as her apprentice who would gain an education in order to develop a

manhood wherein shrewdness, courage, fidelity to race, commercial enterprise, and high moral and religious convictions are prevailing and predominate elements.” Her education serves to reinforce the black man’s public role: “If we are to have such men our women are to give them to us. Let us therefore see to it that our girls receive the care and education which the nature of their life work will require.” Clearly, Mossell and Fortune both selected the girl over the boy as the figure most apt to gain tutelage, retain her lessons, and use these lessons effectively to contribute to racial progress, either by helping to teach the boy to ensure his success in public or by strengthening the black home alongside her mother, which would lead to citizenship for African Americans.

A Tale of Two Black Girls: Lucy Terry and Phillis Wheatley

In both American and African American intellectual thought, representations of the youthful black girl function as a shorthand for black progress. Her image appears as early as the eighteenth century through the stories of two orphaned, educated girl-poets, Lucy Terry and Phillis Wheatley. When Terry and Wheatley are sold as young girls to work as servants to white families, they fill voids in these childless, white colonial households by serving as slaves/surrogate daughters to their white mistresses/mothers. Through this benevolent relationship, Terry and Wheatley earn reputations as preeminent poets. Their growth from untutored slave girls to intellectual women is politically significant because their stories lay the foundation for racial progress. The girl’s coming-of-age here suggests the hope for the eventual inclusion of her community in the larger nation. If she acquires good conduct and education, the black girl, like the disfranchised black race as a whole, may join the larger nation and acquire equal rights and citizenship under the law. Terry’s and Wheatley’s girlhoods contribute to the image of the educated

black girl figure as a powerful anti-slavery model. Their stories become eighteenth-century models of black intellectual agency through their representations as orphaned, black girls who gain education through the benevolence of a white female mother/mistress.

Lucy Terry, who is often cited as the first black person to write a poem (“Bars Fight” in 1746), was sold to white slave owners in Deerfield, New Hampshire in 1728. According to her biographer, Gretchen Holbrook Gerzina, Ebenezer Wells bought Lucy, and she “entered the home of Ebenezer and Abigail Wells, then a childless couple after the death of their infant. She was about ten years old, and an English speaker” (67). Lucy was soon joined by another black girl, Jenny, who was sold to Rev. Jonathan Ashley and his wife, Dorothy, as a replacement for Dorothy’s recently deceased child. Gerzina describes how the “two stolen girls occupied houses at opposite ends of the street” (71). These two black girls functioned as surrogate daughters in the white, colonial home:

It was doubtless and with great pride that Ashley presented the adolescent slave and her baby to his wife, Dorothy, who had just lost her own firstborn infant. As had been the case for Abigail Wells a few years earlier, there was suddenly *a black girl to fill a void in a childless household*, even though Dorothy went on to fill her house with children for whom Jenny was forced to care. (emphasis added, 71)

Although she understood her position as a slave, Terry earned a reputation as an avid storyteller and creator of poems. She gained status as an intelligent, gifted girl among African Americans and whites in her small New England community. The only written record to date of Terry’s stories is her poem “Bars Fight,” in which Terry memorialized a raid by Native Americans on the Deerfield community. In her ballad, Terry vividly describes how Native Americans slay men and women. “Bars Fight” became an instant hit and “was picked up and repeated far and wide for more than a

century” (Gerzina 80). Although Terry may have written her poem on paper in 1746, it was not published until one hundred years later on the front page of the *Springfield Daily Republican*, thirty-three years after her death (Gerzina 80). Terry’s published poem acknowledged a black woman whose achievements extended beyond the homes of her small New England community. Her recognition as a poet and a black intellectual through the pages of print culture traveled to readers across the states and solidified her reputation as a national figure.

The image of the intellectual black girl figure continued to circulate in the public sphere in America and abroad through Phillis Wheatley’s girlhood image on the frontispiece of her collection of poems, *Poems on Various Subjects, Religious and Moral* (1773). When Wheatley was seven years old, slave traders stole her from her family in the Senegal-Gambia region in Africa in 1761, transported her to Boston, and sold her to John Wheatley to work as a servant in his family. Wheatley inaugurates the African American literary tradition as the first known black person to publish a book of poetry.

When Wheatley prepared to publish her volume, she commissioned black Bostonian artist Scipio Moorhead to create a stenciled image of her as a girl to affix to the cover page of her book. Moorhead’s frontispiece represents Wheatley in the act of writing, sitting at a desk in a pensive, thoughtful pose with a quill in her hand and paper and ink nearby. She is clothed in colonial dress with a full skirt and a bonnet. The collaboration between Wheatley and Moorhead points to widespread alliances among the educated black community in the North. Together, they created a girlhood image that promoted the presence of a cultured black person in the public sphere.¹⁹ Because of her

¹⁹Frances Smith Foster argues that a small population of educated, literate black people who lived in the northern states would have comprised a kind of reading group for Wheatley. Its members included

popularity as a poet, the powerful image of Wheatley as a poised, literate girl circulated throughout the Northern states and abroad. This image informed white and black readers of her presence, stamped an image of their awareness of a young black intellect, and established Wheatley's own literary authority, thereby contributing to anti-slavery sentiment and arguments in favor of black achievement (McHenry, *Black Reading Communities*). Abolitionist newspapers appropriated the formula of the motherless, poor, but educated black girl as a sympathetic figure who became a model to teach readers about tolerance, benevolence, and intellectual equality.

Wheatley countered efforts by white "father figures" to diminish her influence. These figures consisted of her master, John Wheatley, and the eighteen men who examined her intellectual capabilities. John Wheatley sought to discredit Wheatley's achievements in a letter to her publisher that validated his ownership of the slave girl who was "brought from Africa to America, in the year 1761, between Seven and Eight Years of Age." Although he reminded the publisher of Phillis's "great Inclination to learn the Latin Tongue," which she learned not through formal education but through her "curiosity," John Wheatley assured readers that her intellect "[was] given by her Master who bought her, and with whom she now lives" (Wheatley vi). John Wheatley took full credit for Phillis Wheatley's intellect, despite her own desire to become educated and achieve an intellectualism that far exceeded that of most black girls of the period. His letter thus served to reinforce his ownership not only of her body, but also of her mind. It

the artist Scipio Moorhead and the poet Jupiter Hammond, with whom Wheatley corresponded regularly. See Foster's essay, "As Collaborative as Sweet Potato Pie" in *Postbellum, Pre-Harlem*. Gretchen Gerzina, in her archival work recovering the biography of Lucy Terry, located evidence of a thriving literate black population, both enslaved and free, in colonial New England in the late eighteenth century. This black population consisted of a reading public who likely knew of Wheatley's poems.

attempted to domesticate Wheatley's public presence, lessen general anxiety of Wheatley as a public threat, and assure the public that her intellect was under surveillance.

To prove her authorship, Wheatley needed to pass an examination that New England's literary elite administered. In his work on Phillis Wheatley and her critics, Henry Louis Gates recreates Wheatley's participation in this oral examination and emphasizes her role as a political symbol against a white power structure. Gates argues that Wheatley's successful passing of her examination directed the course of African American intellectual thought for decades to come: "if (Wheatley) had written her poems, then this would demonstrate that Africans were human beings and should be liberated from slavery. . . . Essentially, she was auditioning for the humanity of the entire African people" (26-27). After Wheatley passed the examination, the eighteen male examiners communicated their assurance of Wheatley's authorship in a "Letter to the Publick":

We whose Names are under-written, so assure the World, that the Poems specified in the following Page, were (as we verily believe) written by Phillis, a young Negro Girl, who was but a few Years since, brought an uncultivated Barbarian from *Africa*, and has ever since been, and now is, under the Disadvantage of serving as a Slave in a Family in this Town. She has been examined by some of the best Judges, and is thought qualified to write them. (Wheatley vii)

While "Letter to the Publick" clarified Wheatley as the author of her poems, the eighteen men labeled her not as an accomplished intellectual, but as an "uncultivated barbarian from Africa." The men further deemphasized Wheatley's intellectualism when they situated her not as a poet, but as someone "under the disadvantage of serving as a Slave." Her identification as an uncultivated slave undermined her public image as a poet capable of reason. Furthermore, placing Wheatley "in a Family in this Town"—the space of the white, colonial home—promoted white benevolence and attributed her personal

accomplishments to her benevolent white owners.

Wheatley ultimately gained public authority from white mistress/mother, Susannah Wheatley. In a poem titled “Farewell to America” written to commemorate her voyage to England and dedicated to Susannah, Wheatley bid “Adieu” to New England. Although Wheatley met people in England who assisted her in gaining her freedom, Wheatley shortened her trip and returned to Boston to tend to Susannah who was dying. Whether through devotion or obligation to Susannah, the bond between Wheatley and Susannah conveyed the nature of a relationship between a black girl figure and her surrogate, white mother figure that would continue for centuries. Black intellectuals in the early nineteenth century co-opted the black girl from the white household. They revised this trope by removing the surrogate, white mother figure and reinstating the black mother as caregiver and educator of black girls as necessary for racial uplift.

Chapter Outline

Girlhood in African American Literature advances scholarship on the racial representation of girlhood and contributes to current debates in African American studies. The dissertation consists of four chapters in which I analyze both canonical and rarely-read texts that feature the black girl as a model for achieving citizenship for African Americans. In Chapter One, “Antebellum Girlhood in African American Literature,” I argue that during the antebellum period, black intellectuals appropriated the figure of the black girl as a political tool to create a model of black citizenship along gender lines. The early black press which was administered by a black male editorial board consistently selected articles for *Freedom’s Journal* and *Colored American* that represented the black

girl as orphaned, scarred, beaten, silent, obedient to dominant laws of conventionality, or dead.

These representations of black girls as victimized or objectified worked alongside the more canonical, expected antebellum model of manhood, as seen in David Walker's *Appeal*, published in 1929. Walker's piece, which demanded that men assert their rights by force, functioned as another way for black activists to arouse readers to participate in the fight for equality. Black men wanted to be protectors of their families, but could not resort to violence to become their protectors as David Walker threatened in his *Appeal*. One option was to adopt the Terry/Wheatley paradigm of the surrogate, white mother. Instead, black editors turned to the ideology of Republican Motherhood as a more viable strategy. As demonstrated in *Colored American* articles, the black mother figure nurtured the black girl and taught her refinement through dress, manners, and education.

Once the black girl and her mother became central figures in their arguments for citizenship efforts, black women writers and activists like Maria Stewart, Harriet Wilson, and Harriet Jacobs insisted on speaking for themselves. Although the black community forced Stewart to flee from the podium and even from her hometown of Boston, her fiery speeches in support of women's rights laid a foundation for black women authors to tell their *own* stories. In these narratives, black girls were represented not as victims, but as active, vocal, and willful participants striving to gain their freedom and independence. In Harriet Wilson's *Our Nig* (1859) and Harriet Jacobs's *Incidents in the Life of a Slave Girl* (1861), black girls are purposefully unruly, spirited, physically active, self-reliant, and when able, unabashedly *vocal*. Representations of black girls in these narratives offer a new set of laws to assist black women, free and enslaved, in acquiring independence.

Wilson's and Jacobs's testimonials function as courtrooms in which readers can judge the stories black girls communicate about themselves. Thus emerged a custody battle between black male and female activists through the pages of print culture centering on the black girl. In this intra-racial conflict, the black girl figure became the object of black attempts at legitimacy.

In Chapter Two, "Black Girlhood Post-Emancipation," I argue that black activists continued to employ the black girl as a citizenship model, but reconfigured it to reflect the newly emancipated black race and efforts to rebuild the disfranchised South. In narratives of progress found in speeches, novels, and newspaper columns, black writers and activists privileged newly-emancipated, educated black girls as models for black achievement, and expressed the promise of reconstruction and a unified nation through representations of post-Emancipation black girl figures, who live in two parent households with extended family who groom them for uplift efforts in the public sphere.

This post-Emancipation girlhood model works alongside popular male icons of progress, such as the fugitive slave, the fiery orator, or the male abolitionist, as depicted in Frederick Douglass's *Narrative of the Life of Frederick Douglass* (1845) or Booker T. Washington's *Up from Slavery* (1901). Rather than the singular, individual journey to freedom as evident in popular male-centered narratives, the black girl as post-Emancipation citizenship model functions communally to involve parents, extended family, and community members, who assist the girl in her growth. Her myriad representations, found in genres as diverse as speeches, short fictional vignettes in black newspapers, serialized novels, and advice columns, suggest the power and potential of

the black girl figure as a new political tool reaching a wider population of African Americans through print culture.

Christian Recorder (1852-present), the official newspaper of the African Methodist Episcopal Church, constructed the black girl figure in articles and stories as indeterminately raced as a way to move from racial difference to the acquisition of nationhood as essential for equal rights. The relevant articles appeared during the Reconstruction period, when a belief in the possibility of national unity led the paper to racially-indeterminate girls. As a citizenship model, this girl figure reinforced a national culture based not on the race but on the achieved characteristics of intellect, morality, decorum, duty, and nationality at a time when free African Americans were seeking social and economic inclusion in the dominant culture. Reaching white and black readerships through the racially-indeterminate girl suggests erasing racial distinction and replacing race with nationality and class as the basis of achieving citizenship. The un-raced girl thus offered African American editors an important code to position *Christian Recorder* as a national text; the image also elevated the fight for citizenship to a national concern based primarily on the issue of one's rights as an American.²⁰

When Reconstruction efforts failed, images of the black girl in the black press shifted to represent the everyday, lived experiences of black families working to maintain their households. During this period, Mrs. N. F. Mossell wrote a series of articles on girlhood in her advice column, titled "The Woman's Department," published between

²⁰In "Frances Harper, Charlotte Forten and African American Literary Reconstruction," Carla Peterson argues, "The *Christian Recorder*'s history . . . points to its lengthy struggle in helping African Americans imagine community, inviting them both to craft identity based on a shared past and to work toward the achievement of . . . citizenship." Peterson also agrees that in addressing a national concern like temperance, authors such as Frances E. W. Harper, who published in *Christian Recorder*, hoped to reach both white and black readerships.

1885 and 1887 in *New York Freeman*. These columns essentially instructed readers on how to prepare black girls for work in the public sphere. Mossell's parental advice warned black girls against the vices of the public, urban sphere, such as ill-intentioned men and over-indulgent amusement at saloons and parties. Although Mossell is considered one of the first black female journalists to write her own biweekly column in the black press, scholars have neglected her work. This chapter includes selections from Mossell's clever columns that introduced readers to long-neglected parental advice on raising black girls.

Mossell's advice columns stand apart from alternative or competing models of racial achievement. Her columns fill a void in African American literature published during the decade of the 1880's. They anticipate the burgeoning of literature published during the Women's Era of the 1890's in which girl characters travel alone in the public sphere, as in *Clarence and Corinne; or God's Way* by Amelia A. E. Johnson (1890). Mossell's no-nonsense tone and upfront demeanor depart from the sentimental prose in works of the period, and offer an engaging rhetoric that attracts a wide readership.

Some authors fictionalized journalistic renderings of black girls seeking to gain access to the public sphere. One such text is Frances E. W. Harper's novel, *Trial and Triumph*, serialized in *Christian Recorder* from 1888 to 1889. This work departs from the popular images of both the mulatta figure and the unraced girl through Harper's use of the dark-skinned, orphaned girl heroine, Annette, as a citizenship model. Annette's transformation, from an unruly, mischievous girl to an educated woman refined through her interactions with community members, signals the epitome of achievement in which

the girl is groomed for the public sphere through a combination of communal and domestic support.

Harper's dark-skinned girl figure destabilizes the long-standing trope of the tragic mulatta or the unraced girl who were embodiments of racial anxiety in nineteenth-century literature. She is one of the first representations of the dark-skinned girl in African American literature, and her image exemplifies the stark realities of the working-class in the public sphere. This chapter argues for the critical significance of this figure in affirming the black family and constructing a nineteenth-century allegory of race that is less fatalistic and more celebratory than that of the better known mulatta.

Bridging post-bellum images of the educated black girl to the early twentieth century, I argue in Chapter Three, "Black Girlhood in *Floyd's Flowers; or Duty and Beauty for Colored Children*," that anxieties over African Americans' newly acquired freedom and education encouraged race leaders to publish black conduct books. The prime example, also the focus of the chapter, is Silas X. Floyd's *Floyd's Flowers* (1905), in which the language, iconography, and coded messages of decorum taught black girls traditional rules of domesticity in order to reroute the public presence of African Americans in the white imagination. Floyd's conduct book worked against white supremacist texts such as Thomas Dixon's *The Leopard's Spots*, also published in 1905. *Floyd's Flowers* was published during what historian Rayford Logan labels the "nadir" or the lowest point in African American history, and contributed to a collection of prescriptive texts written by black men that instructed African Americans migrating to northern cities how to behave in a manner that would prevent violence from whites.

These texts included W. E. B. DuBois's *Morals and Manners* (1903) and Booker T. Washington's *Working with Your Hands* (1904).

Floyd represented dutiful images of black girls as cautionary measures to stem the tide of violence towards African Americans during the Jim Crow period. I draw from Katharine Capshaw Smith's work on African American children's literature of the Harlem Renaissance, in which she argues that the black child became "emblematic" of the racial tensions of the period, a political subject no longer insulated but fully aware of the racial climate. I extend Smith's claim to specify the black girl in the didactic literature of the first decades of the twentieth century as a figure who embodies the period's tensions and anxieties as she returns to the domestic sphere in deference to black male leadership.

Competing models of achievement existed alongside Floyd's text at the turn of the century. Activists in the Black Women's Club Movement worked against the patriarchal images of black girls in African American conduct literature. In "The Colored Girl" (1905), Fannie Barrier Williams outlined the black girl's unrecognized potential and her commitment to the "marvelous task of establishing the social status of the race" (64). Rather than returning to a domesticated image of the black girl as the sole representative citizenship model, Williams urged race activists to recognize and honor the humanity, desires, and aspirations of the black girl, and refrain from condemning her for departing from the "artificial standards of other people." Williams asked that men equally honor and "heroically protect" both the girls who cook and clean and those who "play the piano or manipulate the typewriter." That only the "parlor girl finds social favor" over the girl who "works with her hands"—a distinction that Williams labels "borrowed

snobbishness.” In Williams’ text, she critiques class differences that affect black girls’ livelihood and creates further intra-racial tension.

Additionally, *Floyd’s Flowers* worked alongside the popular children’s anthology, *The Brownies’ Book*, co-edited by W.E.B DuBois and Jessie Fauset between 1920 and 1921. This book offers short stories, poetry, biographical sketches of prominent African Americans, puzzles, and beautiful illustrations by black authors for black children. These pieces are intended to showcase black literary achievement and teach children about members of their race, rather than offer specific lessons on behavioral codes that instructed readers how to comport themselves to prevent threats of violence. While both texts were intended to instruct children, the historical moments of each text—one published in 1905 and the other in 1920—suggest that the purpose and the meaning behind each publication differs. While *The Brownies’ Book* was well received by young readers, it unfortunately was not able to gain enough subscriptions to secure its success. In December 1921, after twenty-four issues, *The Brownies’ Book* ceased publication.²¹ Conversely, according to advertisements in *The Voice of the Negro*, a black newspaper, Floyd sold 10,000 copies of *Floyd’s Flowers* in the first five weeks of publication, and fifteen years later, in 1920, sold 20,000 copies. The text was also reprinted four times between 1905 and 1925. These numbers attest to its popularity.

My earlier chapters reveal how historical narratives of racial progress represented the black girl as subscribing to dominant ideals of elevation and education as a citizenship model. In Chapter Four, “Black Girlhood in Gwendolyn Brooks’s *Annie Allen*,” I argue that the modernist girlhood poems in this 1949 collection function as an

²¹Brownies’ Book, Series 3D, W.E.B. Du Bois Papers (MS 312). W.E.B. DuBois Library, Special Collections and University Archives, UMass Amherst.

anti-conduct book that challenges older models of race progress. The poems also overturn Victorian models of conduct by subverting traditional conventions of narrative and poetic forms.

In the post-World War II period, Brooks's girlhood poems offer another kind of political intervention connected to citizenship. Through her modernist poetics, Brooks expresses the interior thoughts and expression of a black girl, Annie Allen, as she comes of age on the South side of Chicago in the 1940's. Brooks insists on Annie learning lessons not from her mother or by conforming to the dominant behavioral codes and rules of decorum. Instead, she insists that Annie learn lessons from her own lived experiences.

Brooks's girlhood poems works alongside competing models of coming-of-age narratives published in the 1940's. Zora Neale Huston's *Dust Tracks on a Road* (1942) and Ann Petry's *The Street* (1946) include black female characters that resist social conformity. However, Brooks's collection of poems is significant in that her poems consciously reject conformity to tradition through an *insistence* on interiority and girlhood subjectivity, and offer a decisive shift in literary representations of black girlhood in African American literature.

My dissertation ultimately strives to trace how race leaders have historically endowed the image of the black girl with political meaning and emphasized its latent power to represent a race entering modernity. A diachronic approach to the study of black girlhood reveals the historical impact of her image on black people's access to citizenship in American culture. The black girl figure as a model of racial progress suggests the power of her potential as a national figure. My examination of her historical, literary, and visual presence offers an innovative way to study African American literature.

CHAPTER ONE

ANTEBELLUM GIRLHOOD IN AFRICAN AMERICAN LITERATURE

In the antebellum years in the North, citizenship was synonymous with manhood. The ideal citizen was a propertied, virtuous, and independent man, most often the patriarch of the family. Such an emphasis on manhood and autonomy as preeminent qualifications for full citizenship provided the basis for denying such rights to dependent populations, specifically women, children, and blacks (Horton and Horton 166). Not only was the autonomous male citizen positioned against the dependent female—“women’s weakness became a rhetorical foil for republican manliness”—but dominant culture dictated that he also be white because black people were “assumed to lack the capacity for the autonomy and self-restraint required of a citizen” (Horton and Horton 166, 167). Given this denial of citizenship rights, black men could not assert their manhood or protect their homes and families, nor could they resort to violence as David Walker threatened in his *Appeal* published in 1829. To claim the nineteenth-century republican ideal that equated citizenship with a powerful and autonomous manhood (Horton and Horton 173), free black men living and working in the antebellum North devised many strategies other than violence to attain equal rights.

Literary historian Hazel Carby discusses the relationship between black manhood and men’s role as protectors, particularly in slavery. She notes the difficulty of enslaved men to achieve a sense of manhood when unable to protect their mothers, sisters,

daughters or lovers against abuse. The convention that dictated the inviolability of the white woman's body did not apply to their own families: "The slave woman, as victim, became defined in terms of a physical exploitation resulting from the lack of the assets of white womanhood: no masculine protector or home and family, the locus of the flowering of white womanhood" (35). I extend Carby's claims to relate to black men's roles as protectors in the antebellum North. I argue that representations of the physical exploitation of the black girl in the black press contributed to the black male's awareness of his inability to fully protect his family and achieve or maintain manhood.

This chapter argues that as part of their effort to achieve and exercise full citizenship rights as men, black male editors of the early black press appropriated images of black girls, often victimized, to encourage mobilization among free, black Northerners. The early black press, which was administered by a male editorial board, expressed the concerns of the free black population living in the North. Black newspapers were a source of information that united free, scattered, black, communities. Articles mobilized and united these communities by encouraging them to participate politically in the fight for full citizenship rights, which included property ownership, voting rights, and the abolition of slavery in the south.

One way editors mobilized readers was to appropriate the figure of the black girl as a political tool for creating a model of black citizenship. Editors published articles with sentimental representations of black girls as unprotected, orphaned, beaten, or victimized to arouse black readers scattered throughout the Northern states to react. Her sentimental representation reminded black men of their own lack of full citizenship rights and

functioned as shorthand that communicated the necessity for full citizenship rights and equality in all aspects of American life.

Particularly in *Freedom's Journal*, considered the first black newspaper published between 1827 and 1829, black men rejected the Lucy Terry/Phillis Wheatley paradigm of the surrogate white mother as nurturing presence. Instead, one way they depicted black girls was as orphaned, bereft of either a white or a black mother figure's nurturance or guidance, and frequent victims of violence. The black girl's image served as political shorthand to express the vexations of the black race and communicate its desire for full citizenship rights in all aspects of American life. At the same time, this representation of the unprotected black girl devalued the black mother as *absent*. This dismissal of the black woman's presence in matters of political reform and as a mother and teacher to her children conveyed a dominant, patriarchal agenda.

The Terry/Wheatley paradigm did not altogether disappear during this period; rather, it continued in William Lloyd Garrison's abolitionist newspaper, *Liberator*, whose first issue was published on January 1, 1831. "The little Black Girl," a story that appeared in the February 1834 issue, is one example in which a poor, orphaned, black girl is assigned to a white surrogate mother figure who clothed, refined, and educated her. The article suggests that tutelage by a white surrogate mother figure rather than by her black mother would enable the black girl to become a positive contributor to the nation.

A decade later, black male editors of the *Colored American* (1837-1841), the second, major black newspaper after *Freedom's Journal*, revised the Terry/Wheatley formula with representations of orphaned black girls who come of age with the aid of a *black* female figure, thus restoring black womanhood. The biological black mother

appears in a nurturing role to teach the black girl lessons on morality and decorum. This turning away from violence against the black girl's body in *Freedom's Journal* and the shift from the absence of the black mother in *Liberator*, to her *presence* in *Colored American* signaled a changing citizenship agenda for African Americans. This agenda focused on recuperating the black home, improving the black girl's mind through education, and refining her outer appearance through dress and manners. Black maternal figures became "Republican Mothers" who instructed their daughters in matters of character and education to produce black citizens.

After stories about black girls became a presence in black newspapers, African American women insisted on telling their own stories. They took up the image of the girl as a model for citizenship, but did so in ways reflecting an agenda for change more specifically driven by the concerns of women activists and their female audiences. Black women activists such as Maria Stewart countered sentiments that sought to objectify black women. Her fiery speeches in support of women's rights laid a foundation for black women authors to tell their *own* stories in which black girls were represented not as victims, but as active, willful participants in their fight for freedom and independence. In Harriet Wilson's *Our Nig* (1859) and Harriet Jacobs's *Incidents in the Life of a Slave Girl* (1861), black girls were represented as purposefully unruly, spirited, physical, self-reliant, and when able, unabashedly *vocal*. They fought back against oppressors and knowingly broke laws of conventionality and feminine virtue. Wilson presented her character, Frado, and Jacobs presented her heroine, Linda, as using their early girlhood unruliness as ammunition to ward off threats of sexual abuse and lessen brutal, physical

attacks. These two women writers manipulated earlier citizenship models of the black girl to address their *own* political agenda.

This chapter examines two black antebellum newspapers, *Freedom's Journal* and *Colored American*, owned and edited by black men, to demonstrate how they used the figure of the black girl to claim citizenship status for black men. It then explores how black women writers, Stewart, Wilson, and Jacobs, eventually re-appropriated the figure of the young black girl in their own narratives, and manipulated that figure to make their own citizenship claims.

Freedom's Journal

With slavery abolished in the northern states, African Americans married, created families, established residences, secured employment, purchased property, joined churches, and forged communities. They forged a complex network of societies and institutions apart from the white power structure and engaged in practices that addressed the needs, interests, and aspirations of disparate northern black communities. Benevolent societies and literary clubs sat at the center of antebellum life in the major cities. These institutions allowed people to organize across class, ethnic, and religious lines, and adjust their activism to the changing social and political landscape. Eventually, northern blacks created an institutional and intellectual public culture with an international reach that facilitated the movement of political ideals and created political consensus within their community.²² Through her representation in the black press, the black girl figure communicated the political aspirations of black communities.

²²For more information on free black communities in the antebellum North and the creation of civic institutions, please see Craig Wilder's essay titled "Black Life in Freedom: Creating a Civic Culture" (217).

Able to reach further than the black church or meeting halls, newspapers emerged as an effective means of communicating to readers who were scattered throughout the northern states. They joined black schools and self-improvement societies as institutions capable of mobilizing black communities and communicating issues related to citizenship. Their print messages promised to have a greater impact, distribution, and permanence than messages from the podium or the pulpit (Pride and Wilson 7).²³ By reading the newspaper, African Americans became members of “imagined communities” in which readers from one region were instantly connected with those from other regions reading the same stories and investing in similar political goals. For members of northern black communities, the newspaper allowed each communicant to be “well aware that the ceremony he performs is being replicated simultaneously by thousands (or millions) of others of whose existence he is confident, yet of whose identity he has not the slightest notion” (Anderson 35-36). The newspaper became a one-day bestseller, reporting important meetings, coordinating the community’s political work, facilitating the movement of information, and making black people’s ideas, values, and politics accessible to a broader national audience. The central motive for black newspapers during the antebellum period was the full realization of citizenship and equality in all aspects of American life.

Freedom’s Journal was founded in 1827 in New York, which at the time had the largest free, educated black population of any northern city. In the 1820s, about 150,000 free people of color lived in the North, with 15,000 located in New York City and 9,000 in Philadelphia. Basic concerns for free African Americans during the antebellum period were voting rights, education, places of worship, and jobs for skilled and unskilled

²³See Dann 8-10.

workers. Throughout this era, freemen were restricted to employment as barbers, waiters, porters, coachmen, and janitors; women worked as cooks, maids, laundresses, seamstresses, nurse maids, and day laborers. The professional black person was a rare exception.²⁴

The readership of *Freedom's Journal* consisted primarily of African American men and women in the North who were perpetually plagued by economic, social, and political inequality (Pride and Wilson 4).²⁵ In her history of *Freedom's Journal*, Jacqueline Bacon notes that historians estimate the number of subscribers to *Freedom's Journal* to be 800, but argues that the figure is actually based on subscription numbers for the *Rights of All*, the newspaper edited by Samuel Cornish in 1829 after the demise of *Freedom's Journal*. Historian Frankie Hutton argues that the number of readers was much larger than that of subscribers because actual readership was considerably wider than circulation figures—people in the communities shared their newspapers with one another (Hutton xv). An actual count cannot be fully ascertained because residents of the scattered communities read the paper to others who could not read. Moreover, black organizations like The Library of the Colored Reading Society of Philadelphia and The Library of the African Free School maintained a subscription, and the American Convention for Promoting the Abolition of Slavery had two subscriptions, which allowed non-subscribing patrons the opportunity to read the paper (Bacon 51-52). Furthermore, *Freedom's Journal* reached Southern states and was even read by slaves²⁶ since it was

²⁴See Dann 4.

²⁵See Jacqueline Bacon's *Freedom's Journal: The First African American Newspaper* and Elizabeth McHenry's *Forgotten Readers* for more information on the literary societies and readership of African American newspapers (McHenry 337).

²⁶Jacqueline Bacon notes that in an 1831 letter to William Lloyd Garrison's *Liberator*, correspondent "V" revealed that he looked out his window and "saw a mulatto with a newspaper in his hand, surrounded by a score of colored men, who were listening, open mouthed, to a very inflammatory

common practice in the South to have literate slaves and free African Americans read to others who were not.

Freedom's Journal promoted a nationalist agenda:

It would be strictly a Negro newspaper. It would be Negro speaking; it would be directed to the Negro's problems. Unlike abolitionist newspapers run by whites with black assistance, it would be Negro owned and Negro controlled. . . . Moreover, there was urgent need for a mouthpiece to reply to mounting attacks on the colored population of seaboard cities. (Pride and Wilson 9)

As for many later African American newspapers, the newspaper's objective was the full realization of citizenship and equality in all aspects of American life. The editors stressed to its readers that personal responsibility, "the obligation to make it on their own," came with freedom and living in the North. Their intent was to provide a program of self-help and reform within the ranks of the free colored population (Hutton 14-15).

Because *Freedom's Journal* reached a population of middle-class African American readers who sought to attain the lifestyle, respectability, and citizenship rights of their white counterparts, the paper served as a thinly-veiled conduct book, acquiring the characteristics of "a poor man's primer or practical guide for self-development and a provident life" (Hutton 15). The newspaper promoted concern for personal conduct and character development. It advised readers on how to budget time, conduct oneself discreetly, select friends carefully, elevate one's standing in life, realize the value of hard work, read the Bible regularly, and face problems squarely rather than run away from them (Hutton 15). Editors expressed the sentiment that once black communities acquired

article the yellow man was reading. Sometimes the reader dwelt emphatically on particular passages, and I could see his auditors stamp and clench their hands. I afterwards learned the paper was published in New-York, and addressed to the blacks" (Bacon 54), p. 68 notes. See V, "Walker's Appeal. No. 2," *Liberator*, 14 May 1831.

education and intelligence commensurate with those of white citizens, prejudice would diminish.

The Orphaned Black Girl

To communicate the need to attain citizenship status, newspaper editors appropriated the figure of the black girl in the sentimental guise of the unprotected orphan. This representation functioned as a platform to critique the inhumanity of slavery and call for its abolition. Select articles, poems, and stories in *Freedom's Journal* represented the abused body of the orphaned slave girl as a model to protest the cruel treatment of African Americans in the South who were “still in the iron fetters of bondage.” In addition, this representation critiqued the lack of citizenship rights for free black people in the North. Restrictions on voting rights and lives circumscribed by discrimination prevented free-born and newly-liberated slaves from achieving citizenship rights. Relaxed voting restrictions existed for white male citizens, while tightening qualifications resulted for black males. For white men to vote, they simply had to be taxpayers; there was no legal age limit. Black men, however, had to be at least twenty-three years old and a state resident, and own property with a value of \$250; even those who did not qualify to vote were required to pay taxes on their property (Dann 4-5).

On September 12, 1828, *Freedom's Journal* reprinted “Punishment of a Slave” from *Commercial Advertiser*, a white newspaper. The story portrayed the brutal whipping of “a housemaid; a neat, attentive, and orderly girl” who worked in a boarding house in New Orleans (Weimer, “Punishment”). The article described how a male guest, a Frenchman, became outraged after the slave girl appeared to ignore his repeated requests for water, which he interpreted as insolence when, in fact, she simply did not hear him.

As a result, the Frenchman “immediately struck her with his fist, so that the blood gushed down her face” while other white men stood by, observing and demanding more whippings (Weimer, “Punishment”). The girl, “excited by this undeserved treatment, put herself on the defensive and seized the aggressor by the throat. He cried aloud for help, but nobody would interfere.” When the Frenchman packed his belongings and threatened to leave the boarding house, the landlady, Madame Herries, intervened. The author of the article, Saxe Weimer, described the scene:

When [Madame Herries] heard this, in order to make her peace with the rascal, had the infamy to order twenty-six strokes of a cow-skin to be inflicted upon the poor girl, and carried her cruelty so far, as to compel her lover, a young black slave who served in the family, to be the executioner. This was not all; the Frenchman, who was a clerk to a commercial house at Montpelier was not satisfied with the punishment. He lodged a complaint against the girl at the Mayor’s office, caused her to be arrested by two constables, and had her lashed again in his presence. I regret that I did not pay attention to the name of this wretch, in order to make his shameful conduct as public as it deserves to be.

The “young black slave” in this story, who was forced to beat the black girl, was her lover. He is victimized and emasculated through his inability to protect the girl. It is the black girl, rather than the young, male slave, who fights against her aggressor in an act that displays her courage and unwillingness to be a victim.

As indicated by “Punishment,” *Freedom’s Journal* regularly reprinted articles that featured black girls from white newspapers. As Elizabeth McHenry notes in her work on reading communities and the early black press, *Freedom’s Journal* reprinted articles from many other sources. It also published original pieces by sympathetic whites who dramatized in writing their dawning recognition of the cruelty inflicted on black people, both free and enslaved, and the depth and danger of American racism (McHenry 92). Like McHenry, Martin Dann, historian of the black press, argues that although the

editorial board of *Freedom's Journal* was black and the newspaper was aimed at a black readership, many articles in *Freedom's Journal* and later black newspapers were reprinted from newspapers whose editors, authors, and targeted readers were white (Dann 33).

Through this reprinting, black male editors co-opted the representation of the black girl from a white readership and redirected her image towards black readers. Representations of black girls' abused bodies held different meanings for different readerships. They functioned for white readers to make the Frenchman's "shameful conduct as public as it deserves to be." The Frenchman, who was likely traveling to New Orleans to purchase or sell slaves, exhibited cruelty and lack of benevolence. In contrast, the black girl's brutal treatment fueled the energies of black readers to mobilize and fight for the abolition of slavery.

An article titled "Anecdote," reprinted from the *Boston Evening Bulletin* and published on February 28, 1829 in *Freedom's Journal*, showcased a black girl's abused and scarred body to denounce the cruel treatment of black people. The article described the proceedings of a court case in which a man was "indicted for gouging out the eyes of a girl, because she had made the oath that he was the father of her illegitimate child" ("Anecdote"). The short article focused not on the girl, who during the trial was "present, in total blindness," but instead opened with a description of the Attorney General who "was nearly eighty years of age, and said to be more competent to the discharge of arduous duties of his highly honorable station than almost any practitioner at the bar." After an extensive description of the Attorney General's "mental power," the article presented the testimony of the abused girl's brother which disclosed how, after hearing

his sister scream in anguish, he ran to the attacker and “struck him with a pole, and broke his jaw.” When the Attorney General asked the brother why he did not “repeat the blow, and knock his d___d brains out!” the Judge reminded the attorney that “profanity in court is a high offence punishable with imprisonment; but, in consequence of the unusual excitement of the case, it will, in this instance, be overlooked.”²⁷

In this article, the black girl’s inhumane treatment functions as an instructional scene. For editors of the *Boston Evening Bulletin*, the image of the abused black girl conveyed to its white readership lessons on conduct and the misuse of profanity. In contrast, black journalists appropriated the black girl’s abused body to teach black readers a different set of values specific to the concerns of African Americans who sought upward mobility and citizenship rights. The representation of the abused girl focused on the efforts of black men to protect their families, emphasizing the valor of the brother who beat the attacker with a pole. Little time is spent on the outcome of the girl’s charge of rape that most likely produced the illegitimate child. Readers only hear the girl’s scream, while her blindness reinforces the *lack* of attention to the rape and violence on her body. Beaten, blinded, and silent, the black girl in the courtroom is unable to testify, tell her *own* story, and achieve justice. Rather, her brother speaks on her behalf. For white and black readerships, the black girl remained objectified for the purpose of teaching lessons about manhood. For black readers, that lesson consisted of upholding the *potential* of the black male figure as protector.

The boy’s physical retribution in front of a judge at a trial suggested to readers that the free black man cannot count on the nation’s legal system for protection nor enact change for the black community. The free black male in “Anecdote” who described in

²⁷“Anecdote.” From *Boston Evening Bulletin*. Reprinted in *Freedom’s Journal*. 28 February 1829.

court how he pummeled his sister's attacker with a pipe to protect her and defend her honor revealed an active, aggressive, willful representation of black manhood that reacted against the formal, white judicial system.

Sensationalist articles that featured abused black girls were intended to mobilize free black readers in the North and reinforce their responsibility to participate politically in citizenship efforts, which included the abolition of slavery in the South. For example, the abused girl was portrayed as a sentimental object in one particular notice for a missing girl titled "Missing" and published in *Freedom's Journal* on August 15, 1828. Presumed to be an indentured servant in the North, she was feared to have been captured and transported to the South to be sold as a slave. The notice described "a colored girl named Eliza Pisco," an eleven-year-old with "large brown eyes, pretty well grown," who "has a scar a little above her forehead in the hair, speaks the English and German languages . . ." ("Missing"). The notice requested readers to keep a watchful eye for the lost girl: "The humane are earnestly requested to be on the look out, and whenever they meet with any person who may answer the description of the lost child, will please give information to the Mayor of the City. Printers of papers, will serve the cause of humanity by giving this advertisement a place in their respective papers" ("Missing").

The girl's knowledge of English and German languages and her outer bodily scar was intended to create a tension between the mind and the body, the exterior and interior, that would heighten the critique of violence on an educated, enlightened person and further underscore the inhumanity of slavery. The girl's scars also reinforced in the reader what Marianne Noble refers to as a "bodily experience of anguish caused by identification with the pain of another" ("Ecstasies" 295). Readers were meant to "feel

the pain, an experience that awakens in them an intuitive recognition of the urgency of the antislavery cause and redoubles their commitment to it” (295). Such a “transformation through feeling” in observing black girls’ wounded and scarred bodies was meant to provoke a sentimental reaction against slavery (295).

The Marriageable Black Girl

Themes in *Freedom’s Journal* articles not only featured black men’s attempts to protect the black girl from violence, but also their attempts to protect her character. Frankie Hutton, historian of the black press, notes that included in its agenda, *Freedom’s Journal* proposed to serve as “a teacher, a prod, a unifier and a defender and to pursue a reformist program with the ultimate design for the universal improvement of all people” (15). Its objectives focused on parental guidance, personal conduct, and character development—all goals related to citizenship. Other goals were to provide black people with their own forum; to help children become useful members of society by emphasizing education and inspiring parents to teach them habits of industry and self-reliance; to intensify character development, improve personal traits, and raise the conduct of free black people by offering principles of individual and household economy, lessons in self-help, and examples of thrift and resourcefulness; to urge black people to vote; and to encourage the pursuit of knowledge.²⁸

Thus, black men realized that character and respectability were essential qualities cherished by the dominant culture and necessary for citizenship. This attention to instilling moral character among readers encouraged the black press to print articles featuring black girl figures that conformed to dominant conventional rules of decorum to

²⁸See Hutton 13-15.

maintain an image of civility for the black race as a whole. Such obedience to dominant rules constituted yet another way of objectifying the black girl's image in the black press.

To uphold a respectable image, writers for the black press promoted marriage for black girls while berating the unmarried woman as “unruly.” In an untitled article reprinted from the white press and published on May 1, 1827, in *Freedom's Journal*, the author “Ned” asked readers how Tabitha Wilson, “the old maid of 45 . . . could be suffered to reach her 45th year, without being caught in the chains of wedlock?” He answered, “one word will explain the whole mystery: She had a tongue, that was indeed—a tongue, a very tongue. And I solemnly aver, that for no other reason was Miss Tabitha compelled to remain in a state of maidenhood.” Ned expressed how Tabitha's “unruly member, the tongue” which she puts “to daily use and exercise,” prevented her from getting married. His final assessment was that “a female wit is a dangerous thing.” The article adamantly discouraged willful, vocal behavior in black women.

Freedom's Journal articles instructed black girls to marry in order to uphold respectability. In “Girls ‘Have at Ye All,’” published on October 10, 1828, Dick Dashall wrote to the editor that he “has been roaming about for the last two years, looking for a woman to fall in love with . . . but ha[s] not seen the girl yet that catches [his] eye.” In his list of prescriptive instructions, Dashall offered to female readers “a few salutary hints for their conduct in courtship” to attract the right kind of husband. However, these rules objectified the black girl and constituted another form of violence:

At fifteen affect vivacity: If you are in company with the man you would like for a husband, hold your breath long enough to blush when he speaks to you; be cautious at this age to wear your gowns made high in the neck, that your charms may be conceived to be greater than nature usually allots to you at this time of life. At sixteen, affect a great liking for little babies, and get the credit of being a good nurse. At seventeen, read the news of literature and fashion, and talk

sentimentally of the happiness of retirement and domestic life; simper a little to put your lips into a pretty shape and kiss little children voluptuously. At eighteen, look out for a husband for yourself, and practice making baby linen for a friend. At nineteen, go to routs and parties, but avoid “a general flirting;” if not naturally modest, affect it to such a degree as to seem blushing at your own shadow. At twenty, consider yourself in some danger of not getting a husband, and suit your conduct to your circumstances. At twenty-one, affect every thing, and marry any body that courts you. At twenty-two, make an expiring effort by going travelling [sic]. At twenty-three, advertise for a husband. I am undone—When you get to twenty-four you cease to be young girl.²⁹

By reprinting this article from the white press, which I am suggesting is the case for this article although another press is not indicated, black editors showed their intention to support marriage as ideal for both men and women. Reprinting these articles on marriage from white newspapers suggests that black editors were encouraging black Northerners, particularly women, to conform to dominant rules of decorum by grooming their daughters to get married and create nuclear families. The willful, *vocal* black woman or girl who failed to follow these standards is considered “unruly.” Labeling the unmarried, unruly, and willful woman, Tabitha Wilson, as “dangerous,” and encouraging female readers to follow a rigid age-specific timeline for marriage or risk “some danger of not getting a husband” conveys that girls and women conform to a patriarchal agenda designed to promote citizenship.

The Little Black Girl

In 1829, *Freedom's Journal* folded and was followed by short-lived black newspapers. Abolitionist William Lloyd Garrison filled this gap in journalism when he began *Liberator* on January 1, 1831, and invited readers to join abolitionist causes. Although controlled by a white managerial board, the majority of *Liberator's* subscribers in its early years were black. The newspaper's circulation was about 3,000, three quarters

²⁹Dick Dashell. “Girls ‘Have At Ye All.’” *Freedom's Journal*. 10 October 1828.

of whom were African American. The newspaper ran for thirty-five years, with its last issue dated January 1, 1866. *Liberator* articles appropriated the black girl figure to communicate abolitionist messages to both white and black readers. A close look at one article, “The Little Black Girl,” published February 15, 1834, reveals how *Liberator* returned to the Lucy Terry/Phillis Wheatley paradigm in its representation of the figure of the black girl as an exemplum of racial progress. Written by an anonymous author, “The Little Black Girl” promoted white female benevolence to African American readers in its depiction of the relationship between the black orphan Sylvia and the white Mrs. F., who plays a pivotal role in transforming the girl into an educated, obedient, Bible-reading young woman. Because Sylvia’s transformation from poor and orphaned to educated and nurtured becomes a representative image in early African American literature, I will analyze the story in detail.

In the article, Sylvia’s evolution from a poor, orphaned black girl to an educated woman mirrors the struggle of the black race, still disfranchised and seeking freedom and inclusion in the nation. Sylvia’s story symbolizes the transformation of a disempowered, unrecognized people into potential citizens imbued with the intellect, morality, and insight necessary to contribute to the nation’s welfare. She is an orphan whose transformation into a well-schooled “good” girl teaches lessons on morality and benevolence to others. Her transition from wretchedness to “goodness” through nurturance, education, and morality is a common theme in narratives of progress that feature black girl figures.

In “The Little Black Girl,” the unruly, wretched, twelve-year-old Sylvia is taken from her family and made to work as an indentured servant in a white family, of whom

Mrs. F. is the mistress. Sylvia eventually learns to read the Bible, converts to Christianity, and studies Latin and French. Through the white family's tutelage and her own perseverance, Sylvia lifts herself from despair and becomes an upstanding, educated young woman. The anonymous author of "The Little Black Girl" informs readers that if poor, black, orphaned Sylvia can learn to read, cultivate a moral character, and contribute to the nation, surely anyone can follow her example and become a productive citizen. Sylvia's journey is translated into a set of practices that, if followed, will confer political, social, and economic gain. The author constructs Sylvia as a model for citizenship by devising a narrative formula that upholds three major characteristics: she is a poor orphan; she becomes a dutiful "daughter" to a surrogate (white) mother; and she becomes educated.

Orphanhood

A common literary strategy for revealing a girl character's orphaned state is to emphasize her poverty and unkempt clothing. In "The Little Black Girl," Sylvia's downtrodden appearance heightens her sentimental appeal.

She was dressed in a woolen gown, which had been so often mended that scarcely enough of the original garment was left to distinguish the color. She had on an old pair of shoes down at the heel, which she had probably selected from some castaway lot, and her hair was covered with that mat of black curly hair which had resisted the pelting of the storm, and her only shelter from the rays of sun.

Sylvia's motherlessness is aligned with her oppression and indicts black motherhood: her tattered clothes, worn shoes, and uneducated mind are associated with the absence of a nurturing biological mother. By acquiring a surrogate white mother, Mrs. F., Sylvia is able to become a "good" girl and acquire the education, moral training, and refinement that groom her for citizenship. Through her change in dress, the black girl figure

overcomes the challenges of orphanhood and comes to embody the customs and mores of society, such as wholesome ideals of character, education, and virtue. Such emphasis on character and respectability reflects the thinking of the black elite for whom matters of character replaced the trappings of wealth as they turned “to focus on the internal, the moral and even the spiritual” (Peterson 205).

Surrogate Motherhood

Having a white surrogate “mother” who dresses and cares for her enables Sylvia to improve her moral condition. Sylvia’s perceived immorality, as suggested by her poverty and tattered attire, is redeemed through attributes represented in part by finer clothes. When Mrs. F. offers Sylvia new clothes, she is in essence providing qualities of respectability and civility: “So [Mrs. F.] changed [Sylvia’s] apparel, and made her more comfortable. And you all know how much happier you feel, when you have changed an old garment for a new one. Sylvia felt so too, and was thankful to Mrs. F. for making her happier.” Respectable clothing supplies the virtues that Sylvia lacked in her old, worn garments (Johnson 204). It elevates her, pulling her out of poverty and into another social class.³⁰ Changes in surface appearance thus enable the image, if not the reality of the larger, structural change of class difference. As the donor of clothing, the surrogate white mother offers wealth whose value is measured not in monetary units but in character formation and class mobility.

³⁰In nineteenth-century discourse, clothing, character, and citizenship contribute to nationhood, as suggested in *Dress, as a Fine Art* (1854), wherein the author, Mrs. Merrifield, claims that “in a state so highly civilized as that in which we live, the art of dress has become extremely complicated” (10). Merrifield also states that “the rules of society require that to a certain extent we should adopt those forms of dress which are in common use, but our own judgment should be exercised in adapting these forms to our own individual proportions, complexions, ages and stations in society” (10-11).

For her nurturance, Mrs. F. is held in high regard: she is “a kind and *good* lady, and loved to do *good*; and she wanted to make the little black girl *good* and happy too” (*Liberator*). In clothing Sylvia, Mrs. F. acts as her benevolent guardian; in being clothed, Sylvia performs as the sentimental character upon whom white generosity is bestowed. Repeated reference to the word *good* emphasizes Mrs. F.’s gracious character, suggesting the qualities of womanhood to which all girls should aspire. Mrs. F. is charitable, religious, moral, and nurturing—all aspects of the “good” woman. It is this goodness that Sylvia tries to imitate to become a participant in the nation.

Framing Mrs. F. as a surrogate mother draws attention to the absence of the black woman as nurturer and mother, making it appear as though the biological mother plays no role in the abolition of slavery and the socialization of the black race. Only the benevolent white surrogate mother gains agency as the civilizing entity, while the black girl as a metonym of the black race remains silenced, submissive, and objectified. She is the mere recipient of the charity of white abolitionism.

Education

In addition to being orphaned and mothered, “The Little Black Girl” emphasizes how Sylvia’s education ultimately contributes to her strong Christian ethic under the tutelage of Mrs. F. and her children.

She became a *good* girl, and remembered all the *good* instructions which were given to her. She learned her letters, for she did not know them before, and soon learned to read; so that she read the Bible constantly; as her leisure permitted until she had gone entirely through it, several times. She could repeat a great deal of it, and tried to understand all that she read: the *good* lessons which she found in it, made her better and happier. (emphasis added)

As is evident from the passage, industriousness and persistence distinguish Sylvia’s new character from her old. Sylvia asks the eldest son, George, who studies English grammar

so that he can “speak properly and write properly,” to teach her as well because she, too, has “a desire to possess these advantages.” [Sylvia] “engaged George as her tutor, [and] she soon made herself acquainted with the principles of grammar, to apply them to her conversation and writing, (for she had, in the mean time, learned to write a very good hand)—so that very few grammarians knew more about it than Sylvia did.” When Sylvia took on the task of learning Latin, she “persevered, and all the leisure time she could get, she devoted to that study. She was very industrious—perhaps more so in her favorite study.” Her work ethic encompasses the qualities of resolution, determination, and commitment, and results in her transformation into an educated and moral woman.

Sylvia’s trajectory is thus presented as a path that all children should follow. Addressing his/her readers, the author writes: “My children, the example of Sylvia is worthy of your consideration and imitation; and if you would be good like Sylvia, and have all good people respect you, go, as she did, to the Bible first, and remember its good instructions, and form your habits and character from what you read there.” The author asks the readers to reflect on Sylvia’s path to transformation: “Remember what Sylvia was when she came into the family of Mrs. F. Poor, ignorant and wretched in the extreme; but consider what she is now, an enlightened, intelligent, and well-educated girl: her mind is stored with knowledge, and her heart filled with glowing love for her God.”

The author then emphasizes the truthfulness of the story, identifying Sylvia as real by grounding her in a location, a home, and a city: “Children, this story of Sylvia is not a fiction: it is true, and she lives in a very respectable family in this city, and is, no doubt, growing up to be the most valuable member of society, beloved by Mrs. F. and respected by all who know her.” In placing Sylvia in an actual location, the author stresses the

practicality and reality of her achievement, and thus the potential capability of the readers' *own* transformation. The author asks his/her readers to "imitate" Sylvia's actions to achieve similar enlightenment and refinement. Through her representation, Sylvia becomes an allegorical figure who embodies the potential development of the black race. The author places less stress on Sylvia as an exemplar of refinement than on the *process* of her refinement, emphasizing characteristics necessary for advancement similar to the earlier Terry/Wheatley formula: the white household, the benevolent white mother figure, the religious and educational training.

Colored American

Colored American (1837-1841) was the second, major black newspaper after *Freedom's Journal*. In this publication, black intellectuals seeking to reclaim the image of the race adopted the image of the poor, orphaned black girl from white writers to represent her as coming of age with the aid of a black mother figure. Editor Samuel Cornish created a new direction and agenda for the paper, outlining *Colored American's* main objectives: 1) it spoke out against slavery in the South; 2) it was the "chief method" for communicating with the population of the free North scattered over 5,000 towns; 3) it offered the only means available to publicize the black man's wrongs and engender public sentiment of the nation in his behalf; and 4) it functioned to enable the black man to act on his own behalf to improve his public image and correct misconceptions about him (Armistead 31). Finally, Cornish changed the name of the paper to *Colored American*, claiming that "blood, nativity and complexion permitted him and his kind to be more exclusively American than our white brethren" (30).

Colored American articles moved away from the Terry/Wheatley paradigm to restore black womanhood by presenting the biological black mother as a solid presence in the black girl's education and to offer a model of productive collaboration and black advancement. This shift from violence towards a black girl's body in *Freedom's Journal* and from the absence of a black mother in *Liberator* to the presence of the black mother in *Colored American* signaled a changing citizenship agenda for African Americans. This agenda focused on recuperating the black home, improving the black girl's mind through education, and refining her outer appearance through dress and manners. Black activists endorsed the ideology of "Republican Motherhood" and assigned black women the role of educator and protector of the home. It became her role to raise dutiful daughters and sons to produce potential citizens and advance the agenda of racial progress.³¹ By entrusting black girls' refinement and education to their mothers, black men enlisted the black woman's domestic role in the citizenship agenda. Because the black man was unable to protect the black girl from violence, as suggested in *Freedom's Journal* articles, the black mother as a "Republican Mother" now assumed the role of protector through

³¹ *Colored American* began on January 7, 1837, under the name *Weekly Advocate*, with Philip Alexander Bell as its managing editor. Bell was born in New York around 1808 and attended the New York City African Free School with such schoolmates as actor Ira Aldridge James McCune Smith and Henry Highland Garnet. Bell "was well known in temperance, abolitionist, self-help, and pauper assistance organizations. He began the Philomathean Society, a self-improvement association designed for young people. He was also instrumental in manning the Underground Railroad." The paper's goals were to "serve the 'colored community' as a standard-bearer for the Black man's right and claims, and . . . foster emancipation, temperance, education, and universal suffrage" (Armistead 30). *Colored American* replaced the *Weekly Advocate* and appointed Samuel Cornish as editor, a position he would hold for the next two years.

The *Colored American* achieved a national and an international readership. The paper increased its intended readership from black people in the antebellum North to a more national appeal as black churches and organizations helped to increase its subscriptions. Even reaching abroad and as far away as Jamaica, subscribers offered to raise money for the paper (34). The newspaper's general agent supervised a corps of local agents, of whom *Colored American* had seventy-seven in nine states and southern Canada during its five-year life (34). By the end of 1837, the newspaper had 1,650 subscribers, 800 of them in New York City; by 1838, the figure increased to 1,800 subscribers, with an estimated 10,000 readers (31).

her teachings in morality and character refinement. This tutelage promised to strengthen the black home and ultimately improve the race's public image.

Colored American emphasized repeatedly that as a newspaper, it “was not a private possession, but that it belonged to the reader.” Editors repeated this stance in editorials throughout the life of the newspaper (Armistead 35). *Colored American* gained the readers' confidence by publicizing its managerial board in a column that listed the names of its staff, two editors, and twenty-eight members of the “Committee of Citizens.” Similar to a frontispiece, this column served as an authenticating device to validate the authority of the paper and the legitimacy of its contents for its readership. *Colored American* enacted the concept of “imagined communities” in reaching members over a wide geographical area:

Because the afflicted population in the free states are scattered in handfuls of over 5000 towns, and can only be reached by the press—a public journal must therefore be sent out at least weekly, to rouse them up. To call all their energies into action . . . [s]uch an organ can be furnished at little cost, so as to come within the reach of every man, and carry to him lessons of instruction on religion and morals, lessons on industry and economy—until our entire people are of one heart and of one mind, in all the means of their salvation, both temporal and spiritual. Because without such an organ, we never can enlist the sympathy of the nation in our behalf, and in behalf of the slave; and until this is done, we shall have accomplished nothing, nor shall we have proved ourselves worthy to be free men and to have our grievances redressed. (Dann 47-48)

In many *Colored American* articles, the black girl often interacts with a black mother figure who teaches her good morals, behavioral practices (how to dress, how to behave in a refined manner), and character traits deemed desirable by the nation.³² The dynamic between the black girl and her mother instructed readers about tolerance, obligation, temperance, and duty, hoping thereby to increase the “moral improvement and

³²My research focused primarily on locating articles written about black girls in *Colored American*.

amelioration of the race” and encourage the kind of behavior necessary to attain citizenship (McHenry 107).

Similar to *Freedom’s Journal*, some articles in *Colored American* are reprinted from white newspapers, such as “The Jug” reprinted from *The Reformed Family*, and published in *Colored American* on June 26, 1841, and “I Wish I Were a Kitten,” reprinted from the *S. S. Visitor* and published in *Colored American* on May 22, 1841. *The Reformed Family* and the *S.S. Visitor* appear to be Christian-centered papers. Editors of the *Colored American* would likely reprint articles from Christian-centered papers to promote those ideals to their readers. However, other articles that feature girl figures in the *Colored American* do not indicate the name of another newspaper in its tagline.

Many articles in the *Colored American* reveal a mother figure that ensures a stable home by raising dutiful children. In “Forgetting God in Good Health,” published on November 14, 1840, for example, a black girl in conversation with her mother learns her duty to pray so that God can “take care of [them], and restore [them] to health, and deliver [them] from danger.” In “The Good Girl,” a black girl’s mother encourages her to read her Bible so that she can understand “her obligation to obey its precepts.” In “I Wish I Were a Kitten,” reprinted from the *S. S. Visitor* and published in *Colored American* on May 22, 1841, “a very good girl” named Mary, who would rather play all day than complete her chores, learns the importance of obligation from her mother and becomes “an industrious little girl” who “feels very grateful to God for giving her a kind mother, that can direct her what to do [sic].” “Order and Neatness,” published on October 30, 1841, offers a similar lesson in obedience, in which a mother converses with her daughter to explain “good habits” of order and neatness. If these articles are reprinted in the black

press, editors teach readers that a girl's interaction with her biological mother is a valuable tool for teaching those "good" Christian characteristics of duty and obedience that black men felt were necessary to achieve citizenship. This concept of the nurturing mother who kindly and tenderly directs her daughter was intended to teach readers the importance of family life and familial moral codes to citizenship.

The Educated Black Girl

From its inception in 1827, the black press advocated education. John Russworm, editor of *Freedom's Journal*, claimed that

Education being an object of the highest importance to the welfare of society, we shall endeavor to present just and adequate views of it, and to urge upon our brethren the necessity and expediency of training their children, while young, to habits of industry, and thus forming them for becoming useful members of society. (Dann 34)

Martin Dann notes that Charles Bennett Ray, an editor of *Colored American*, promoted education in the black press. Ray was "highly regarded by his contemporaries as a consistent laborer for the welfare of the poor and depressed, and he knew well the value of a Black weekly paper—cultivating community pride and unity" (Dann 35).

Articles in *Colored American* advocated formal schooling for African American children that would promote refinement. In conveying the obstacles to education that African Americans experienced in the North, the articles featured the black girl's attempt to enter a schoolhouse by describing the physical vulnerabilities she experienced. In "Riot at Brookfield," published on September 7, 1839, "a colored girl" accompanied by her mother attends Sabbath school for the first time. Because the girl belongs to a missionary family, she does not expect mobs and riots, but the demonstration she encounters results in "a real scene" of barbarity against the girl, allegorized as the black

race. The mother's presence nurtures the girl. No longer is the girl unprotected and left to defend herself against oppression. "A Beautiful Illustration," published on June 16, 1838, anticipates potential fears surrounding a black girl's entrance into school on the first day. The article describes how she is met not by "mobs and riots" but by a more pleasant welcome. At first, the "little stranger looks upon trees, playgrounds, large rooms and the multitude of children and teachers and is afraid." As she enters the school, she decides she "will try to be a good girl[,] . . . do her duty" and "avoid doing wrong." The other students volunteer to help her, and the teacher selects one girl to be "protector[s] of the little stranger." The protector and the new student form a strong attachment so that "if the stranger is injured, the protector grieved; and kindness shown to one touches the other." The new girl, who is warmly welcomed at school, signals a new beginning filled with acceptance. That the teacher selects another girl to *protect* the new student suggests that her path to advancement will not be a singular journey nor one that involves a parental figure, but a journey supported by community involvement.

African American Women Authors and Models of Racial Progress

Maria Stewart's "The First Stage of Life"

Once the newspapers run by black men had established the image of the black girl, African American women authors took up the same image as a model for citizenship, but transformed it in ways that reflected an agenda for change more specifically driven by women's concerns. Activist, orator, and author Maria Stewart encouraged black women's contributions to racial uplift by extending her support of "Republican Womanhood" for black mothers. In an essay published in *Liberator* in 1831 titled "Religion and the Pure Principles of Morality, the Sure Foundation on which we

must Build,” Stewart urged black mothers to “imitate” the practices of “the American ladies” to gain the same privileges granted to Anglo-Americans. She asked women, “Why cannot we do something to distinguish ourselves, and contribute some of our hard earnings that would reflect honor upon our memories, and cause our children to arise and call us blessed? . . . How long shall the fair daughters of Africa be compelled to bury their minds and talents beneath a load of iron pots and kettles?” (12). By “imitating” the practices of the dominant culture, Stewart claimed black women will “distinguish” themselves and depart from a role of servitude and gain autonomy. Black girls will no longer “bury their minds and talents beneath a load of pots and kettles,” but store their minds with knowledge and the will to achieve. Black women and girls will become active agents in race elevation because “we need never to think that anybody is going to feel interested for us, if we do not feel interested for ourselves” (13).

In her story “The First Stage of Life,” published in January 1861 in *Repository of Religion and Literature of Science and Art*, a periodical largely administered by black men and designed for black readers, Maria Stewart adopted the orphan girl figure as a political tool for citizenship. Literary historian Eric Gardner suggests that Stewart’s story was written to “interface with a range of public spheres” consisting of diverse environments like schoolrooms and churches and read to both adult and young readers. The newspaper reached many age groups because it called for teachers to “share their papers with their young charges,” suggesting that the stories were written to be read aloud to children (157). The story also demonstrated “that some early black women writers seized on a sense of domestic womanhood centering on a revision of republican

motherhood and teaching, and combined it with Afro-Protestant Evangelicalism and nascent nationalism to fashion public spaces for themselves” (157).

“The First Stage of Life” tells the story of Letitia, a black girl orphaned after her mother dies and her father gives her to an aunt: “The child became almost a wandering gypsy, for her aunt had no settled home, and she taught Letitia all kinds of naughtiness, and became very unkind and cruel to her, and went away and left her in the street, without home and without friends” (165). Another family soon took Letitia under its charge, but Letitia “was almost a ruined child, she was so bad” (165). As an unruly girl, Letitia existed on the periphery, unsocialized and untutored. She was always outdoors, robbing bird’s nests, rambling in the woods, picking chestnuts and walnuts, and, in the winter, sliding on the ice (165). Letitia was six years old and disobedient, as she “never liked to work very hard, and when she had to work harder than she felt disposed, she would cry, and make such a fuss, that they would send her to bed, or somewhere else, to get rid of her noise” (165). Letitia’s playful unruliness is quite different from the young back housemaid in *Freedom’s Journal’s* “Punishment of a Slave,” who exhibits a different form of unruliness when she “seize(ed) (her) aggressor by the throat,” an act that resulted in her repeated whippings, yet signaled her willingness to fight back and protect herself. Although both are girl figures, Letitia represents the youthful, unaware girl who learns to follow dominant rules of decorum by becoming a self-reformed, educated “good” girl, while the housemaid represents a more mature, knowing girl figure.

Because her unruliness adds to her loneliness, Letitia eventually develops a desire “to be a good girl.” She is transformed “from being one of the most abject and despised, [to] . . . one of the most caressed and admired among her associates” (165). Thus, Letitia

functions as a model to teach parents that raising their children is both a private and public nationalist duty. Stewart's suggestion that black women follow the "Republican Motherhood" paradigm to further black women's independence underscores continuity with messages in *Colored American* articles, which advocated nuclear families and righteous, moral tutelage for children.

Stewart's essays, speeches, and stories laid a foundation for black women writers to tell their *own* stories in which black girls were represented not as victims, but as willful participants in gaining their independence. Two important narratives, Harriet Wilson's *Our Nig* and Harriet Jacobs's *Incidents in the Life of a Slave Girl*, demonstrate the black girl's growth from unruliness into educated and moral womanhood. These works recognize necessary courses of action specific to black women to ensure their survival. In these narratives, education takes the shape of both formal education and informal learning. Protection is not only patriarchal, but also comes from the maternal line. Thus, representations of black girls in these narratives offered a new set of laws to assist both free and enslaved black women in acquiring independence.

Harriet Wilson's Our Nig

Scholars have speculated on the readership for *Our Nig*.³³ In her preface, Harriet

³³Scholars have discussed Wilson's readership and how she combines autobiography with fiction in *Our Nig*. Please see Henry Louis Gates's introduction to the 1983 edition of *Our Nig*, in which he writes that Wilson's discursive use of fiction and autobiography is the result of "an inexperienced author struggling with or against the received conventions of her form" (xxxvii), as well as his chapter on *Our Nig* in *Figures in Black*, in which he argues that in the text there exist "two parallel discursive universes: the plot structure of the text claiming to be a 'fiction' and the seemingly antithetical biographical documents published as the text's 'appendix' which claim to demonstrate that this fiction is indeed fact—"an autobiography"" (126). See also P. Gabrielle Foreman's and Reginald H. Pitts's introduction to the 2005 Penguin Classics edition of *Our Nig*, in which they argue, "*Our Nig* is prototypical of black antebellum writing in its tendency to blend and challenge the narrative forms it incorporates, weaving together factual and fictional conventions. Indeed, *Our Nig* functions as an autobiography characterized by its complex novelistic maneuvers just as surely as it is a brilliant novel that makes autobiographical claims" (xxx). See also Priscilla Wald's chapter on *Our Nig* in *Constituting Americans*, in which she argues that *Our Nig* tells

Wilson wrote that she “sincerely appeal[ed] to her colored brethren universally for patronage, hoping they [will] not condemn this attempt of their sister to be erudite, but rally around [her] a faithful band of supporters and defenders” (3). In their biographical work on Harriet Wilson, Gabrielle Forman and Reginald Pitts argue that Wilson had good reason to request patronage from black (male) readers: she wanted to avoid treatment like that endured by the orator Maria Stewart, who was expelled from Boston following provocative remarks she made in her speeches.³⁴ Her primary motive for requesting the support of black (male) readers was to seek benevolence and protection from black men.

Our Nig's readership also included young people. Eric Gardner argues,

Although Wilson clearly addresses a black readership in her preface, this readership may never have been reached by the original edition of *Our Nig*. . . . [I]t appears that it instead attracted primarily white, middle-class readers who lived close to Wilson's home in Milford, New Hampshire. Startlingly, most were under the age of twenty when *Our Nig* was printed. It seems, then, that the book's purchasers either interpreted or deployed *Our Nig* as a book geared toward the moral improvement of young readers. (227-228)

In addition, Gardner's research on the original owners of *Our Nig* concludes that many were white under the age of twenty:

Of the owners of *Our Nig* who have been traced, more than half were children—some not even at reading age when *Our Nig* was printed. *Our Nig* allows itself to be read as a ‘children's book’ because, focusing as it does on Frado's early life (between the ages of about nine and seventeen), it deals mainly with a child's search for a self and a God. . . . Further, if we take at face value Wilson's prefatory statement that supporting her child was her major reason for writing the book, we can easily accept that questions of youth may well have been part of her

the story of how Frado becomes *Our Nig* and of what happens when she tries to tell her story; from the discrepancies between Wilson and “our Nig” emerges the story of an author's struggle with the prescriptive conventions of form and plot (168-169). See too R. J. Ellis, *Our Nig: A Cultural Biography of a ‘Two-Story’ African American Novel* (New York: Rodopi BV, 1993), and Carla L. Peterson, *Doers of the Word* (New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 1998).

³⁴Gabrielle Foreman and Reginald Pitts discuss Wilson's request for patronage from black male readers: “By the late 1850's, black patronage for literary pursuits was certainly in place. Nearly two-thirds of black adults in Northern cities were at least functionally literate. There were several well-established literary societies in nearby Boston; and though their runs often spanned only several years, a full generation of black newspapers had been launched by this time” (82-83, n8).

intended focus. In addition, both the preface and the novel itself place a great emphasis on reading. The young Frado is empowered in part by reading. In writing her novel, Wilson may, then, have wished to bestow this gift of empowerment on young people of her own race. (238-239)

Our Nig tells the story of Frado, a black girl in the antebellum North who becomes orphaned when her parents abandon her, thus forcing her to work as an indentured servant for a white family, the Bellmonts. Although she endures brutal torment for years, Frado eventually resists and achieves her freedom. Through her tribulations, Frado personifies alternative avenues for black women in the North to attain citizenship—ones that depart from mainstream ideals of decorum and convention. Wilson emphasizes how Frado's status first as an orphan, then later educated and subject to maternal influences, contributes to her eventual freedom.

Frado's orphaned state serves to underscore the near impossibility of maintaining the stability of the black family which would function as a first step toward achieving citizenship. Wilson depicts Frado as the product of an unconventional marriage between an enterprising black man (Joshua [Jim] Brown) and a poor white woman (Mag Smith) who, after her husband's death, abandons her daughter to a life of indentured servitude. Frado's lineage subverts traditional expectations of marriage which, according to nineteenth-century conventions, should represent desire, bliss, respectability, and social and economic security. Wilson portrays Mag and Jim's marriage as a financial exchange in a patriarchy which considers women as currency. Foreman and Pitts argue that Wilson "reject[s] many aspects of domestic ideology: the redeeming power of motherhood and the ability of marriage to bring happiness or stability to women or children" (xxxix). Wilson thus revises the sentimental marriage plot and expresses her reservations about marriage as a viable option for poor black women in the antebellum North to achieve

citizenship. This view of marriage represents a marked departure from *Freedom's Journal* articles, which support marriage for black girls as a source of protection and a way to achieve access to citizenship.

Frado's lack of maternal influence further reveals the obstacles to the citizenship aspirations of black women in the antebellum North, many of whom worked as domestics in white households. Her position as an orphan girl reinforces how growing up outside the protection of a nuclear family affects African Americans' access to citizenship rights, particularly for black women and girls. Frado must fight her own way in the world without a mother's wisdom or a family's protection.

Frado's experiences of abuse as an indentured servant mirror the experiences of orphaned girls in the antebellum North who were forced to work as indentured servants from as early as age six. To this point, Faye E. Dudden writes, "Orphaned children were commonly bound out at about age ten or twelve to serve until they were eighteen" (195). Citing Joan M. Jenson, R. J. Ellis argues that the age often began even earlier, at six—much like Frado (Foreman and Pitts xlv, n12). As an orphan, Frado stands outside of societal expectations and cannot connect to a larger black social structure. Her character challenges domestic ideals that "privilege bourgeoisie home maintenance without providing a point of entry for those who have been excluded, at least as mistresses of their own homes" (xxxix).

While *Colored American* articles portrayed girls interacting with mother figures who imparted lessons in character, morals, and behavioral practices that were desirable for citizenship, Frado's lack of maternal influence suggested by contrast that many black girls in the antebellum North did not enjoy the advantage of a nurturing mother and of

learning conventions in feminine decorum. Wilson's story depicts how Frado is able to take advantage of this lack and finds the strength to resist oppression, suggesting that nonconformity may be an effective tool to black women's efforts to attain equality.

Because Frado does not learn behavioral rules from a black mother, she fails to abide by prescriptive definitions of decorum and traditional female behavior, but responds to acts of racism and oppression in other ways.³⁵ At an early age, Frado is a "wild, frolicky thing," with the ability to "do jest as she's mind to." She wanders off with a friend, causing her family to panic at not finding her. In her wanderings, she "climbed fences and walls, passed through thickets and marshes, and when night approached, selected a thick cluster of shrubbery as a covert for the night" (20). Believing that Frado needs physical disciplining, her mother decides that "severe restraint would be helpful" and abandons her to the Bellmonts. Without parents and familial constraints, Frado is unprotected but survives through her willful determination, even as she endures torment.

Frado's interactions with her new, white surrogate mother figure hinder rather than advance her pursuit of citizenship. Frado attributes the major cause of Mrs. Belmont's aggression to the absence of her mother. After suffering a vicious kicking, Frado runs to Aunt Abby, Mr. Belmont's sister, and confesses that she "ha'n't got no mother, no home. I wish I was dead" (46) and laments, "Oh, I wish I had my mother back; then I should not be kicked and whipped so. Who made me so?" (51). In contrast to other benevolent white mother figures whose interactions with orphaned, black girls

³⁵Foreman and Pitts contend that the racism and abuse Frado endures makes it impossible for her to participate in the ideals of true womanhood: "The racism documented in *Our Nig* make it impossible for Frado to join or claim a family to fulfill the maternal and material expectations of womanhood valued by sentimental ideology. *Our Nig* challenged domestic ideals that privilege bourgeoisie home maintenance without providing a point of entry for those who have been excluded, at least as mistresses of their own homes. In that way, *Our Nig* can be characterized as *anti-sentimental*; it offers perhaps the strongest and most subversive challenge to sentimental ideology and literary conventions articulated in an antebellum woman's novel" (xxx).

revealed kindness, moral instruction, and education, such as with Susannah Wheatley or Mrs. F. in “The Little Black Girl,” Frado’s life with the Bellmonts consists of violence. Wilson thus exposes the oftentimes unwritten and unvoiced physical abuse of black girls working as servants in the homes of white families, dismantling the image of the benevolent, white surrogate mother to reveal the actual obstacles to black girls’ path to citizenship in this figure.

Similar to the black girls’ scarred bodies in *Freedom’s Journal* articles, the beating and scarring on Frado’s body further critique the violence inflicted on African American girls working as indentured servants in the North. In his work on race and the home in the antebellum period, Robert Reid-Pharr describes how Mrs. Bellmont’s violence towards Frado helps her make sense of Frado’s black body in her white household (Reid-Pharr 99).³⁶ Mrs. Bellmont’s beatings “become the material markers of the very complex ideological structure that holds together slavery, domesticity, and American racialism. . . . Again and again, Mrs. Bellmont returns to Frado’s body in order to assure herself that there is some reality to race that might be accessed through the corporeal” (104). Frado’s scars and abuse make her black body a visible reality in the white household.

Though young, Frado eventually overcomes her physical oppression through small acts of resistance that empower her to retaliate against Mrs. Bellmont’s torture. Her resistance insists not on a bodily presence, but a *mental* presence. In those moments, unwilling to accept any more degradation, Frado spiritedly speaks out against Mrs. Bellmont after an incident of not returning quickly enough with a pile of wood. Frado

³⁶See, in particular, Robert Reid-Pharr, “Black, White, and Yeller,” in *Conjugal Union: The Body, the House, and the Black American* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1999), 89-109.

“gathered, stood like one who feels the stirring of free and independent thoughts” and refused to accept any more abuse (105). In creating this resistant character, Wilson introduces early into American literature the *spirited* black girl as a vehicle to effect racial and social change against injustice.

Frado thus emancipates herself from Mrs. Bellmont’s torture through her body *and* her mind. Wilson reveals how education may take many guises that can serve as alternative models for black female advancement. Although Frado attends school and receives a formal education, Wilson redefines the meaning of schooling when Frado plays tricks in school and learns her most important lessons both *outside* and *inside* the schoolhouse. Similar to early representations of Letitia in Stewart’s “The First Stage of Life,” who acts like a “boygirl” before gaining refinement, Frado too is unbound by physical structures and behavioral codes. She revels in any opportunity for freedom, “ever at some sly prank” at school and often “venturing far beyond propriety, thus shielded and countenanced” (38). While the schoolhouse is intended for formal education, Frado and Letitia exhibit another kind of wit—pranks and tricks that enable them to enjoy a mental form of freedom. Their multiple forms of education sharpen their minds and protect them against abuse.

Further refining the model of education that empowers black girls, Wilson depicts Frado as learning the practices and techniques of the trickster. Frado puffs on cigars, plays a trick on a sheep, boldly climbs to dangerous heights, fearless of getting hurt. Rather than eat off Mrs. Bellmont’s plate during dinner, she allows her dog Fido to lick the plate clean. Wilson admits that it is “strange” that “one spark of playfulness could remain amid such constant toil,” but Frado refuses to allow Mrs. Bellmont to break her

spirit (53). The physical, playful acts that involve her body not only remind the reader of Frado's youth, but redefine play as an act of survival against torture.

The repeated pattern of mind over body as necessary for survival surfaces through Frado's attempts at formal education. A constant battle ensues as Frado insists on preserving her mind and spirit through literacy while Mrs. Bellmont attempts to diminish her soul and reduce her body through violence and work. While living with Mrs. Bellmont, Frado persistently "strives to enrich her mind" through learning the Bible. Although Mrs. Bellmont tries to diminish Frado's soul and body through brutal abuse, Frado reclaims her self-worth, dignity, and spirit through education. Rather than friends, "school-books were her constant companions, and every leisure moment was applied to them" (64). Frado always holds a book nearby, "where she could glance from toil to soul refreshment" (64). Frado's shift from pranks to book learning—a path similar to Letitia's—suggests that refinement through formal education is as necessary as spirited resistance if black girls are to gain full independence.

Sewing becomes another form of education and source of financial independence for Frado. After leaving the Bellmont house, Frado learns to sew her own clothes and straw bonnets to support herself. With a newfound passion for sewing, Frado "felt herself capable of elevation": "Expert with the needle, Frado soon equaled her instructress; and [Frado] sought also to teach [the instructress] the value of useful books" (68-69). Frado connects sewing to book-learning to suggest that learning to sew was an alternative form of education leading to a profitable source of income for poor black women to elevate themselves. These shifts in education from pranks to book-learning to sewing clearly demonstrate to readers alternative, viable sources for black women's survival.

While Wilson's autobiography ends with Frado achieving her freedom from Mrs. Belmont, and attaining refinement and education on her own, the letters in the Appendix by white women reveal Frado's true desire, which is a home complete with a nurturing mother figure. Not until Frado is an adult does she gain, for the first time, a mother figure and a nurturing home. In contrast to the earlier black girl figures who first gained mothers, then attained guidance and education, Frado achieves an education through learning the Bible from a white woman before ever obtaining a home and mother figure.

These letters by white women suggest Wilson's returns to the Terry/Wheatley paradigm when she ascribes to Frado a white surrogate mother. After Frado fulfills her obligation to Mrs. Belmont, she moves into the home of Allida, also referred to as Aunt J. Upon entering Aunt J.'s home, Frado cries out that she "at last found a *home*,—and not only a home, but a *mother*" (73). Wilson's adoption of the Terry/Wheatley formula places Frado as the benevolent subject and Aunt J. as the nurturer—a motive Wilson intended would gain financial support from readers. This ending differs from the Terry/Wheatley formula, however, because Frado, by the end of the text, is no longer a child, but a woman. Her nurturance from the white, surrogate, female figure is less to provide Frado refinement and education, which she has already achieved on her own, but to offer a home. While this home offers Frado protection, security, and nurturance, none of which she is able to achieve through marriage or by living on her own, Wilson exposes the impossibility of Frado having her own black home for comfort.

Letters reinforce Frado's interiority to encourage readers to buy her text. A letter in the Appendix by Margaret Thorn, a white woman, urges "friends of our Dark-complexioned Brethren and Sisters" to buy Wilson's text because Frado is a poor orphan,

“deprived of parents and all those endearing associations to which childhood clings” (78). Thorn describes Frado while working for Mrs. Bellmont as “indeed a slave, in every sense of the word; and a lonely one too” (78). While Forman and Pitts refer to Thorn’s mention of Frado’s “loneliness” as racial isolation and the isolation many indentured servants felt as workers during the antebellum period, I extend these comments on Frado’s feelings to suggest a move away from her physical descriptions in the text to a focus on her interior in the Appendix. Such privileging of the interior draws readers into the text in order to purchase it, and suggests a decisive shift away from the earlier objectifications of the black girl. Because of Frado’s inability to secure a black home—her own home with her child and her husband, or a black mother figure, Frado seeks comfort within herself. This move to the interior suggests that it will be her interior, rather than an actual home, where Frado will ultimately gain comfort.

Harriet Jacobs’s Linda; or Incidents in the Life of a Slave Girl

Like Frado, Linda Brent must seek similar protection in Harriet Jacobs’s *Incidents in the Life of a Slave Girl* by orchestrating an escape from slavery and threats of sexual abuse. However, unlike Frado, in the slave girl’s reaction to assault, there exists a greater language of active resistance and power. Linda describes not physical resistance, but an active knowingness as she acquires a conscious awareness of her danger. Jacobs expresses Linda’s realization of sexual threat with language that at first is laced with girlhood wonder, but is quickly replaced by a willful, determined, *adult* insistence on fighting back. Linda responds to Dr. Flint’s sexual advances “with indifference or contempt.” Linda’s awareness arrives “prematurely” and she is “compelled” to learn at an early age that her girlhood will differ from that of her white counterpart. Such awareness

suggests that Jacobs privileges an alternative kind of resistance for black girls, one that locates power and retaliation in a perceptive wit and awareness. This capacity positions Linda one step ahead of her aggressor's violent intentions, even though she must physically hide in the garret until she finds her way to freedom. While Frado demonstrates active, physical, *and* mental rebellion against her oppressor, Jacobs clarifies for readers how resistance for enslaved black girls often requires calculated thought. According to Jacobs, black women's efforts to acquire freedom in the South require a paradigm distinct from black men's *and* women's citizenship pursuits in the antebellum North.

An Abolitionist and an ex-slave, Harriet Jacobs published an account of her life in slavery and her escape to freedom titled *Incidents in the Life of a Slave Girl* in 1861 with the aid of two white, female abolitionists, Amy Post and Lydia Maria Child. The narrative, published twenty years after Jacobs's escape from slavery, is written under the pseudonym Linda Brent, and is one of the few slave narratives written by a woman.³⁷

Literary historians Hazel Carby, Frances Smith Foster, Valerie Smith, Mary Helen Washington, and Deborah Gray White, among others, argue that Jacobs's narrative is unique because it details the sexual exploitation of enslaved girls and women and does not conform to the conventional rhetoric and form of slave narratives written by men.³⁸

Jacobs's narrative reveals her struggle with shame and humiliation in exposing her past life and her inability to follow the tenets of True Womanhood, which historian

³⁷See Mary Helen Washington, "Meditations on History: The Slave Woman's Voice" in *Invented Lives: Narratives of Black Women 1860-1960* (New York: AnchorBooks Doubleday, 1987), 3.

³⁸See Hazel Carby, *Reconstructing Womanhood: The Emergence of the Afro-American Woman Novelist* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1987), Valerie Smith, "Introduction," *Incidents in the Life of a Slave Girl* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1988); and Dorothy Sterling, ed., *We Are your Sisters: Black Women in the Nineteenth Century*. New York: W. W. Norton & Company, 1973).

Barbara Welter defines as piety, chastity, submissiveness, and domesticity.³⁹ Conversely, male narrators “wrote to show that they had the qualities valued and respected by other men—courage, mobility, rationality, and physical strength” and was “under no obligation to discuss his sexuality or his sex life; he did not have to reveal the existence of children he may have fathered outside of marriage” (Washington 4). Frances Smith Foster argues that male narrators tell stories of “humanity lost, then regained” through detailed accounts of awakening to their humanity by separating themselves from other slaves, gaining power over their masters, acquiring literacy and finally, fleeing to Northern states—patterns that are inadequate to capture the specifics of the slave woman’s experience.⁴⁰ Valerie Smith exposes how male narrators “fail” to represent women’s actual experiences in slavery, arguing they “rarely feature protagonists who suffer over the separation of their families or who bring relatives North with them. More importantly, they fail to represent the slave woman’s sexual vulnerability, the crucial fact that differentiated her experience from that of her male counterparts” (Smith, “Introduction,” xxx). While male authors slave narratives often represent women as victims of sexual abuse, “rare indeed is the account that provides glimpses of the interior lives or survival strategies of women so victimized” (xxx).

Scholars argue that crucial to understanding Jacobs’s narrative is an understanding of the generic literary conventions of the antebellum era, which she recruits into her text. Because the techniques and conventions of the slave narrative did not permit Jacobs to describe her sexual vulnerability, she employed but critiqued the

³⁹See Barbara B. Welter, “The Cult of True Womanhood: 1820-1860” *American Quarterly* 18.2, part 1 (1966): 151-174

⁴⁰See Frances Smith Foster. *Written by Herself: Literary Productions by African American Women, 1746-1892* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1993), 95.

techniques of the sentimental novel to tell her own story (Smith xxxi). Frances Smith Foster writes that Jacobs “modifies literary techniques familiar to her anticipated audience and invents new ones in order to accommodate her testimony as she tests her readers’ abilities to accept and to act upon that testimony” (97). Similarly, Valerie Smith claims

Jacobs’s readers were accustomed to a certain degree of propriety and circumlocution in fiction. In keeping with cultural injunctions against women’s assertiveness and directness in speech, the literature they wrote and read tended to be ‘exercises in euphemism’ that excluded certain subjects from the purview of fiction. The tension between the decorousness of the genre and the urgency of the slave woman’s situation thus underscores how inadequate the sentimental novel’s techniques are in telling Jacob’s story. They fail, like those of the slave narrative, to meet the demands of her situation. (xxxii–xxxiii)

I argue that Jacobs employs the black girl figure to critique those obstacles that prevented self-expression through her willful, girlhood subjectivity.

In *Incidents*, Jacobs creates a carefully-constructed girlhood that she intended to deliver a political message to white women of the North. Although just a girl, the enslaved fifteen-year-old Linda Brent is unwilling to become a victim of sexual assault. Linda’s testimony draws political attention to the most dependent of groups—enslaved black girls—and thus challenges the citizenship model in which men attempt patriarchal protection of their families or uphold the ideals of Republican Motherhood.

Jacobs establishes specific girlhood chapters to voice those often-unspoken horrors of sexual abuse that many enslaved black women experienced, and to seek to absolve them from this violence. “The New Master and Mistress,” “The Trials of Girlhood,” and “A Perilous Passage in a Slave Girl’s Life” pay close attention to the threats of sexual abuse that Linda receives as a girl and how she intervenes to prevent her

victimization. These girlhood chapters provide an apparatus for independence specific to the experiences of enslaved black women in the South.

Jacobs's depiction of Linda's girlhood makes a political statement about slavery's violent impact not only on black women, but on all women. In her work on black women's slave narratives, Frances Smith Foster argues that

Jacobs recounts incidents in her life as a naïve slave girl but the narrative voice is clearly that of a free, informed woman. She not only intends to demonstrate the evils of slavery but to show her female readers the similarities to their situations and to convince them that as long as there are slave girls such as Linda Brent, no woman's freedom is secure. (*Written by Herself* 96)

Jacobs aligns her girlhood with the girlhood of white women to demonstrate how slavery prevents black girls from abiding by standards of purity and chastity cherished in the antebellum period. Thus, Jacobs reveals how repeated threats of sexual assault make Linda's girlhood "a sad epoch in the life of a slave girl" (Jacobs 26). In acknowledging girlhood as an "epoch," a distinct stage in a female's development, Jacobs makes the important distinction between girlhood and womanhood, a rhetorical and political move that acknowledges the slave woman not as chattel but as human *and* female.

Understanding girlhood as a stage of purity and vulnerability, white female readers would likely commiserate with the descriptions of slave girls who are beaten and raped, and thus lend their support to the abolition of slavery.

Jacobs's descriptions of girlhood reveal that women, her aunt and grandmother, *and* men, her uncle Phillip and her friend Peter, offer her protection and nurturance throughout her childhood and as she prepared for her escape. While articles in the black press centered on the black girl as victim and the black man's *inability* to protect, Jacobs privileges the maternal line, specifically in the figure of her grandmother as a nurturing,

maternal, and *protective* presence for enslaved girls and a community of men as caring, supportive protectors. As Foster argues, Jacobs

writes an account of slavery that does not excuse the evil inherent in that institution but does reveal it as a condition within which some are able to develop strong family ties, develop bonds of affection and loyalty among women, and unite themselves into a viable and resourceful community of resisters. (Foster 95)

Thus, Jacobs reveals how life on the plantation and escapes for freedom were not singular, independent experiences, but how black men and women often worked together as a community.

Linda describes two men in her life, her uncle Phillip and her friend Peter, whose freedom enables them the mobility to offer her protection. Linda's uncle Phillip is a carpenter who makes devices that allow Linda to hide away in the garret while still maintaining contact with her family. He makes the concealed trap door which not only allows Linda to hide away safely, but which provides access to another part of the house, the storeroom, where she can communicate with her family. Linda discovers that her uncle made a gimlet, a device that enables Linda to look out a peephole and watch her children in the yard, and she was "as rejoiced as Robinson Crusoe could have been at finding such a treasure" (Jacobs 96). These devices protect and hide Linda from detection while ensuring her accessibility to her family. Similarly, Linda's friend, Peter, who is a free black man, risks his life to assure the safe passage of Linda and her friend to the North. Described as "intelligent" and "generous," Peter negotiates Linda's escape with the captain of a vessel, and assures Linda "that he would take care we were not left unprotected" (Jacobs 131). While these men's mobility and skills in carpentry and negotiation protect Linda and aid her escape, it is Linda's grandmother who provides the nurturance and sustenance that protects Linda when she is a girl.

In her narrative, Jacobs appropriates the strategy of Republican Motherhood, but revises this formula to include the black grandmother as a nurturer in the enslaved girl's coming-of-age. Linda's grandmother clothes, feeds, and protects her from many abuses, nurtures Linda's own children, protects her secret confinement in the garret, and helps to facilitate her escape North. Linda's grandmother occupies a particularly privileged position in that society because she raised many members of the slaveholding family, and this status gains her privileges such as earning money by making and selling food as well as a certain authoritative presence that protects her family, household, and herself from many acts of violence.

Jacobs makes further distinctions between the lives of enslaved girls as compared to her northern counterparts when she writes of the slave girl being "prematurely knowing" of sexual abuse at an early age (27). Dr. Flint abuses Linda's innocence when he "whispers foul words in her ear" and "peoples [her] mind with unclean images" (26). His lascivious language suggests the impossibility of Linda remaining chaste and pure as dictated by dominant ideals of womanhood. To depict the enslaved girl's assault, Jacobs emphasizes the violation of her mind rather than her body. Dr. Flint's language adds to suggestions of sexual violence of the mind and indicates Jacobs's awareness of the extent to which not only physical abuse, but also psychological violation defiled women's purity of character. That the enslaved girl must become "prematurely knowing" suggests an alternative form of education and experience that varies significantly from the education of girls featured in the black press. Apart from learning to read and write, which were instrumental in engineering the letter-writing scheme that led to her escape, Linda

acquires another set of lessons: learning about sexual assault and other indecencies that violated enslaved girls and women and were a routine part of her life.

While Brent learns not only about principles of morality and decorum from her grandmother, she also learns about the violent abuse of enslaved black women and about how she, too, might fall victim to it.

Even the little child, who is accustomed to wait on her mistress and her children, *will learn*, before she is twelve years old, why it is that her mistress hates such and such a one among the slaves. Perhaps the child's own mother is among those hated ones. She *listens* to violent outbreaks of jealous passion, and cannot help understanding what is the cause. She will become *prematurely knowing* in evil things. Soon she will *learn* to tremble when she hears her master's footfall. She will be *compelled to realize* that she is no longer a child. (emphasis added, 27)

Linda's resistance takes the form of active *knowingness* of her danger. Similar to Frado who demonstrated awareness through diverse forms of education learned from her environment, Linda too absorbs her lessons simply by being attuned to her environment—as she must to survive.

Thus, through Linda's girlhood experience, Jacobs exposes and directly confronts the lawlessness on plantations that violates slave girls. Dr. Flint warns Linda that she is "his property; that [she] must be subject to his will in all things" (26). Jacobs questions the lawlessness of a society that would condone such violence to an unprotected, enslaved girl when she asks, "But where could I turn for protection? . . . there is no shadow of law to protect her from insult, from violence, or even from death; all these are inflicted by fiends who bear the shape of men" (26). These "fiends" are propertied, white, male citizens who abuse the law for their own profit.

Decades earlier, editors of the black press had similarly appropriated the figure of the black girl to question unlawful practices towards African Americans. The three

articles featuring scarred and beaten black girls in *Freedom's Journal* portrayed black activists critiquing their own inability to shelter victimized young women as well as the ineffectiveness of the judicial system to protect African Americans from violence.

Thus, Jacobs's insistence on exposing the slave girl's experience and her specific strategies for survival and protection challenge the citizenship model set up by men. Linda Brent's testimony draws political attention to the most dependent of groups—enslaved black women and girls—and thus challenges the citizenship model in which men attempt patriarchal protection of their families or uphold the ideals of Republican Motherhood. Jacobs reveals how in the South, black men were unable to protect their families and black girls had to protect themselves. Similar to the enslaved boy who cannot protect the slave girl from brutal whippings in “Punishment of a Slave,” Linda's father is unable to offer her any form of protection against sexual abuse. Jacobs describes the endemic inability of enslaved black men to protect their families:

Some poor creatures have been so brutalized by the lash that they will sneak out of the way to give their masters free access to their wives and daughters. Do you think this proves the black man to belong to an inferior order of beings? What would *you* be, if you had been born and brought up a slave, with generations of slaves as ancestors? I admit that the black man *is* inferior. But what makes him so? It is the ignorance in which white men compel him to live; it is the torturing whip that lashes manhood out of him, it is the fierce bloodhounds of the South, and the scarcely less cruel human bloodhounds of the north, who enforce the Fugitive Slave Law. *They* do the work. (68)

Because of the black father's inability to protect his family and the absence of the biological black mother, surrogate motherhood takes the form of the black grandmother.⁴¹ Similar to *Colored American* articles in which surrogate black mother

⁴¹Similar to Jacobs, Elizabeth Keckley recalls the lack of a mother figure when she describes the brutality she endured as a slave girl. In “Girlhood and Its Sorrows,” the second chapter of *Behind the Scenes*, Keckley defines her girlhood as marked by violent beatings and whippings by her owner, her fighting back against such torture, and the extreme loneliness she suffered without her mother's nurturance

figures refine and educate the black girl, Linda's grandmother takes an active role in her character development by instilling in her "pure principles" of righteousness, and thus appropriates the strategy of Republican motherhood as a path to citizenship.

Conclusion

During the antebellum period, black cultural expectations of citizenship emerged as black newspapers encouraged readers to accept conventions of the dominant culture. To demonstrate their worthiness as American citizens, black Northerners emphasized their own moral rectitude, personal etiquette, sobriety, intelligence, industriousness, and honesty. To fight for these citizenship rights, black men and women appropriated the figure of the black girl in early black newspapers and in literature as a political tool for creating a model for black citizenship. Images of beaten or scarred black girls encouraged mobilization and critiqued injustices inflicted on African Americans. Representation of girls reformed through proper conduct and education or groomed for marriage encouraged black populations in the North to abide by dominant moral codes that would promote citizenship.

Black women writers joined black newspaper editors in promoting ideals of citizenship by insisting on the concerns of black women. In their narratives, black girl figures knowingly break laws of conventionality and feminine virtue. The girl achieves an active, revolutionary stance that differs from her objectification as a victim of violence or a model for marriage and reform by the black press. Black women writers authored stories about girls who demonstrated strategic and brave acts of rebellion. These stories offer a *new* set of laws to assist black women, free and enslaved, in acquiring

and love. In a letter to her mother, reproduced in the "Girlhood" chapter, Keckley reveals to readers the politics inherent in her rhetorical depiction of girlhood.

independence and addressing the lawlessness of the dominant society. Thus emerged a custody battle between black male and female activists through the pages of print culture that centered on the black girl. By manipulating the black girl figure as a tool for citizenship across literary genres, black writers uncovered the power and potential of her image to gain equal rights for African Americans in the antebellum period. The next chapter reveals how after the Civil War, black women activists gained greater access to the black press and consolidated a new image of the black girl in the public sphere to advance the political and cultural concerns of post-Emancipation black communities.

CHAPTER TWO

BLACK GIRLHOOD POST-EMANCIPATION

After Emancipation, Reconstruction efforts were underway to rebuild the South and the nation through the extension of political rights, the expansion of public education, the evaluation of labor and capitalism, and the reunion of black families. Historian Eric Foner argues that newly freed slaves “found countless ways of pursuing aspirations for autonomy and equality, and seizing the opportunity to press for further change” (125). This “meaning of freedom,” according to Foner, meant that “institutions were consolidated, expanded, and liberated from white supervision, and new ones—particularly political organizations—joined them as focal points of black life” (36). Not only on the level of institution building, but also in the everyday, personal lives of freedmen and women, did resistance against white authority and surveillance take place (36-37). Black people sought to overturn the real and symbolic authority that whites had exercised over every aspect of their lives. Freedmen and women exercised their liberation from innumerable regulations associated with slavery by holding meetings, participating in religious services, and publishing in venues unrestrained by white surveillance.

The promise of Reconstruction was illustrated in girlhood stories published in *Christian Recorder*, the official newspaper of the African Methodist Episcopal Church, beginning as early as 1854 with the newspaper’s first issue. The stories were written by black writers and published in *Christian Recorder*’s “Children’s sections.” To attract

black and white readers, the newspaper represented a racially indeterminate girl as a citizenship model to reinforce the promise of a national culture based not on race but on family, a domestic household, and achieved characteristics of intellect, class, morality, decorum, and duty. In the stories, girl figures are taught to use their voices effectively and make rational decisions. These racially-indeterminate girl characters, combined with themes of self-sacrifice, fairy-tale frameworks, and happily-ever-after endings, encouraged in readers a promise of reconciliation and a future, *unified* America.

When Reconstruction efforts failed, black writers turned to new representations of the black girl to represent the everyday, lived experiences of black families working to maintain their households. In the press and in literary works, black women writers like Mrs. N. F. Mossell and Frances E. W. Harper confronted the realities of Reconstruction's failures in their journalistic contributions. Mrs. N. F. Mossell addressed the impact of failed hopes on black families in her advice column, "The Women's Department," published weekly between 1885 and 1887 in *New York Freeman*. Mossell's no-nonsense tone and upfront advice departed from the Christian-centered, sentimental prose of *Christian Recorder's* fairy-tale stories. Rather than happy endings, Mossell prepared black parents and girls for the reality of working in the urban sphere to support families and warned of the dangers that existed in the form of ill-intentioned men and over-indulgence in saloons and parties.

Frances Harper—author, activist, and orator—fictionalized Mossell's advice to black girls, parents, and the larger community in her serialized novel, *Trial and Triumph*, published between 1888 and 1889 in *Christian Recorder*. *Trial and Triumph* tells the story of Annette Harcourt, a poor, dark-skinned black girl who becomes orphaned after

her mother abandons her to run off with an intemperate man and eventually dies. Forced to live with an uncaring grandmother, Annette is encouraged by members of her community to pursue an education, become a teacher, and travel south rather than marry so as to devote her life to racial uplift. Harper's dark-skinned girl figure represents black women's and girls' increasingly active and *visible* role in political life, and her story warned readers of the often-unspoken compromises imposed on the personal lives of black women who break from feminine conventions and choose a life of work and political activism.

This new image represented the promise of African American inclusion in the body politic by preserving a Christian ethos, securing the legality of relationships, presenting black families as worthy citizens, and cultivating character. The goal for this post-Emancipation girl figure as a model of progress was to involve her safely in public, uplift work. To fulfill this agenda, black writers continued to foreground the girl's mind through education, as did Wilson in *Our Nig* and Jacobs in *Incidents in the Life of a Slave Girl*. But in contrast to these early nineteenth-century black writers, black activists post-Emancipation emphasized the visibility of the girl's body as *crucial* to gaining a political presence and consolidating black citizenship. Politically, for the race to progress and for African Americans to gain access to the public sphere as citizens, black intellectuals acknowledged the black body as inescapable, and confronted this visibility by grooming the girl's mind to ensure her own protection as she traveled, worked, and spoke on behalf of the race in public spheres. To fulfill the agenda, black writers moved beyond the antebellum model of the surrogate parent or the Republican Mother figure as singular, civilizing agents, to a *communal* concept of citizenship. In this concept, domestic

households, extended family, community members, and the reading public assumed the responsibility of teaching the black girl ways to use her voice, administer her body, and protect herself. The figure of black girl as post-Emancipation citizenship model leaves the domestic sphere to participate fully in public, civic work.

In this chapter, I begin with an exploration of the racially-ambiguous girl figure in *Christian Recorder* stories. Next, I examine Mrs. N. F. Mossell's advice columns published in *New York Freeman*, and I close with an analysis of how Harper fictionalized Mossell's messages through her dark-skinned protagonist, Annette in her serialized novel *Trial and Triumph*. These texts demonstrate that the black girl figure as a model of racial progress post-Emancipation took shape in varied forms of literary expression that captured the goals and intentions of black activists.

Fairy Tales in *Christian Recorder*

The newspaper *Christian Recorder* was first published in 1854, but was short-lived. When Elisha Weaver assumed editorial control in 1861, he introduced the newspaper in the South by distributing it among the black regiments in the Union army. In 1867, Benjamin T. Tanner became the editor, followed by the Rev. Benjamin F. Lee who served as editor from 1885 to 1892. *Christian Recorder* contained secular as well as religious material, and included coverage of the black regiments together with the major events of the Civil War. The four-page weekly contained such departments as Religious Intelligence, Domestic News, General Items, Foreign News, Obituaries, Marriages, Notices, and Advertisements. The newspaper accepted all types of submissions, from poetry and essays to short stories and serialized novels, and included the normal complement of prose and poetry found in the newspapers of the day. The newspaper

received submissions from black authors, activists, artists, and educators such as Frances E. W. Harper, Frederick Douglass, Benjamin Tanner, Fanny Jackson Coppin, Daniel Payne, Morris Brown, and Samuel Didimus (Hayward 418).

An important issue that concerned the editors of *Christian Recorder* was how political and social turmoil in the daily lives of African Americans during Reconstruction would affect their children. In sections devoted to children, fictional stories instructed young readers about the power of their voices, opinions, and decisions. In her study of children's stories published in *Christian Recorder* between 1854 and 1865, Chanta Haywood explores how these childhood sections ranged from didactic and entertaining poems and stories to illustrations and letters, all of which addressed such diverse themes as gender roles, proper child behavior and parental training, political responsibility, and moral and spiritual awareness. The sections bore such titles as "Our Children," "The Child's Cabinet," and the "Child's Portion."

While Chanta Haywood claims that black writers regularly contributed articles to the *Christian Recorder*, it is likely that the *Christian Recorder* also reprinted articles from white newspapers, as *Freedom's Journal* and *Colored American* did in earlier years. If *Christian Recorder* editors reprinted girlhood stories from white newspapers, they hoped that an indeterminately raced girl figure might be an attractive rhetorical tool for black and white readers. This unraced girl figure offered African American editors at the *Christian Recorder* what was perhaps the only code that enabled the newspaper to call itself a national text and envision the fight for citizenship as a national concern based on rights as Americans rather than on race. By reaching both a white and black readership through the figure of the racially-indeterminate girl, *Christian Recorder* editors hoped to

erase racial distinctions, so that nationality and class would supplant race as the foundation for power in black regeneration.

Much scholarship has emerged on racially-indeterminate characters in nineteenth-century African American literature. In her short story “The Two Offers” and her novel *Sowing and Reaping: A Temperance Story*, Frances Harper’s lack of racial characterization suggests her intention to make temperance a national rather than a racial issue. Carla Peterson argues that because “temperance transcends racial categorization, . . . the characters are to be imagined not as either white or black but as both/and” (45). Peterson continues, “*Sowing and Reaping* appears to be a purely domestic story in which neither time, place, nor race is specified. But this apparent narrowness belies a broader agenda: temperance is a national problem because the nation as a whole has become intemperate” (“Frances Harper” 45). Because the racially-indeterminate characters in *Sowing and Reaping* are intended to articulate a national rather than race-based concern about temperance, the novel’s inferred addresses are both black and white.

Similarly, Doveanna S. Fulton argues that racially-indeterminate characters functioned as “a strategic act” to foster temperance in African American communities and to address race problems in temperance movement work (211). This indeterminacy, claims Fulton, “foster[s] a radical integrationist vision of America in which communities, though class stratified, are peopled by individuals whose race is insignificant to the context of the narrative” (210). Racial indeterminacy “allows readers not to be preoccupied with race and, when race is invoked, to realize the very instability and inappropriateness of racial categories” (211).⁴²

⁴²These stories function as antecedents to novels written during post-Reconstruction which feature racially-indeterminate girl figures. See Claudia Tate, *Domestic Allegories* (1992), in which she describes

Girlhood stories in the *Christian Recorder* drew from fairy-tale discourse whose themes challenged existing social norms and opened up new possibilities for a different life. The incorporation of the racially-indeterminate girl into this genre suggests a resistance to an American culture that was not living up to its ideals of liberty, justice, and freedom. Fairy-tale narratives generated in readers the firm conviction that other, better worlds existed and that it was possible to enter these worlds and draw strength from them. The “happily-ever-after” endings suggested a departure from oppression and a hope for a new way of life. To evoke the fairy tale is to deny what is considered ordinary and everyday and to imagine an existence where opportunity is attainable.

In their work on fairy-tale archetypes in literature, Jack Zipes and Michael Metzgar argue that fairy tales induce an individual

to change his own way of being through possibilities offered by certain other realities, and when this ability to change becomes firmly planted, a significant shift in perception occurs—away from judging fairy tales by how well they conform to our world, to judging the world by how well it measures up to the possibilities offered by certain other realities. (quoted in King 3)

For recently emancipated and free black Northerners, the realm of the fairy tale was a welcome relief from the reality of oppression. Inserting fairy-tale discourse into histories of progress demonstrated African Americans’ awareness of the dominant ideologies that granted white Americans the privileges and opportunities that African Americans did not yet enjoy.

Christian Recorder stories followed common fairy-tale themes. There are warning tales, as in “Taking a Pear” (*Christian Recorder*, 24 September 1864) and “Boasting” (*Christian Recorder*, 12 December 1868), both of which featured girl figures who learn

the racially-indeterminate figure in *Clarence and Corinne* (1890), *The Hazeley Family*, and *Megda*, post-Reconstruction novels by black women, Amelia A. E. Johnson and Emma Dunham Kelley-Hawkins and discusses these representations as a form of “radical, racial politics” (120).

about honesty and prevent others from committing immoral acts such as stealing and boasting. Another popular theme was the bad-girl-turned-good as in “Kitty and ‘Please’” published in *Christian Recorder* on 17 May 1862; “The Bitter Kiss,” published on 21 November 1868; and “Pleasing Mamma,” published on 3 December 1870. Stories often begin with a small conflict as with a girl named Mary who mistreats a friend, or who steals from the kitchen, but after realizing her errors through conversation with family members, problems are swiftly resolved and stories conclude in happy endings.

The presence of family members in *Christian Recorder* stories contribute to the girl’s growth and reinforce the viability of black families at Reconstruction. Girlhood stories represented a move beyond the antebellum model of the surrogate parent or mother figure as singular, civilizing agents, to a *communal* concept of citizenship. In this concept, households with black mother and father figures, extended family, community members, and the reading public represented the promise of reconciliation and assumed the responsibility of teaching the girl how to use her voice, administer her body, select appropriate dress, make rational decisions, and protect herself — all for a future role in uplift efforts. This adult nurturance helps the girl reach resolutions and overcome bad habits within the space of the black home and the black family. The presence of father figures and extended family members in these girlhood stories widened the role of nurturer to the black girl figure. These figures help groom the girl for her future work in the public sphere through lessons in morality, voice, decorum, and honesty. These family members worked alongside the girl figure to show that the model of progress is not a singular, individual achievement, but one that is communal.

For example, in “Kitty and ‘Please,’” Kitty acts in an unpleasing way and uses an unpleasing voice toward her friend, but through conversations with her mother *and* father, she learns from her errors. In “a tone of command, very unbecoming a little girl,” Kitty chooses to say “‘Do this,’ or ‘Do that,’ like a little tyrant” rather than ask her friend in a gentle manner, “‘Will you be kind enough to do this, or that?’ or ‘Please do this;’ or ‘Will you?’” Kitty’s mother is “very sorry and talked with her little girl about this new fault,” but when she speaks unkindly again to another girl, Bridget, and her mother asks her to say “please,” Kitty “pout[s] but [does] not speak.” Kitty’s mother tells her daughter to go to her room until she is able to say “please.” Eventually, Kitty has a conversation with her father and tells him that the word “‘please’ wouldn’t come out of my throat’ it staid [sic] there; it almost choked me; but maybe it will now.” She “took her father’s hand” and asks her friend in a kind way to help her put on her shoe. The story ends as Kitty states, “Mamma, ‘please’ did stay in my throat so long as it felt big, and ‘most choked me; but mamma, it’s out, and I think it will come out quick next time. Please kiss me, mamma, I’m very sorry.” Such tutelage encourages Kitty to use her voice wisely, as she must when she participates in political meetings or works in the public sphere. In “The Bitter Kiss,” a girl named Katy lies to her mother about sneaking mincemeat from the kitchen. Chastised, Katy expresses her compliance: “I have never told a lie since. I think its best *always* to tell the truth.” The stories end with problems resolved and happy, amicable endings.

In “Pleasing Mamma,” Minnie complains to her mother that she would rather wear a thin, calico dress than one that would keep her warm in cold weather. When she asks her mother “what frock do you want me to wear this morning?” Minnie’s voice

“[sounds] clear and flute-like as the caroling of the birds in the street.” Yet, when her mother tells Minnie to wear the warmer, pink frock, Minnie replies “in another voice that sounded like the filing of a saw, ‘Ma, I don’t want to wear that old buff; I want to wear my white frock!’” Minnie’s Aunt intervenes because the mother is “too busy” and warns Minnie to “do as mamma bids you.” The aunt offers these final words of advice: “I would rather see a little girl that tries to please her mamma than to see all the white frocks in Carrolton.” All of these stories emphasize that the girl figure lives in a home and is nurtured by parents *and* extended family. From her family, she learns vital lessons in how to dress and use her voice appropriately. Rather than be silent, the black girl gains an active and *vocal* presence through her opinions, reactions, and decisions. These representations of the black girl figure and her nurturing, nuclear family convey how Reconstruction enables capability of black, nuclear families to prosper and contribute to the nation.

Most common in *Christian Recorder* girlhood stories is the Cinderella theme, which tells a rags-to-riches story. In these stories, poor black girl figures care for their ill mother figures, but are eventually rewarded for their sacrifice and duty and gain a prosperous future. Two examples are “The Family: How to Honor a Mother,” published in *Christian Recorder* on 7 April 1866 and “A Story with a Lesson” published in *Christian Recorder* on 24 September 1864.

“The Family: How to Honor a Mother” develops the Cinderella theme in its tale of a girl’s self-sacrificial care for an ailing mother figure. The story describes the Swedish king, Gustavus the Third, who comes upon a poor girl whose “artless, unembarrassed politeness at once attracted the king’s attention, and touched his heart.”

When the King offers to find the girl a pleasant home, she kindly refuses because of her duty to care for her sick mother. The girl asserts that “Providence placed me here, and I am not anxious to change my position in life. No offer, however tempting, could induce me to leave my mother.” The king is so touched by the daughter’s duty that he regularly sends money to the girl and, when her mother dies, bestows on her a large fortune so that she may live in happiness. Through the example of the girl’s sympathetic attendance to her mother, the story teaches children how to honor their parents. In caring for an ill mother, “duty” and “goodness” indicate acceptance of racial uplift and mobilization to gain access to citizenship. In both instances, the biological father is absent and another male figure unrelated to the girl provides sustenance, benevolence, and protection. In keeping with the fairy-tale discourse, this male figure as benefactor functions as the girl’s “knight” who saves her from poverty.

Similarly, “A Story with a Lesson” describes how the self-sacrifice of an orphaned servant girl named Perine eventually gains her riches. After Perine is sent by a relative to care for a poor, elderly lady, word comes to the woman that her brother has died and left her a fortune. The lady adopts Perine as her own daughter and sends her to a boarding school in Paris. Perine’s care for the elderly lady thus reaps great rewards, but rather than actual monetary riches, the girl-caretaker gains a mother and a family. Perine’s selflessness and dedication to the old woman are later reciprocated with returned affection, education in Paris, and refinement. Monetary exchange for work is replaced by shelter and education, all of which suggest a move towards re-building the nation through moral goodness, duty, and perseverance. No longer does the surrogate mother care for the

black girl as in the antebellum period; rather, roles are reversed. The orphaned girl gains a caregiver role.

When *Christian Recorder* published “A Story with a Lesson,” African Americans were facing insurmountable hardship. At this point during the Civil War, many black men enlisted with the hope of gaining freedom after their service. In the North, African Americans faced discrimination, economic inequality, and injustice that grew under the strain of war. In the context of the Civil War, the message of Perine’s story was dedication to worthy work, although the rewards may not be immediate. However, rewards would come if one remained selfless, altruistic, and patient. This message undoubtedly had a powerful impact on readers. Similar to Perine’s freedom and the bountiful rewards gained after she had fulfilled *her* duty, the reward for disfranchised African Americans after the Civil War was not only freedom, but also citizenship and equal rights.

The Post-Reconstruction Era

At the end of Reconstruction and throughout the last decades of the nineteenth century, themes in black newspapers shifted to reflect the escalation of violence towards African Americans. Educated, middle-class blacks in the North who had enjoyed a relative measure of freedom and were involved in the advances of Reconstruction now faced imperiled citizenship, mounting racism, and increasing powerlessness during the post-Reconstruction years (McHenry, *Forgotten Readers* 147). After the Dred Scott decision of 1857, Congress passed civil rights laws in 1866, 1870, 1871, and 1875. The Civil Rights decision of 1883, concerning a series of cases involving discrimination against African Americans, reversed these decisions and denied African American

citizens federal protection against discrimination in accommodations by declaring the Civil Rights Act of 1875 unconstitutional. The black press reacted with outrage.⁴³ Rather than write fairy tales with hopeful endings, African American leaders searched for solutions to the problems of legalized violence, institutionalized racism, and widespread discrimination.

Black institutions such as literary societies provided a forum from which to critique America's racial domination and devise strategies to contest inequality. They became "social spaces in which public concerns could be discussed and questions of Negro leadership and identity debated" (McHenry 148). In their desire to be treated as citizens, thinkers, and contributors to American culture, African Americans employed diverse literary forms as resistance and political strategy. "Rather than direct political or economic protest," claims McHenry, "middle-class African Americans saw their literary work as a means of instilling pride in their community; stressing the importance of racial solidarity and self-help, they struggled to turn the pejorative designation of race into a source of dignity and self-affirmation" (149). They recognized literature as "an institution" that would "investigate and address the inequalities that defined the community" (149). The formation of a black intelligentsia and organizations that promoted literary work helped shape the black middle class.

In particular, black writers responded to this new political crisis by invoking the necessity of black community action. Mrs. N. F. Mossell and Frances E. W. Harper took advantage of the increased readership in the black community to contribute their public voice in the form of serialized works in the black press. Through progressive rhetoric and

⁴³See Armistead S. Pride and Clint C. Wilson, II, *A History of the Black Press* (Washington, DC: Howard University Press, 1997), 117-118.

diverse literary strategies, Mossell and Harper instructed a generation of women and girls how to participate *safely* in work and racial uplift efforts while maintaining a balance in black male/female relations. Written against the backdrop of the failure of Reconstruction, Mossell and Harper's serialized works taught a wide readership how to assume the responsibility of racial uplift and protect against violence.

Mrs. N. F. Mossell's "The Women's Department"

Mrs. N. F. Mossell's column "The Women's Department," published in the *New York Freeman*, expressed the protection of black women and girls in the public sphere. Her columns encouraged fathers and mothers to look to the economic potential of their daughters, encourage them to leave home and work, and help them navigate the public sphere safely. Mossell's no-nonsense tone and upfront advice departed from the Christian-centered, sentimental prose of the stories in the *Christian Recorder*. Rather than happy endings, Mossell prepared black parents and girls for the reality of working in the urban sphere to support families and warned of its potential dangers.

Mossell's gesture to serve women drew from the *New York Freeman's* mission statement to act as protector over its readership. Founded on 13 January 1883 by T. Thomas Fortune, *New York Globe* collapsed on 22 November 1884, and became *New York Freeman*. The newspaper's name changed again, in 1886, becoming *New York Age*. In its inaugural issue in January 1883, *New York Globe* defined itself as "the organ of the Colored people," having as an "absolute necessity" the goal of being a strong and independent paper. It adopted a "strong and fearless" tone, stating that its main objectives were to protect the black race and offer its people reliable news:

The Globe aims to supply the place of a National Journal for the colored people of the United States. We do not advocate any man or any party. We are servants of

the people and in defending their interests we criticize the shortcomings of friends and the injustice of enemies. To properly defend a people's interests, a newspaper at this juncture should be non-partisan.

As its community's representative, the newspaper sought to protect and defend the people it served, obtain their trust and ensure their well-being. Doing so, it reinforced its place as the center of the black community. Through her goal to protect black women and girls as they navigate the public sphere, Mossell extended the newspaper's mission statement to address specific members of the black community.

The sophistication of Mossell's columns represented traits that she developed as a writer at an early age. Mossell was born Gertrude Bustill in Philadelphia, Pennsylvania. She showed early promise as a writer when delivering a speech titled "Influence" at her high-school commencement, which was published in the *Christian Recorder*. After graduating from Robert Vaux Grammar School in Philadelphia, Mossell taught school before becoming one of the leading journalists of the era. Her articles on political and social issues emphasizing women's rights and responsibilities were published in a number of periodicals, including the *AME Church Review*, *Philadelphia Times*, *Philadelphia Echo*, and *The Independent*. For a time, Mossell edited the "Woman's Department" of *New York Freeman*, *Indianapolis World*, and *New York Age*. In 1893, she married a leading Philadelphia physician, Nathan Frances Mossell, and had two daughters. In 1894, Mossell wrote *The Work of the Afro-American Woman*, a collection of essays and poems that showcased the achievements of black women in a range of fields. Although she is regarded as one of the first black female journalists to write her own column, scholars have neglected Mossell's work.⁴⁴ Many concentrate primarily on

⁴⁴See Claudia Tate, *Domestic Allegories of Political Desire* (1992), Joanne Braxton's Introduction in the Schomburg edition of *The Work* published by Oxford University Press, and a section of Mossell in

her book, *The Work of the Afro-American Woman*, but few mention her serialized columns.

Before encouraging the safety of girls in the public sphere, Mossell highlights their special place in the home, and reinforces their economic potential in supporting their parents. In her *New York Freeman* articles “Only a Girl” (February 13, 1886), “Domestic Training for Girls” (April 3, 1886), and “Teach Your Daughters” (April 3, 1886), Mossell warned parents not to view female children as second to boys; to be disappointed in having a girl would be to miss the benefit she can provide the family. Mossell described prevailing attitudes toward female children in other societies: “In some countries, it is entirely permissible to rid a family of too many feminine additions by drowning at birth; but in this civilized land the only mark of disapprobation permitted is a disgusted countenance, neglect of the mother and child, and the remark in not very pleasant tone, ‘only a girl’” (“Only a Girl”). She encouraged readers to do away with negative views towards female children and realize the emotional and economic support girls contribute to the household.

Loyalty to family and economic potential are reasons why Mossell claimed black families should view girls as important. She offered an old adage to reinforce her point: “A son is a son until he gets him a wife; a daughter is a daughter all the days of her life” (“Only a Girl”). Whether sick or busy, “a daughter always steals time to write a line, finds a day to see the dear ones, but many a good but thoughtless son finds himself too busy, and so procrastinates until it is too late, and someday the whitened heads lie low, and he need never pay the promised visit” (“Only a Girl”). Mossell ended this column by

Ann DuCille’s *The Coupling Convention* (1994). No work has been published on Mossell’s newspaper columns in *New York Freeman*.

noting that because girls have greater opportunities than before, fathers can look upon their daughters to contribute economically to the family: “In these days a father can gratify his ambition in that his daughter can often succeed him in his business, or profession, or take another equally lucrative and honorable. The day, we hope, is slowly but surely passing away when a father will exclaim in disgust ‘another girl’” (“Only a Girl”).

Mossell advised her women readers to groom their daughters to be wise about marriage. “Teach Your Daughters” conveyed her message with rhetorical emphasis: “Give your daughters a thorough education. Teach them to cook and prepare the food for the household. Teach them to wash, to iron and darn stockings and sew dresses. Teach them to make bread and count.” Mossell listed these maxims in the hope that mothers would raise intellectual, dutiful daughters, girls who will not fall victim to marriages in which men treat them as poorly. She tried to convince mothers to teach daughters to look not for riches in a man, but for honesty, compassion, and trust: “Teach them good common sense, self-help and industry. Teach them that an honest mechanic in his working dress is a better object of esteem than a dozen haughty, finely dressed idlers” (“Teach Your Daughters”).

Mossell drew upon examples from other countries to reinforce recommendations for raising girls. In “Domestic Training of Girls,” published 3 April 1886 in *New York Freeman*, Mossell discussed how other nations treated their girls and groomed them for the future:

In every country the domestic training of girls differs widely. In Germany the children of noblemen as well as day laborers learn to do all the manner of domestic work and do it well. In France the children are taught the strictest

economy, and every meal is prepared with the utmost care and skill. Most nations teach their girls carefully that which will be required of them.

Mossell ended with an address to American parents:

American parents do not seem to realize the necessity for this as fully as they should. Too often after the outline of school days is at an end that of the ballroom begins, and the spare time is spent in gossip, novel reading, or dawdling. If we would have competent housekeeping, we must train our girls more carefully to habits of economy and painstaking. (“Domestic Training of Girls”)

By comparing America’s domestic training of girls with other nations’ approach to responsibility, Mossell introduced a transnational element to the subject—which suggested a readership aware of other nations. Mossell’s sophisticated, cosmopolitan voice encouraged black readers to look beyond their local, immediate surroundings and consider the ways people in other nations raise their children.

Mossell tried to give equal attention to boys in “Training of Boys,” published 22 May 1886 in *New York Freeman*, yet this article continued to emphasize the role of girls throughout. While Mossell agreed that it was important to “teach [boys] to help lighten sister’s and mother’s burdens when they are young, whereby creating in them a sympathetic feeling,” she also offered her viewpoint on why girls have been ignored: “The reason there is so much trouble among our girls is because mothers do not take more care with training boys. They think they can do anything and there is no impropriety to it. Whereas girls do the same thing and it is thought a great sin” (“Training of Boys”). In blaming parents for failing to raise boys properly, Mossell concluded that boys might well proceed to harm girls: “It is generally thought that girls must be kept in a greenhouse, while boys are allowed to grow as weeds. But a bed of weeds is best far removed from a garden of flowers” (“Training of Boys”). Mossell characterized boys as weeds that threaten the well-being of girls, who have been confined to a greenhouse.

In addition to advising her readers on the importance of girls' contributions to the family and home economically and of marrying wisely, Mossell also encouraged girls to be safe as they moved away from home and worked in the public sphere. However, to keep black girls safe and protected, she regularly warned and cautioned them about the dangers of public life. This brought the issue national attention and encouraged readers to help protect black girls in the city.

To further her message on safe access to the public sphere for black women and girls, Mossell wrote under her husband's name, Nathan Frances Mossell—a choice that implied deference to her husband based on a belief that the black man should maintain the dominant role in racial activism. This accommodation to social conventions ensured her greater access to speak on increased rights for black women and girls while maintaining equilibrium with black male activists. Such “public modesty” displayed in her journalism signaled Mossell's intention to “defend and celebrate black womanhood without disrupting the delicate balance of black male-female relations or challenging the masculine authority.”⁴⁵ Mossell would be “a ‘race woman’ first; she would promote the cause of her sisters, and she would do so in a context that would elevate the entire race. Thus, Mossell “invited and received the enthusiastic support of influential black men and spread her mission further than if she had taken a different track” (Braxton xxviii).⁴⁶ Similarly, Ida B. Wells-Barnett—journalist, author, and anti-lynching activist—set an early precedent in 1895 as being one of the first married American women to keep her own last name with her husband's when she married civil rights attorney Ferdinand L.

⁴⁵See Joanne Braxton, “Introduction,” *The Work of the Afro-American Woman* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1988), xxvii-xlii.

⁴⁶See Braxton, xxvii-xlii.

Barnett.⁴⁷ This message, which suggested to readers that black women may gain political participation but not at the expense of black men, perhaps explained Mossell's waning influence in the twentieth century.

However, at the time, Mossell's column gained a loyal female readership. According to Braxton, Mossell's often wry tone offered "sisterly aid and protection to a range of readers—working-class, professionals and homemakers—and addressed how to maintain dignity that would be meaningful in the context of their day-to-day lives" (xxxiii). She encouraged readers to maintain control over their lives, seek active participation in the city, and be responsible for their *own* protection in the public sphere.

Mossell joined a body of activists in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries who worked to ensure the protection of girls entering the public sphere to work. Mossell's columns anticipate the work of activists who would soon follow her, such as Jane Addams, Victoria Earle Mathews, and Nannie Helen Burroughs, among others, who built schools and settlement houses for unprotected young girls. In her text, *The Spirit of Youth and the City Streets* (1909), Jane Addams describes how industrialism after the Civil War gathered together "multitudes of eager young creatures from all quarters of the earth as a labor supply for the countless factories and workshops" (5). She explains that

"never before in civilization have such numbers of young girls been suddenly released from the protection of the home and permitted to walk unattended upon city streets and to work under alien roofs; for the first time they were being prized more for their labor power than for their innocence, their tender beauty, their ephemeral gaiety. (5)

⁴⁷In 1892, Ida B. Wells published a pamphlet titled *Southern Horrors: Lynch Law in All Its Phases*, and she published *A Red Record* in 1892-1894, which documented research on a lynching. Having examined many accounts of lynching based on alleged "rape of white women," she concluded that Southerners concocted rape as an excuse to hide their real reason for lynching.

Similarly, activist and author Victoria Earle Mathews addressed the growing social concern of black girls' lack of protection and victimization upon entering large cities for employment. In 1897, Mathews created the White Rose Industrial Association in Chicago, a "working girl's home" where newly arrived black girls were befriended, counseled, and prepared for employment through courses in cooking, sewing and housekeeping. She sent agents to docks in New York and Norfolk, Virginia to prevent criminals from abducting young travelers to big cities. Mathews insisted that acquiring an education would shield girls from threats of sexual abuse and broaden their access to economic opportunity and social mobility. In 1909, Nannie Helen Burroughs created the National Training School for Girls in Washington, D.C., and maintained a curriculum of liberal arts as well as industrial training because she held "a staunch belief that domestic work should not be disdained but should be made into a science," and called girls who learned how to become professionals in the domestic economy "Household engineers" (102).

Similar to these schools for girls, Mossell's columns functioned as early foundational curricula that offered advice not only to parents and girls, but also to members of the community to assist in protecting girls against the dangers they might encounter when working as domestics in the public sphere. In her inaugural column entitled "Care of Children," published on 26 December 1886 in *New York Freeman*, Mossell placed the home at the center of nation-building and expanded the role of nurturer to include parents, teachers, and community members. In a list format, Mossell discussed the connection between effective parenting and developing children's moral character. She advised parents to "be careful to know with whom their children associate.

No parent should allow her child to associate with another without assuring herself of the purity of mind of the little friend” (“Care of Children”). Mossell included teachers in the role of parents:

Parents and teachers should co-operate in an attempt to keep the minds of the little ones filled with pure thoughts, and see that they are not led into bad habits and temptations by evil association, or too much liberty in going and coming. Do not give the little ones opiates that you may be relieved of their troublesomeness. (“Care of Children”)

By including community members in educating and parenting black children, Mossell redefined the domestic space as a communal space, wherein community members outside the nuclear black family aided in the project of racial uplift.

Enlisting the help of community members would help black girls work successfully in the public sphere, and prevent them from falling victim to the dangers of the city. Mossell suggested that large cities brought threats of sexual abuse and manipulation by men seeking to take advantage of them:

Many young girls reared in the country are tempted by the promise of higher wages and a brighter life into leaving their safe and sheltered homes, crowding into large cities where they meet with a class of men stylish in their appearance, fluent talkers and apparently with a large amount of unoccupied time on their hands. Many girls, dazzled by their seeming superiority, willingly accept their attentions. (“A Word of Counsel,” 13 February 1886)

Mossell described the character traits of men who preyed on young black girls traveling to the city:

These men are, in the majority of the cases, totally unprincipled, without moral character; often their entire existence is eked out by gambling, policy playing, free lunches, & c. They stand around saloons and cigar shops part of the day, and in the evening they call on two or three girls, take tea with one, go to the theatre or the opera with another at her expense, and borrow a small sum of money from another, and so they manage to live an easy idle life at the expense of hard working parents and foolish girls. (“A Word of Counsel”)

Mossell warned her young readers to be wise about the men with whom they socialize while in the city, and avoid men in the form of the “city dandy.” Mossell warned that these types of men were “not fit company for fit-minded women,” and if a young girl chose to marry such a man, “only misery untold can follow” (“A Word of Counsel”). While she acknowledged that girls are navigating the public sphere, Mossell encouraged black girls to marry wisely, and offered a better-suited alternative than the “city dandy”: “better by far, less wages, less city life, and a marriage with an honest, sturdy country man, willing to work and win a subsistence for his family, even though he may not possess the stylish appearance of a city dandy” (“A Word of Counsel”). Mossell’s persuasive voice, ardent tone, and urgent message suggested that a girl moving to the city without proper advice and protection was a significant social concern in the African American community. Her cautionary message sought to educate and inform unknowing black girls who left their homes for the city without appropriate instruction on how to face oppression—sexual, racial, and economic.

Mossell elaborated on the subject of sexual predators in “Olive Logan’s Advice to Girls,”⁴⁸ published 13 March 1886, in which she drew from lectures on gender roles to instruct black girls and women how to use their voices to ward off potential threats of violence:

A woman’s safeguard is to keep a man’s hands off her. If you need his assistance in walking take his arm instead of his taking yours. Just tell him in plain English to keep his ‘hands off.’ He may not like it at first, but he will respect you ten fold more. Men do just what the women allow them to do. Keep your girls off the

⁴⁸Olive Logan (Mrs. Wirt Sikes) is the author of *Get Thee Behind Me Satan!* (New York: Adams, Victor, & Co., 1872). Deemed a “*woman-book*” by the author, this progressive and liberal series of lectures challenged traditional gender roles for women as well as for children. In the Introduction, Logan describes the importance of her text: “It seems to me that there is a useful career, just at this moment, for a woman-book which shall breathe the spirit of true love, and the sweet sanctities which grow out of Christian marriage: A book which shall stand for the progressive and liberal women of our day, who love home and hate the abominable doctrines which have distracted and broken our ranks” (5).

street, except when they have to do business. Teach them it is unnecessary to go to the Post office every time they go out. Your girls can go home alone just as well as your boys. If possible, instill in their very nature that they are safer in their own hands than they are in the hands of any man—preachers not excepted.

In short, Mossell urged black women and girls to be smart, prepared and well-formed about life in the public sphere and avoid behavior that could result in harm. While Mossell's advice reminded black girls and women to follow gendered behavioral norms to ward off sexual threats, such as staying off the streets late at night, her columns taught black girls how to protect *themselves* without depending on a male figure. Mossell's columns suggested that women and girls can live, survive and be productive in the city, and were in control of sexual morality through their decisions and actions.

Serialization and the Black Girl

Given that fictional anecdotes on girlhood had proved to be fertile ground for black columnists to portray the black girl as a model for racial progress, *Christian Recorder* extended that tradition to novelists. The newspaper serialized Frances E. W. Harper's *Trial and Triumph*, offering the author a space to experiment with longer works of fiction and envision the black girl as a literary representation of social inequalities. In the pages of *Christian Recorder*, Harper fictionalized the advice and instructions of Mossell's columns. With a growing black readership, the black press became a viable option for novelists seeking to serialize their fiction in the nineteenth century.⁴⁹ The growth of literary societies, coupled with increased access to printing technologies and

⁴⁹Many black writers in the nineteenth century published their first longer, fictional pieces in serialized newspapers. Harper's *Minnie's Sacrifice*, *Sowing and Reaping*, and *Trial and Triumph* were all serialized in *Christian Recorder*. *Colored American* serialized three of Pauline Hopkins's novels: *Hagar's Daughter: A Story of Southern Caste Prejudice* (1901-1902), *Winona: A Tale of Negro Life in the South and Southwest* (1902), and *Of One Blood: or, The Hidden Self* (1902-1903). Katherine Davis Chapman Tillman's *Beryl Weston's Ambition: The Story of an Afro-American Girl's Life* (1893) and *Clancy Street* (1898-1899) appeared in the *A. M. E. Church Review*. Frederick Douglass published his novella *The Heroic Slave* in *The North Star* in 1853.

thus to the texts themselves, led to the development of a substantial reading community in the North. According to U.S. census data, 70 percent of the black population was illiterate in 1880, but by 1910, only 30 percent of the black population remained illiterate. These statistics clearly indicate a slow but steady rise in black literacy in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries (McHenry, *Forgotten Readers*, 4-5).⁵⁰

Although the late nineteenth century is considered the nadir of African American literature, it is a pinnacle in terms of African American literary production. Paradoxically, the violence toward African Americans that pervaded this historical low-point enabled a second flourishing of the novel. With the shift from autobiography in antebellum narrative to fiction in postbellum literature, the novel gained prominence and became a political, economic, and rhetorical tool. As a genre defined by literary freedom, it encourages a multiplicity of rhetorical strategies, such as dialogue and shifting points of view, and increased its popularity among the reading public.

By serializing the adventures of a black girl named Annette in *Trial and Triumph*, Harper connected the larger black community to Mossell's advice to girls and women in the public sphere as well as to national concerns, such as temperance and industrial education. The novel initiated an exchange of ideas among black communities interested in redrafting the meaning of race, nation, and citizenship. Harper's goals aligned with the larger purposes of the black press, which was to open a discourse that pushed the cultural and political agenda for free black people in the North through rethinking ideologies, interrogating prejudice, and examining society on their terms.

⁵⁰See Frances Smith Foster's "Gender, Genre and Vulgar Secularism," a work on Harper's involvement with the *Christian Recorder*.

Frances Smith Foster argues that while the newspaper might in the simplest sense have offered Harper and other black women a venue for employment and publication, the publication of Harper's works in *Christian Recorder* also indicated her political and racial consciousness ("Gender" 54). In analyzing Harper's serialized fiction in *Christian Recorder*, Foster aligns Harper with other African Americans who argued for political activism:

Frances Harper . . . was part of the same Christianity that produced Nat Turner and John Brown. Harper was a church militant whose congregation included several radicals named Moses. . . . Frances Harper's subordination of literature to serve a militant religion that she called Christianity did not obviate her concern for technique or talent. Rather, it led her to seek out new ways in which the truths might be told and Christian soldiers might be enlisted. ("Gender" 54)

Christian Recorder gave Harper a forum for addressing the political concerns of the postbellum period and expedited the delivery of her messages to a wide range of readers. Carla Peterson claims that this paper targeted a black readership, noting that "the *Christian Recorder's* history . . . points to its lengthy struggle in helping African Americans imagine community, inviting them both to craft identity based on a shared past and to work toward the achievement of . . . citizenship," but that Harper, in addressing national concerns such as temperance, hoped to reach both white and black readers ("Frances Harper" 42). Michelle Campbell Toohey adds that Harper "addressed the complex social and political concerns of the postwar black community with the intimacy required for building community from the inside" (203). Toohey further notes that *Christian Recorder* provided both the space and audience needed to communicate not only with members of the black race, but also with readers in the dominant culture. According to Toohey, through her writing, Harper maintained "a strong political agenda

of vital self-determination for her own race while exposing complicated issues for the dominant white community” (202).

Susan Belasco Smith defines serialization as “the writing of a story in sections that appear over a period of time with interruptions for the author as well as for the reader” (75). In contrast to the progressive linearity of a book, which is envisioned, written, and published as a complete text, *serial* publication enables readers to participate closely with the narrative (72).⁵¹ Referring specifically to Harriet Beecher Stowe’s *Uncle Tom’s Cabin* (1852), Smith argues that the genre “creates within the text of the novel a web of relationships and experiences that closely approximates the complicated conversations and exchanges of false starts, distractions, and breaks that occur within the family circle of Stowe’s experiences” (72).

Serialized publication suggests multiplicity and disjunction rather than wholeness and unity by “discouraging a straightforward linear storyline; instead, it invites the creation of scenes, tableaux, and parallel organizations of plot” (Smith 72). For the novelist, serialization offers “a special form of communication . . . involving a complex negotiation by which a writer acts on as well as reacts to a particular and evolving publishing environment” (76). The production of literature in serial form is directly related to the parlor experience; that is, writers recreate the exchanges and conversations that occur in the homes of community members.

Frances Smith Foster describes the function of the serial form as follows:

⁵¹For more information on serialization, see Cathy N. Davidson’s *Revolution and the Word* (1986), Richard H. Brodhead’s *Cultures of Letters: Scenes of Readings and Writing in Nineteenth-Century America* (1993), Aleta Feinsod Cane’s and Susan Alves’s “*The Only Efficient Instrument*”: *American Women Writers and the Periodical, 1837-1916* (2001), Meredith L. McGill’s *American Literature and the Culture of Reprinting, 1834-1853* (2003), and Elizabeth McHenry’s *Forgotten Readers* (2005).

First of all, these novels are fun to read. They are interesting and compelling stories about ideas, dilemmas, and choices; loves lost and won; identities uncovered and recovered; purposes defined, risks taken, rewards reaped. The novels are also convenient to read. Written for serial publication, each chapter has enough complication of plot and mystery of outcome to invite the reader to obtain the next installment, but at the same time they are not cliff-hangers. Each chapter offers an episode complete enough in itself to be read and enjoyed in short periods of time. While continuity is important, episodes build upon one another, and the developments are not predictable. The serial format contains enough exposition in each unit to enable a reader to imagine what came before. One need not block out large periods of time in order to get into the story. And finally, these works were written for sharing because their format lends itself to reading aloud. (“Introduction” xxviii)

The shared, community appeal of the serial format with weekly episodes that contained “complication of plot” encouraged the reader to “get into the story,” which would lead to an urgency for action. The regular appearance of the column also suggested that this genre was ideal for everyday life, given the appeal of its language and style to ordinary, common individuals in society. In each installment, conflict was swiftly resolved, thereby giving hope to African American readers that their own injustices would be similarly overcome.

Frances E. W. Harper’s Trial and Triumph

Scholars first became aware of *Trial and Triumph* in 1994, when Frances Smith Foster published it along with two other serialized novels, *Sowing and Reaping*, *Minnie’s Sacrifice* (1869), and *A Temperance Story* (1876-1877), which she recovered from the pages of *Christian Recorder*. Despite the popularity of Harper’s fiction, *Trial and Triumph* has received scant critical attention. When Harper published *Trial and Triumph* more than ten years after *Sowing and Reaping*, she kept her focus on temperance. By developing her main character as a black child, orphaned after her mother runs off with an intemperate man, Harper centered her novel on how a household is torn asunder and a

black girl victimized by the effects of intemperance. In doing so, Harper argues for the capacity of the orphaned child to exercise self-discipline in order to become a model citizen.

This theme of a heroine's self-reliance in the face of adversity is an important tenet in nineteenth-century women's fiction. Literary critic Nina Baym argues that fictions published after 1820 usually met three conditions: "they are written by women, are addressed to women, and tell one particular story about women. They chronicle the 'trials and triumphs . . . of a heroine who, beset with hardships, finds within herself the qualities of intelligence, will, resourcefulness, and courage sufficient to overcome them'" (22).⁵² Baym notes that women writing after 1820 detested the novels of seduction made popular by Samuel Richardson and his female counterpart Susanna Rowlandson, and wrote an alternative form—the novel of sensibility. Baym argues that the heroine who lived entirely in her feelings, as in novels of seduction, was "a fool and a pernicious example to young women starting out in the battle with life" (25). However, the purpose of novels of sensibility was to "show their readers how to live," not to have their protagonists "fall immediate victim to her first contest and never recover" (26). Women authors were unwilling to permit their readers to envision women as sexual prey (26). The result is a strengthened character and marriage to a much more desirable man than the seducer.

Harper reconfigures the sentimental narrative by contesting conventional expectations of feminine behavior and domestic bliss and having her protagonist, Annette opt *not* to marry. Post-Reconstruction cultivated among African Americans the widely-

⁵²This genre began in American Literature with Catherine Sedgwick's *New England Tale* (1822), continued with Susan Warner's *Wide, Wide World*, and remained a dominant fictional type after 1870.

held viewpoint that full citizenship could be acquired if more black people demonstrated and adopted the genteel standard of Victorian sexual conduct as vehemently as they protested racial injustice. Literary critic Claudia Tate explores black women writers' adherence to the Victorian ideal of marriage as a political means. She examines how domestic novels emphasized bourgeois decorum as an important emancipatory cultural discourse, and argues that these novels must be read in the context of the cultural history of the period, an era embedded in Victorian ethos. These novels portrayed courtships and wedded bliss that allowed African Americans to enter social and political events from which they were largely excluded (Tate, *Domestic Allegories*, 5).

Harper's narrative strategy departs from characterization of women in these postbellum African American novels. To present her political agenda that focused on black girls as active participants in racial uplift to the reading public, Harper employed four specific textual strategies. First, Annette's dark skin is a textual strategy that destabilized the long-standing trope of the tragic mulatta and the un-raced girl that dominated nineteenth-century literature as embodiments of racial anxiety. Rather than die tragically to prevent sexual insult, as was popular with mulatta characters in the antebellum period, Annette survives degradation and heralds a new future that rehabilitates, preserves, and honors blackness. Second, Harper destabilizes the grandmother figure as a nurturing and supportive figure. Third, the community member as nurturer replaces the Republican Mother figure, widening the scope and spread of the black family and motivating readers to take an active role in racial uplift. Fourth, Harper privileged Annette's intellectualism through her role as a valedictorian, her occupation as a teacher, and her refusal to marry.

Beyond the Racially-Indeterminate Girl Figure

Although Harper published *Trial and Triumph* during a period in which mulatto/a and racially-indeterminate characters overwhelmed African American literature, she chose to depict Annette with dark skin. The social, cultural, and political implications of casting one of African American literature's "first" dark-skinned female protagonists as a heroine were profound. Annette's skin rehabilitates the idea that dark color is a quality to be valued and preserved, and suggests that the mixed-race heroine in the form of the mulatta or un-raced girl is somehow outdated, inadequate or insufficient for the postbellum period. Annette's dark skin thus heralds a new future for the black race.

Scholarship on racial representation in African American literature provides a theoretical lens through which to evaluate the politics that surround Harper's dark-skinned orphan girl. Gene Andrew Jarrett examines how some African American authors appropriated racially-anomalous characterizations to contest readers' expectations. Jarrett claims that "by examining and historicizing an author's profound experiences with racial difference, we can begin to ascertain, more precisely, the political underpinnings of their literary imaginations of race. In short, we can learn how the racial-political intentions of authors translated into specific literary strategies of racial representation" ("Addition by Subtraction" 317).

Annette's dark skin functions as a literary strategy that counters popular representations of mulatta and un-raced girls as models of uplift in the literature of the period. In darkening Annette's skin, Harper rejects anxieties about miscegenation and sexuality often associated with mulatta bodies. To relay this point, Harper portrays how Annette survives and overcomes circumstances of degradation, and demonstrates a

resilience that distinguishes her from the tragic mulatta. Harper emphasizes this distinction by labeling Annette an “enigma” who is “different from other children.” This label not only highlights her difference from mixed-raced heroines, but also refers to her lineage as the offspring of same-raced parents—a rhetorical move that recovers same-raced union and shifts away from the paradigm of the tragic mulatto. Indeed, although she must confront the everyday realities of racism and sexism because of her dark skin, Annette is neither trapped by seduction nor dies a tragic death; rather, she acquires an education and a future full of opportunity.

Thus, with Annette’s dark skin, Harper directly confronts race rather than mask its implications. In *Our Nig*, for example, Harriet Wilson initially located Frado’s personhood in her body, but at the end anchored it in the transformation of her soul. For Harper, however, the body is inescapable, and Annette gains visibility and authority through both her body *and* her intellect. Annette’s dark skin heightens awareness of race consciousness and ruptures literary norms to imagine a new way of thinking about race in the public sphere that overturns mixed-raced representation of the antebellum era.

By depicting an orphaned black girl who eventually becomes a member of the Talented Tenth, Harper demonstrates her awareness of how achievement through education reinforces class elevation. Annette’s acquired interest in poetry acts as a textual strategy to represent how education might replace her unruliness. Through education and refinement, Annette sheds the loneliness and alienation associated with her condition as an orphan, gains purpose, and overcomes the unruliness that is perceived to stem from her blackness. Her dark-skinned, orphaned, and poor status become a common link and

shared history with the impoverished, disfranchised class of African Americans still without political power or citizenship in the South.

Destabilizing the Grand/mother as Sole Nurturing Figure

After her mother abandons her for a saloon owner, Annette is orphaned and compelled to live with her grandmother, Mrs. Harcourt. Annette encounters neither affection nor nurturance, but constant persecution and humiliation, as Mrs. Harcourt rejects her and calls her “ugly,” “the scabby sheep of the flock,” and an evil child who is “different from other children” (184, 180). Unlike the nurturing support and gentle words of advice Linda Brent receives from her grandmother in Jacobs’s *Incidents*, Annette experiences her grandmother’s words as more hurtful than physical blows to her body: “The inconsiderate prophecy struck deep into her heart and left its impress upon her unfolding life” (184). Harper criticizes caretakers who direct demeaning comments at girls that strike “a blow at the child’s self-respect, one of the things that she should have strengthened” (184). Such verbal abuse “sadly handicaps” Annette and further burdens her already depressed spirit.

Annette’s unruliness and subsequent loneliness is similar to Leticia’s experience in Maria Stewart’s “The First State of Life” (1861). Leticia is also orphaned after her mother dies, and lives with an uncaring relative, an aunt who neither nurtures nor teaches Leticia. Leticia must decide on her own that she wants to be “a good girl,” and initiates this transformation through learning the Bible and doing her chores. Leticia eventually finds comfort in the home of community members and similar to Annette, will gain nurturance and support from Mr. Thomas, a teacher, and Mrs. Lassette, a nurturing member of the community. While Leticia’s moral training ends with her reaching

spiritual salvation as her ultimate goal, Annette's tutelage encourages her participation in public service. Thus, education and moral uplift in the antebellum period enable spiritual uplift and improved intellect, as with Leticia and with Frado in *Our Nig* (1859), yet their growth ends with this fulfillment. In the post-Reconstruction period, the black girl figure's moral and formal education enables moral uplift and improved character, but Annette gains her independence, mobility, and access to the public sphere.

To fight against her emotional abuse, Annette relies on the strength of her mind rather than on the graces of her body.⁵³ She pursues poetry as the central focus of her education. Despite her grandmother's disapproval, Annette learns to read and write poetry, and through these initiatives, she "develop[s] thoughtfulness past her years" (184). Harper describes how for Annette, "Poetry was a passion born in her soul and it was natural for her to speak in tropes and figures as it was for others to speak in plain, common prose" (228). Annette's poetic aspirations, however, are met with hostility not only from her grandmother, but also from other family members, including her aunt, Eliza Hanson, who finds Annette's interest in poetry suspect, too far above her station in life, and not in line with gender conventions of the period. Eliza asserts that Annette ought better "cook a beefsteak" than "string verses together" (228). Annette's grandmother concurs and continues to undermine her granddaughter. Mrs. Harcourt berates Annette's educational goals, saying: "You seem to think that there must be something very great about you. I know where you want to get. You want to get among the upper tens, but you haven't got style enough about you for that" (228). Turning to Eliza, Annette's grandmother continues:

⁵³See Chapter One for my discussion on how Frado in Harriet Wilson's *Our Nig* also uses her body to defend against Mrs. Belmont's torture.

“She’s got too many airs for a girl in her condition. She talks about writing a book, and she is always trying to make up what she calls poetry. I expect that she will go crazy some of these days. She is all the time talking to herself, and I just think it is a sin for her to be so much taken up with poetry.” (228)

Annette’s grandmother refuses to consider the possibility that Annette could possess intelligence or become a poet, and instead announces that Annette “will go crazy some of these days” if she continues to write poetry. Her comments suggest an outdated way of thinking about education, and thus her death symbolizes the end of an archaic view of education that impedes racial progress and heralds a new, progressive attitude in which Annette serves as a forerunner of the Talented Tenth.⁵⁴

Despite family protests, Annette’s willful determination to continue her education and find her own way reveals an inner strength that positions her as a future leader of her race. The grandmother’s death reinforces Harper’s call for a new form of parenting that nurtures girls to womanhood in the modern era. To describe this changing of the guards, Harper writes, “Grandmother Harcourt was failing. Annette was rising towards life’s summit. Her grandmother was sinking to death’s vale” (220). By juxtaposing these two opposing phrases, Harper lyrically and visually evokes Annette’s leadership position as one that supersedes outdated philosophies of black roles. Furthermore, by characterizing Annette as a girl-poet, Harper valorizes not only education, but also the cultivation of girls’ creative capabilities.

⁵⁴Based on an article titled “The Talented Tenth” written in 1903 by writer and activist W. E. B. DuBois, the Talented Tenth is defined as a group of “exceptional men,” an educated elite, who are given the task “of developing the Best of this race that they may guide the Mass away from the contamination and death of the Worst, in their own and other races.” The Talented Tenth must be “worthy of leadership,” these men must be “educated and developed” and leaders, and they must “show their relation to the Negro problem.” W. E. B. DuBois, “The Talented Tenth” in *The Negro Problem: A Series of Articles by Representative American Negroes of Today*, ed. Booker T. Washington (New York: James Pott and Company, 1903).

Community as Nurturer

Annette's socialization begins when members of the community step in to replace her grandmother as tutor, nurturer, and guide. From the community, Annette gains the nurturance she needs to be groomed for a future public role. She learns manners and rules of decorum, which give her self-confidence and a sense of self-worth. Through these interactions, Annette comes to understand the power of her origins and to appreciate and value her dark color. As she matures and is nurtured by the community, her outward unruliness transforms into a power she can turn inward, which gives her the strength to complete her education, become a teacher, and pursue her future role as an independent, progressive woman. That is, she can claim her potential as an agent of racial uplift. With this narrative structure, Harper solidifies a new model for parenting that suggests more attention be placed on parents to nurture the girl. Mrs. Lassette claims that "I think many young persons go astray because their parents have failed to strengthen their characters and to forewarn and forearm them against the temptations and dangers that surround their paths" (202-203). Harper extends Mossell's message for parents to protect their daughters from ill-intentioned men by ensuring their nurturance in the home.

Instead of being the mother of antebellum texts, a neighbor, and an active member of the community, Mrs. Lassette assumes the role of nurturer to Annette. Through her influence, Annette reconciles with her past and makes sense of her condition as an orphaned child. Mrs. Lassette embodies community involvement and even encourages other women in the community to nurture and advise girls who, like Annette, have been abandoned. One message to Annette and other youth is to "gain more persistence in their characters, perseverance in their efforts and that esprit de corps, which shall animate us

with higher, nobler and holier purpose in the future than we have ever known in the past” (205). Mrs. Lassette sees the potential in Annette’s intellectual ability and observes early on that she “had talent or even poetic genius and ardently wished that it might be cultivated and rightly directed” (185). While Mrs. Larkin, another community member, labels Annette “an ill weed” who will only “give her grandmother a great deal of trouble,” Mrs. Lassette claims “ill weeds grow apace” and urges the community to nurture Annette:

Annette is quite young, full of life and brimful of mischief, and girls that age I have heard likened to persimmons before they are ripe; if you attempt to eat them they pucker your mouth, but if you wait till the first frost touches them they are delicious. Have patience with the child, act kindly towards her, she may be slow in developing womanly sense, but I think that Annette has within her the making of a fine woman. (202)

Cultivating Annette’s inner character and developing her “womanly sense” further establish the community’s role in parenting the girl.

When Mary Joseph, a white student, ridicules Annette’s blackness and classifies her as wild and uncouth, Mrs. Lassette connects Annette to an ancestral past that gives her strength to imagine her blackness as power. This literary lesson reinforces a transformation in Annette, a moment of truth captured through the image of Cleopatra:

“In this country, Annette, color has been made a sore place; it has been associated with slavery, poverty and ignorance. You cannot change your color, but you can try to change the association connected with our complexions. . . . Learn to hold up your head and respect yourself. . . . Learn to act as if you realized you were born into this world the child of the Ruler of the universe, that this is his world and that you have as much right in it as she has. I think it was Gilbert Haven,⁵⁵ a Bishop of the Methodist Episcopal Church, a man for whose tombstone I do not think America has any marble too white or any laurel too green, who saw on his travels a statue of Cleopatra, which suggested to him this thought, “I am black, but comely, the sun has looked down upon me, but I will make you who despise me feel that I am your superior,” and “Annette, I want you to be so noble, true and pure.” (220)

⁵⁵Gilbert Haven was an antislavery activist in Philadelphia.

In likening an orphaned black girl to Cleopatra, Mrs. Lassette gives Annette an “ancestral connection” to a distant past not yet torn asunder by slavery.⁵⁶

Included in Mrs. Lassette’s tutelage are lessons that mold Annette’s growth toward leadership by teaching her qualities of respectability and public behavior. To prepare Annette for womanhood, Mrs. Lassette provides essential instruction in matters of decorum and behavioral codes. After Annette quarrels with Mary Joseph, Mrs. Lassette gives her a severe scolding: “It is wrong and unlady-like for you to be quarrelling that way. Do you know how old you are?” (216). Mrs. Lassette also instructs Annette on the proper use of language: “A young lady should never use slang. Don’t use it in private and you will not be apt to use it in public” (218). Mrs. Lassette continues with her instructions, claiming that she does not “think it nice for young ladies to pick up all sorts of phrases in the street and bring them into the home” (218). Mrs. Lassette adds that “however humble or poor a person may be, there is no use in being coarse and unrefined” and that it is “safer not to use harsh slang” (218-219). Mrs. Lassette inserts cautionary messages emphasizing class and its relationship to decorum and propriety to suggest to Annette how her comportment may affect her position in society. The importance Mrs. Lassette assigns to propriety suggests that knowing the language and manners of the dominant culture is essential to citizenship. Perhaps even more important, as Annette learns and becomes educated, so, too, does the readership.

⁵⁶Not until the nineteenth century did Cleopatra’s image become associated in art with slavery and “the question of blackness.” The writer Théophile Gautier and the painter Eugène Delacroix produced their own Cleopatras in Paris in the 1830s, and both represented her in close association with dark-skinned men. For these French artists, Cleopatra was a reminder of aspirations that had died with the French Revolution, “hopes of a reformation of the social order, hopes of a new civil rights for all (including women), and plans for the institution of divorce and for the abolition of slavery.” See Mary Hamer, “Queen of Denial: On the Uses of Cleopatra,” *Transitions* 70 (1996): 85-86.

Annette's Education

Annette's roles—as orphan, valedictorian, and woman who refuses marriage to devote herself to racial uplift—reinforce Harper's call for a knowing, authoritative, intellectual figure. As valedictorian, Annette gives a speech at her graduation in front of an unfriendly audience on issues related to racial progress, and anticipates her future role as an elocutionist, teacher, and social activist. Among those in this audience—comprised of black and white, male and female—are primarily educated and privileged Americans invested in upward mobility. Thus, they are unwilling to connect to issues affecting the poor black community. Despite the resistance she feels from the audience, Annette's speech, titled "The Mission of the Negro," proves to be "a remarkable production for a girl her age" (241). As she speaks, "it seem[s] as if she had fused her whole soul into the subject which was full of earnestness and enthusiasm" (241). The audience receives her words with equal feeling: "Men grew thoughtful and attentive, women tender and sympathetic as they heard this member of a once despised people, [sic] recount the trials and triumphs of her race, and the hopes that gathered around their future" (241-242).

As a result of her education and her calling as a race woman, Annette chooses a life in activism rather than marriage. As a public figure, she accepts her duty to travel south to perform the real, hard work that is needed during this period. After entering into courtship with a young man, Mr. Luzerne, Annette discovers he is engaged to another woman who was separated from him during slavery; she graciously steps aside to allow this long-lost woman to marry her husband. Mrs. Lassette congratulates Annette on her fortitude, and applauds her decision as an indication of Annette's ability to uphold the honorable, true characteristics of womanhood: "I am glad that you have been so true to

conscience and to duty; glad that you have come through your trial like gold tried in the fiercest fire; glad that my interest in you has not been in vain, and that I have been able to see the blessed fruitage of my love and labors” (281). Without a husband, Annette replies that she is ready to assume her calling: “I must have a change; I must find *relief* in action. I feel so weak and bruised in heart” (281). Once she decides to “be true to duty . . . into her soul came a joy which was her strength” (282). Annette’s choice to forfeit marriage to the man she loved and essentially marry the South through her uplift work provides her with the “joy” and “relief” that she might otherwise expect to receive from marriage.

Annette’s union, then, is consummated not with a man but with the collective black population in the South, which is an act that speaks to the sexless, self-sacrificial image of the black woman activist in the public sphere. The community as parent gives its daughter away to the South and to a marriage that will consist of Annette “doing what she [can] to teach, help and befriend those on whose chains the rest of the ages had gathered” (284). When she is about to embark on her journey, Annette encounters again the man whom she was originally going to marry. Luzerne’s wife died years earlier and he travels South to find Annette: “He had come not to separate her from her cherished life work, but to help her in uplifting and helping those among whom her lot was cast as a holy benediction” (285). Bound together, Mr. Luzerne and Annette work as partners to uplift the black race.

Annette’s decision to gain her education, become a teacher, and serve the population in the south through uplift work conveys an alternative form of domestic work which she desires to appropriate for public use. Claudia Tate argues that fictional

characters in novels written by women during post-Reconstruction often represent an “exemplary heroine” whose

decorum and social values endeavored to produce new authoritative relationships with family members and friends; to modify the expectations of courtship, marriage, and family formation; ultimately to revise the mediation of social values and political representation both inside and outside the household, indeed both inside and outside of the text. (*Domestic Allegories*, 143)

Black female protagonists in novels written by black women during post-Reconstruction displays this kind of “individuated desire” and undergo a formation that “recount[s] a process for revising the heroine and make that process available to readers to duplicate in the real world so as to produce discrete and/or wide scale social reformation” (144). Mr. Luzerne recognizes Annette’s “individuated desire” for uplift work when he travels south and chooses “not to separate her from her cherished life work, but to help her in uplifting and helping” those in the south (Harper 285).

Ann DuCille argues that black women writers in the nineteenth century created the sexless and idealized heroine as a political strategy to link black and white womanhood under the protective umbrella of chastity and virtue. “Because it defined women as moral and spiritual rather than sexual and carnal,” states DuCille, “the concept of passionlessness gave middle- and upper-class Anglo-American women a degree of power over their bodies, their marriages, and their families, at the same time that it argues for the possibility of an intellectual life” (31). This passionlessness provided “the moral and ideological underpinnings of claims for female moral superiority that were used to elevate women’s status and to expand their possibilities, even as it delimited female social and sexual behavior” (31). DuCille claims that “Passionlessness took on even greater ideological force when the so-called passionless subjects were black women

whom dominant culture continued to construct as inherently licentious” (32). She argues that “passionlessness negated a negative: it endowed virtue to the historically virtue-less” (32). While it might appear that Annette chooses as her duty what DuCille labels a “passionless” relationship with the South, I argue that Annette does, indeed, have passion, but it is satisfied through modern acts—poetry, writing, and teaching.⁵⁷ Through Annette’s abstinence, Harper suggests that a race woman is a sexless woman and a selfless worker. Uplift work, then becomes a sexual substitute.

While Harper’s character, Annette, offers to readers one alternative to a life of marriage when she travels south alone to participate in uplift work, Harper, as well as many race activists, *did* marry and have children while participating actively on the lecture circuit and working in the public sphere, even if the lifestyle was challenging. In Harper’s *Iola Leroy, or Shadows Uplifted* (1892), the novel ends with the protagonist, Iola Leroy, marrying Dr. Frank Lattimer, and together they work for the black community in the South. Similarly, in a chapter of her autobiography titled “A Divided Duty,” Ida B. Wells-Barnett explains the difficult she had working and raising a family, but she balanced both jobs and continued to work after the birth of her two children.⁵⁸ Thus, *Trial and Triumph* teaches readers that women’s private lives while involved in public work might be varied, complex, and fulfilling.

⁵⁷Nancy Cott coined the term “literary passionlessness” as the idea that [white] women lacked carnal ardor, which became the central tenet of Victorian sexual ideology, reversing older norms of women’s inherent licentiousness.

⁵⁸See Ida B. Wells, *Crusade for Justice: Biography of Ida B. Wells* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1991).

Conclusion

Serial publications introduced a literary form that helped black women gain access to the public sphere through a loyal and dependable reading public. Weekly installments meant that readers came to every issue primed and eager to engage in the material, having retained through memory and anticipation the previous story. *Christian Recorder* fairy tales, Mossell's column, and Harper's Annette in *Trial and Triumph* can be considered rhetorical experiments for the black reading public. The racially-indeterminate girl figure and fairy-tale themes offered readers hope in a future devoid of racial prejudice and violence. Mossell's smart, sharp voice gave readers "instruction and inspiration" that made a "powerful and progressive" contribution to American cultural and intellectual work at the turn of the century (Braxton, "Introduction," xlii). Her rarely-read and rarely-studied columns contained "the wellsprings of black feminist literary expression and the same impulses to document, to share, to inspire and instruct that inform the writings of today's black women" (xlii).

As a highly educated, black girl, Harper's character, Annette is an oddity, an "enigma" who allowed Harper to experiment with textual strategy and racial representation. Harper's embrace of an enigmatic protagonist reveals a new psychology, and a new, spirited outlook. The ideological aim of *Trial and Triumph* was at once to reveal the soul and spirit of a people, to create a social palette that included blackness, and ultimately to repair a group psychology. Harper's cultural project thus became a political one. By centering *Trial and Triumph's* plot on the maturation of a rebellious, spirited, ostracized black girl, Harper reinforced the need to look to the moral and social development of *character* in order to become a positive agent in the uplift of the African

American race. This chapter argues for the critical significance of the black girl in contesting racial constructions, grooming her voice and body for public work, affirming the black family and community, and constructing a nineteenth-century allegory of race that is less fatalistic and more celebratory. In Chapter Three, I examine the representation of the black girl in conduct books and explore the debate among black intellectuals that existed at the turn of the twentieth century concerning anxiety over the black girl's increased public role and the need for her return to the domestic sphere in the name of progress.

CHAPTER THREE

RACE GIRLS IN *FLOYD'S FLOWERS*

During post-Reconstruction, a period lasting from 1877 to World War I, which historian Rayford Logan labels the “nadir” or the lowest point in American race relations, African Americans were concerned with the constraints that were being placed on their political rights. Throughout this period, conservative, white, Democratic federal and state governments passed Jim Crow legislation, creating a system of legal racial segregation in public and private facilities. Restrictions on voter registration and voting methods, such as poll taxes, literacy and residency requirements, and ballot box changes, disfranchised most blacks and many poor whites. Violence in the form of rape and lynching of African Americans intensified race relations. The mass publication of white supremacist literature such as Thomas Dixon’s illustrated novel, *The Leopard’s Spots; a Romance of the White Man’s Burdens, 1865-1900* (1902), and its sequel, *The Clansman: An Historical Romance of the Ku Klux Klan* (1905), contributed to harmful racist ideologies by presenting untruths of rampant, black criminality.

In response to the violence of the period, black activists published instructional manuals that taught readers how to adopt genteel characteristics representative of the cultured, well-mannered “New Negro.” Henry Louis Gates, Jr. argues that between 1895 and 1925, black intellectuals promoted “the image of the New Negro,” which “served various generations of black intellectuals as a sign of plentitude, of regeneration, of a truly reconstructed presence” (130). He argues that this “New Negro” is “new” or

different from an “old negro” generated to counter the image in the popular imagination of the black as devoid of all characteristics that separate the lower forms of human life from the supposedly higher forms (130-131).

To promote this representative subject, black intellectuals wrote prescriptive, instructional manuals with exemplary characters who modeled moral integrity and behavioral codes that whites would recognize as embodiments of bourgeois manners.⁵⁹ This citizenship model relied upon managing outward appearance in the public sphere by emphasizing individual behavioral traits as a representative citizenship model for the masses. While the black girl figure was an active, politically-aware figure in literature published during the post-Reconstruction era who learned how to use her voice and protect her body to prepare for uplift work in the public sphere, conduct rhetoric at the turn of the century assumed a patriarchal agenda in which black girl figures acquired education and learned to care for the body for others. Yet rather than prepare for the public sphere, black girl figures deferred to black male leadership and returned to the domestic sphere in the name of progress. Black girl figures were to follow rules of “duty” and “beauty” that prepared them for their future roles as wife and mother in order to reroute the public presence of African Americans into a domestic space as a safety measure against increasing threats of violence.

With this in mind, this chapter examines the language, iconography, and coded messages of decorum that surrounded the black girl figure as a citizenship model in one popular instructional manual titled *Floyd’s Flowers, or Duty and Beauty for Colored Children*. Written by educator and activist Silas X. Floyd and illustrated by artist and

⁵⁹See Henry Louis Gates, “The Trope of the New Negro and the Reconstruction of the Image of the Black,” *Representations* 24 (Fall 1988): 129-155.

educator John Henry Adams, this conduct book was first published in 1905 and republished in 1925 as *Charming Stories for Young and Old*.⁶⁰ A breakthrough for its time, *Floyd's Flowers* was widely read at the beginning of the twentieth century. Its compilation of one hundred short stories provided black parents with advice on how to raise their children as morally-correct citizens and productive members of society. With girls and boys as protagonists, Floyd prepared readers to face prejudice at an early age, and taught protocols on racial etiquette and lessons on moral refinement. *Floyd's Flowers; or Duty and Beauty for Colored Children* (1905) was part of a collection of prescriptive texts that instructed African Americans on how to act in a manner that would protect against Jim Crow laws and prevent violence by whites. Known as a prominent author and educator, Floyd graduated from Atlanta University in 1891 and served for five years as a public school principal in Georgia. By 1902, Floyd had received honorary degrees from Morris Brown College and Atlanta University. His work can be found in several periodicals of the early twentieth century, including *Sunday School Times*, *The New York Independent*, and *Lippincott's Magazine*.

Floyd's written text worked collaboratively with John Adams's sketched images to convey the psychological need to teach readers about conduct and behavior. Although Adams's illustrations now seem pedestrian, with simple drawing and shading, their messages resonated deeply with racial awareness, economic inequality, and a collective sense of well-being. In later editions, photographs replaced sketches. The human subjects in these photographs refuted caricatured images and thus completed the cultural work that Floyd's text could not achieve on its own. In her work on African American children's

⁶⁰Other editions of *Floyd's Flowers* include *Short Stories for Colored People Both Old and Young* (Washington, DC: Austin Jenkins, 1920) and *The New Floyd's Flowers: Short Stories for Colored People Old and Young* (Washington, DC: Austin Jenkins, 1922).

literature of the Harlem Renaissance, Katharine Capshaw Smith argues that the image of the black child at the turn of the century became “emblematic” of the racial tensions of the period. I extend Smith’s argument to locate the black girl in *Floyd’s Flowers* as the emblematic figure fully aware of the racial climate at the nadir.

I offer in this chapter a close analysis of little known literature at the turn of the century and add to the conversation of canonical texts that we read during this period for the types of messages contained in conduct manuals. Thus we no longer have to lean too heavily on novels like Wallace Thurman’s *The Blacker the Berry* (1929), Jessie Fauset’s *Plum Bun, or; a Novel without a Moral* (1929), Nella Larsen’s *Quicksand* (1928) and *Passing* (1929), and Claude McKay’s *Banana Bottom* (1938) because we could and should look at the various other works that connect behavior, instruction, and the black girl that I present in this chapter.

Conduct Book Discourse

The ideology and rhetoric of conduct has a long history, beginning in late fifteenth-century Europe and gaining prominence between the years 1540 and 1640. Until this time, birth had been the principal determinant of rank for all social groups, an indicator of social status that was considered an intrinsic God-given attribute. However, that perception slowly changed to the more modern notion that individuals create their own identity through their own actions. Upper-class groups feared they would have to share their rank and privileges and thereby be displaced. Hence, they created distinctions set forth in conduct theory—what Frank Whigham labels “a rhetoric of bodily demeanor”—a sophisticated rhetoric that effected an epistemology of personal social identity introducing a new understanding of one’s place and role in society (x-5).

Courtesy literature sought to regulate the surge of social mobility that occurred between ruling and subject classes in late fifteenth-century England.

Initially a discourse of male power, courtesy literature was a “repertoire of actions” meant to alleviate the fear that aristocratic identity was being stolen by “a horde of young men not born to it,” but it also suggested that conduct books could be packaged and sold to individuals for entry into an upper-class identity, implying that status could now be bought and that changes to one’s body could redefine one’s social class. Instructions in conduct books encouraged modification in demeanor, dress, language, and manner—criteria that Whigham calls “courtly signs of status” (5).

Eventually, conduct discourse moved away from determining social classes and entered the domestic realm, regulating women into prescribed, gendered roles.⁶¹ Embedded in conduct books for ladies was the notion that girls lacked guidance and that advice will provide the warnings, information or encouragement needed to become self-governing women. In her work on conduct rhetoric in women’s writing, Nancy Armstrong argues that in the eighteenth century, conduct literature began to target women and their sexuality rather than men and political life. The primary function of this eighteenth-century literature was to essentialize woman and remove her from political events that society had designed for men (4). Conduct literature for women, Armstrong argues, took the place of devotional manuals for wives and daughters of the aristocracy and of courtesy books for would-be court ladies.

Floyd’s Flowers was part of a group of texts by black intellectuals who adopted the rhetoric of conduct books addressed to black readers. These included W. E. B.

⁶¹Catherine Beecher Stowe’s advice book titled *Treatise on Domestic Economy for Use of Young Ladies at Home and at School* (1841) prepared girls for marriage and household management. *New England Offering* (1847-1850) offered discussion of sexuality, reproduction, and health for girls.

DuBois's *Morals and Manners* (1904) and Booker T. Washington's *Working with Your Hands* (1904). In *Morals and Manners*, DuBois addressed the "Negro Problem" when he claimed,

There is without a doubt a deep-seated feeling in the minds of many that the Negro problem is primarily a matter of morals and manners and that the real basis of color prejudice in America is the fact that the Negroes as a race are thotless [*sic*] in manners and altogether quite hopeless in sexual morals, in regard for property rights and reverence for truth. (5)⁶²

Consequently, as Katharine Capshaw Smith argues,

an anxiety about crude public behavior courses through most conduct material, as elites betrayed their fears that blacks would be judged as a whole through the behavior of the lower classes among them. For the black aristocracy, race solidarity resulted from political necessity as well as moral obligation. (798)⁶³

Similarly, Saidiya Hartman argues that "the majority of the violence committed against the freed in the aftermath of slavery was incited by charges of unbecoming conduct, which included one's dress, demeanor, movement through public space, tone of voice, and companions" (148). As Kevin Gaines argues in *Uplifting the Race*, racial progress based on conduct and outer appearance signified the black elite's awareness that its destiny was inseparable from that of the masses. With African Americans migrating from the South to northern and western cities between 1910 and 1940, a period labeled the Great Migration, black intellectuals encouraged the masses to learn certain rules of decorum to acquire a sense of personal worth and dignity in an anti-black, racist society. Floyd thus suggested that girls who publicly exhibited lower-class behavior negatively affected how the dominant culture perceived the black race—with serious consequences.

⁶²At a conference addressing the moral improvement of the black race, DuBois countered this stereotype, crediting the work of the National Association of Colored Women (NACW) for uplifting the race. He claimed being "pleased to call the attention of the country to the fact that much of the real work of social uplift and moral awakening is being carried on by Negro women in their clubs and institutions" (7).

⁶³See Katherine Capshaw Smith's essay, "Childhood, the Body and Race Performance: Early 20th Century Etiquette Books for Black Children," *African American Review*, 40.4 (2006): 795-811.

Booker T. Washington joined DuBois and Floyd in arguing that with proper cultivation, African Americans will improve their condition and prevent threats of violence. Washington focuses mainly on men in his work on uplift. In his essay “Industrial Education for the Negro” (1903), Washington states that African Americans must “learn the secrets of civilization—to learn that there are a few simple, cardinal principles upon which a race must start its upward course” (99). Adoption of these “secrets of civilization” will cultivate productive citizens.

I would teach the race that in industry the foundation must be laid—that the very best service which any one can render to what is called the higher education is to teach the present generation to provide a material or industrial foundation. On such a foundation as this will grow habits of thrift, a love of work, economy, ownership of property, bank accounts. Out of it in the future will grow practical education, professional education, positions of public responsibility. Out of it will grow moral and religious strength. Out of it will grow wealth from which alone can come leisure and the opportunity for the enjoyment of literature and the fine arts. (18)⁶⁴

Washington fashioned an image of the well-mannered, business-minded man who transcended plantation stereotypes. He portrayed the capacity and willingness of African Americans to begin anew despite past tragedies. The folk of the South would become the educated American subject who had mastered both the culture of the masses *and* the culture of industry and commercialization. This new subject would be urban, industrialized, and *well-mannered*. He would exhibit worldliness, but also remain committed to the black race and to the transformation of America through the culture of the black community.

⁶⁴Booker T. Washington, “Industrial Education or the Negro.” *The Negro Problem*. 1903. Rpt. New York. 2003. Washington argues that “it has been necessary for the Negro to learn the difference between being worked and working—to learn that being worked meant degradation, while working means civilization; that all forms of labor are honorable, and all forms of idleness disgraceful” (9).

Floyd's text joins a body of conduct literature that focused not only on men, but on conduct books for children and girls of all ages. These texts elevated the black elite's role as instructors to the black reading public and were designed to contribute to the moral good of black people and the nation at large.⁶⁵ Floyd adopted lessons from these texts to teach his readers how to manage the body through a conservative agenda that promoted propriety, morality, and decorum. While many black conduct books addressed effective parenting to give children a life of happiness and encourage their capacities and possibilities, such as *The Brownies Book*, edited by W. E. B. DuBois and Jessie Fauset between 1920-1921, which consisted of stories and advice and sought to promote racial pride and unity among black children, many books were directed to black girls of all ages, from youthful to marriageable age.

Youthful girls were taught how to avoid rude behaviors, specifically to speak and act in a proper manner. In *Golden Thoughts on Chastity and Procreation, including Heredity and Prenatal Influences* (1903), co-authors Professor and Mrs. J[ohn].W. Gibson discuss how young girls should follow certain essential rules: they must avoid discussions, speak politely, apologize readily; they must shield themselves at their own expense and not tell personal jokes. Because girls are assigned the entire burden of accountability for the moral, mental, and physical states of coming generations, the Gibsons maintain that training must result in superior girls. Similar to the Gibsons, in *Don't! A Book for Girls* (1891), Robert Charles O'Hara Benjamin instructs young girls

⁶⁵See other instructional manuals such as *The New England Offering* (1847-1850), which offers discussion of sexuality, reproduction, and health for girls. Lydia Maria Child's *The Juvenile Miscellany: For the Instruction and Amusement of Youth* (1826-1836) is said to be the first American children's magazine which included information geared towards children, including discussions concerning proper behavior, essays on virtue, and biographical sketches of notable figures.

against unbecoming behavior, such as “idleness, flirting, dancing, vindictiveness, backbiting, gossip, and slangy speech” (Mitchell, 121).

Conduct books addressed to youthful girls instructed readers to care for their bodies and maintain health at an early age. One such text is Dr. Mary Wood-Allen’s *What a Young Girl Ought to Know* (1897), a sex and health education manual for girls. Each chapter of the book instructs the reader on sexual practices, care of the body, proper nutrition, sleep, breathing practices, caring for bodily injuries, exercise, menstruation, and creative power. In her role as national superintendent of the Purity department of the Women’s Christian Temperance Union, Dr. Wood-Allen argues for the importance of the book as a means of protection for girls and women. She states that “life will be safer for the girl who understands her own nature and reverences her womanhood, who realizes her responsibility toward the race and conducts herself in accordance with that realization” (Wood-Allen 16). Girls who violate laws of health are not only hurting themselves, but future generations as well: “girls of today are the mothers of the future . . . the physical strength or weakness of each individual girl affects the average health of the nation (21). Wood-Allen’s message implies that immorality causes race degeneracy. Furthermore, she emphasizes that mothers teach young daughters sexual health and morals rather than avoid the subject, which will not only hurt the child but the race at large. She states, “many parents neglect to give their children the information and advice needed at the period of adolescence because, not possessing full knowledge as to the phenomena of such a time and not realizing the dangers of silence, they feel diffident and embarrassed about referring to this subject (212).

In addition to youthful girls, conduct books instructed girls of marriageable age about lessons on how to prepare for marriage. Benjamin claims he wrote *Don't!* because black women and girls had not received the same “philanthropic largesse” as men after emancipation, and were therefore in need of direction and instruction (Mitchell 121). Rather than an instructive guide that teaches women how to groom themselves for the kind of womanhood that would lead to marriage, Benjamin advises women to remain single rather than marry a man whose lack of morals would only create a dysfunctional household (Mitchell 122). Similar to Mossell’s messages to black girls in her advice columns, Benjamin’s text is considered bold and outright in his advice to girls to stay away from men who would only do them harm.⁶⁶ Likewise, the Gibsons address the behavioral and social skills that girls must acquire at puberty in order to select a husband, and what traits to seek in that prospective husband.

Floyd draws from these conduct books that discuss the natural processes of girls and women’s bodies, and packages their messages into a book on racial etiquette, intended for purchase by the public. The frontispiece of Floyd’s manual reinforced his upper-class status and his credibility as a teacher of racial etiquette. It paired authenticating photographs of Floyd and Adams with stenciled images of their European equivalents: Floyd is placed next to a white male scholar surrounded by books; Adams is juxtaposed with a painter who holds his brush to a canvas and wears an elaborate hat and high, sophisticated clothing. Through its European references, the frontispiece expresses a genealogy of authority in which black men validate their roles as instructors and advisors to the black reading public.

⁶⁶Almost forty years earlier, Frances E. W. Harper promoted “spinsterhood” in “The Two Offers” (1859) and “Fancy Sketches” (1860).

Floyd's "Dutiful" Girls

Floyd emphasized women's "duty" as essential for racial progress in "Thanksgiving at Piney Grove," in which a black girl figure becomes a disciplinary model to teach readers about leadership in the public sphere *and* duty to the home. The story's protagonist is Grace Wilkins, the daughter of Solomon and Amanda Wilkins, who grew up on a farm in the Piney Grove settlement of the black belt of Georgia. A sketch features Grace with unruly hair and a plain face with little expression prior to attending one of the Normal and industrial institutes for the training of black boys and girls of the South. After her first year, Grace returns home at the age of fourteen to spend the summer with her parents, who immediately notice a new hygienic routine that Floyd describes in detail. Floyd writes that "Grace dressed differently and talked differently; and her mother said, speaking one day in confidence to her husband shortly after Grace's return, 'Dat gal's sho got a new walk on her!'" (39).

At school, Grace learned the fundamental skills for caring for her body and her overall appearance. Floyd describes Grace's new hygienic routine:

Grace brought back a toothbrush with her from school. That was something which she had never had before. She used that toothbrush every morning and night. That was something that she had never had before. She was now careful to keep her hair combed every day. That was something that she had been accustomed to do on Sundays only or on special occasions. She washed her face two or three times a day now. (40)

Grace's new practices "made a deep and abiding impression upon Solomon and his wife" (40). The intentional simplicity of the narrative's rhetoric, combined with her parents' Southern dialect, accentuates Grace's physical transformation from being an unruly girl into a "Grace-ful" woman. Her toothbrush, combed hair, and washed face become markers of cultivation. In his autobiography *Up from Slavery* (1901), Booker T.

Washington reinforced the use of the toothbrush to his students at Tuskegee Institute. Washington writes, “In all my teaching I have watched carefully the influence of the tooth-brush, and I am convinced that there are few single agencies of civilization that are more far-reaching” (*Up from Slavery*, 110). Washington reinforced the “gospel of the toothbrush” as an essential component of education for African Americans (110).

Furthermore, Grace’s transformation critiques the role that race and ancestry have on the physical and psychological development of the black race.⁶⁷ Grace’s parents repeatedly suggest that her newly-acquired ritual in hair maintenance, dress, and hygiene are traits she “had never had before”; thus, Grace’s behavior is not inherited from her parents, but rather *learned* from lessons taught in school. Floyd teaches readers that despite their lineage or ancestry, elevation in class and acquiring new behaviors are neither innate nor inherited; rather, they can be learned.

Katherine Capshaw Smith claims that “the child’s body becomes the site on which the character of the new black identity can be staged” (799) and that “through education and uplift, the supposedly fixed nature of public identity can change and be witnessed in the new, cultured body of the black child” (806). Additionally, Saidiya Hartman argues that “the emphasis on hygiene expresses larger concerns about national well-being since hygiene legitimated, if not invited, the policing of dwellings but also the setting of guidelines for marriage and other forms of social association, particularly those considered dangerous or destabilizing of social order” (158).

Through Grace’s story, Floyd shows readers his interpretation of the “Old Negro” in the form of Grace’s parents and the “New Negro” in Grace’s cultured, educated image.

⁶⁷See Richard Yarborough, “Introduction,” in Pauline Hopkins, *Contending Forces: A Romance Illustrative of Negro Life North and South* (New York: Oxford university Press, 1988), xxxv.

This contrast conveys a gap in class and in generation that his lessons will hopefully close. Floyd's story suggests that through her lessons, she will reform her parents. Floyd's text works alongside popular literature of the period such as *The Marrow of Tradition* (1901) and *The Sport of the Gods* (1902), in which black writers such as Charles Chesnutt and Paul Laurence Dunbar documented this change in American citizenship through a synthesis of perspectives, voices, dialects, and personalities from both the literate and the masses.⁶⁸ In conveying a multiplicity of characters and voices through Grace's parents' dialect, her instructors, and her own transformation into a "New Negro" figure, Floyd teaches readers that change from an old to a new way of life will enhance African Americans' access to citizenship and equal rights. Grace's story thus teaches readers that class need not be inherited, but it can be learned through instruction. Floyd's text reveals the kind of education that might lessen the gap between the cultured elite and the masses.

After graduation, Grace opens the Piney Grove Academy, a school for black children. She gains funding for her school "by special arrangement" when she "used the first three months for the public term allowed by the state, and supplemented that with a five-months term, for which the pupils were required to pay fifty cents per month" (Floyd 50). Grace even teaches her own parents who "[join] in heartily in the movement, and the Piney Grove Academy soon became the model school for the surrounding counties" (50). On Thanksgiving Day, Grace holds a ceremony in which she teaches lessons on Frederick Douglass, Booker T. Washington, and Paul Laurence Dunbar. At the end of the ceremony, the town's pastor announces the intentions of his son to marry Grace, whom he views as "one of the best women in the world" (46). Floyd positions Grace as the

⁶⁸See Charles Chesnutt's texts, *The House behind the Cedars* and *The Goophered Grapevine*.

politically-aware, intellectual center of her community *and* as a woman in line with the values of the cult of domesticity. Thus, Grace not only achieves leadership status as head of school, but gains an additional reward of a marriage with the pastor's son. Grace's preparation for leadership consists of social and cultural awareness as well as gendered expectations.

The image of Grace at graduation embodies what Floyd perceived as the culmination of successful, self-governing womanhood: Adams's illustration reveals Grace in a full skirt, crisp blouse, and overall well-groomed appearance. Her slight smile suggests apprehension, if not ambivalence. According to Katharine Capshaw Smith, Grace's *lack* of pronounced facial expression, a characteristic that she maintains from childhood to adulthood, suggests that "the key instruction for the child's body is discipline, both emotional and physical. Because the conduct material advocates in part a return to turn-of-the-century elite mores, restraint and self-control become primary political tools. Floyd is deeply concerned with adopting a mask to hide emotional displays" (799).

Concerning the impact of a text's illustrations on a reader, the Gibsons, authors of *Golden Thoughts*, note that "it is important to study the illustrations as well as the content, because combined, they tell their own story; they tell the coming of a new aristocracy, a people powerful in strength, morals, culture, wealth and refinement" (74). Artist and Professor John Henry Adams defines this "new aristocracy" in his sketches of black femininity that align with Floyd's written text. In an article titled "Rough Sketches: A Study of the features of the New Negro Woman," published in 1904 in *Voice of the Negro*, an Atlanta-based monthly journal, Adams offers a model of black femininity,

which he expresses through his sketches. This model black woman is “an admirer of Fine Art, a performer on the violin and the piano, a sweet singer, a writer mostly given to essays, a lover of good books, and a home making girl . . . ” (Adams 446). Adams’s sketch is intended to capture visually Floyd’s representation of Grace’s transformation from an uncultured girl to one who is educated, a “lover of books and a “home making girl” (Adams 446).

Floyd channels Grace’s independence and achievement into the gendered role of wife. Her story begins with change and ends with marriage. This growth suggests that marriage, rather than her achievements, is Grace’s reward for her education and cultivation. Although Grace portrays all of the attributes of a woman qualified to educate and mobilize her race as head of her own school, she will teach texts written by men, maintain a gendered role as wife, and fulfill marital obligations. That the image of Grace at graduation looks staged and constrained intimates that her obligatory marriage will overshadow her academic and intellectual attainments and that her future, too, will amount to a life of prescriptions. This impression is amplified by the fact that both ceremonies—her graduation and the announcement of her marriage—occur on Thanksgiving Day, indicating a return to tradition. With her diploma and her polished stance, Grace has earned the right to be a wife who presents a meal to her new family.

Grace’s transformation thus highlights the black girl’s *dual* role in contributing a spirit of courageous independence, and maintaining a level of stoic, rigid service to racial progress. While Frances Harper’s Annette in *Trial and Triumph* enjoys a level of rebelliousness when she is young, does not marry as an adult, and devotes her life to uplifting the race with a black male figure joining her not as her husband, but as a fellow

partner in race activism, Floyd denies Grace such independence and choice. For Annette and Grace, “duty” encompasses two separate spheres. Harper advocates a girl’s duty to the public, political realm, while Floyd reinforces a girl’s duty to her home as essential to racial progress at the nadir.

Katherine Capshaw Smith argues that the black child, including girls, gained a role in transforming the image of the black race during the early twentieth century. The child functioned as the icon of black identity and served as the main indicator of nationhood to black Americans because “the child, the youngest of the New Negroes, will bear the mantle of change” (xiii). She writes that many black intellectuals were “deeply invested in the enterprise of building black national identity through literary constructions of childhood, suggesting that the child who reads the texts has a duty to reform backwards parents” (xx). By observing their daughter’s new, hygienic routine and “joining in heartily in the movement,” Grace’s parents also become reformed.

I argue that the black girl had a distinct role in the transformation. While Annette’s formal education prepared her for traveling south to teach the masses and aligned her with black women’s public involvement in temperance movements and other political activities in the 1880s and 1890s, Grace’s domestic role underscores the gendered expectations at the nadir, as expressed in the prescriptive literature of the early twentieth century. For example, in “Industrial Education for the Negro” (1903), Booker T. Washington joined Floyd in stressing a girl’s domestic education and hygienic practice over her formal education:

I have gone through the South, and into the homes of the people of my race, and have found women who could converse intelligently on abstruse subjects, and yet could not tell how to improve the condition of the poorly cooked and still more poorly served bread and meat which they and their families were eating three

times a day. It is discouraging to find a girl who can tell you the geographical location of any country on the globe and who does not know where to place the dishes upon a common dinner table. It is discouraging to find a woman who knows much about theoretical chemistry, and who cannot properly wash and iron a shirt (16). . . . Our knowledge must be harnessed to the things of real life. (17)

Washington further highlighted the connection of girls' domestic education, worth, and self-governance to leadership in *Working with the Hands* (1904), his sequel to *Up from Slavery* (1903). In this manual, Washington offered a comprehensive, instructional guide explaining the kind of education girls should undertake. The book included photographic images of girls sewing and engaged in other industrial activities reflecting their training at Tuskegee Institute. Claiming that "the hands, the head, and the heart" must work together, Washington explained his solution for educating black girls in the South:

These girls, now more than fifty in number, are taught simple lessons, receive short practical talks on behavior at home, on the streets and elsewhere. We also have a small library for them, and each one is allowed to draw the books she wants, to keep two weeks or longer. We also have picture books on the table for the younger children and pictures for the walls of the room. A friend gives two hours of her time on Saturday to these children, and it delights one's heart to see the improvement in them in all directions, especially in their quiet and becoming conduct on the streets. (122)⁶⁹

Washington suggested that education should support the "every-day practical things of life" which relate to the domestic sphere.

Floyd reinforced black girls' domestic role and their contribution to the collective well-being of the black race in the story "Mary and her Dolls." Here, the representation of a young black girl, Mary, and her love for her black dolls channel her budding, progressive awareness of social and economic inequality into a lesson on the duties of her future role as a mother as she learns to make an important decision about loyalty and

⁶⁹*Working with the Hands* contains illustrations and photographs by Frances Benjamin Johnson.

economic inequality by giving to those less fortunate. The story opens with a description of how dolls and other toys are a privileged but salutary part of children's upbringing.

Was there ever a time when little boys and girls, especially little girls, did not love dolls and did not have something of that nature to play with? It is not only amusing, it is inspiring to see the little children making merry with their dolls and their toy animals and their little express wagons and their wooden guns and their toy steam engines and their whistles and their balloons . . . and a hundred and one other things. (76-77)

While Floyd mentions a number of playthings for children, such as toy animals, wooden guns, little express wagons, and toy steam engines, dolls are the focal point of the story. Mary's father, Dr. Smithson, asks her to give one of her five dolls to a less fortunate girl. Since he is clearly a member of the black middle-class, Mary's refinement and awareness can be attributed to her father's influence. Rather than part with her precious dolls, however, Mary decides to buy the less-fortunate girl her own doll using her own money with which she had intended to purchase "a little iron bank" (76).

Mary's independent spirit in maintaining her own money represents a forward, modern outlook that conveys a mature, if not maternal way of thinking: "She was glad that her papa had understood how she loved her dolls and glad to find that none of her beloved children was missing" (77). The sketch of Mary and her dolls reinforces how an independent spirit is channeled in favor of a domestic, dutiful role learned early in life. Similar to Grace's mother whose role is peripheral, Mary's mother is never given any attention. Instead, Mary, with her maternal guise, assumes the role and posture of her mother. In Adam's illustration, Mary seems to replace her mother. She appears older than her suggested age, and maintains the posture of a mother with a long, clean, neat, matronly, non-seductive dress, prim short hair, and furrowed eyebrows that accentuate a look of deep concern. Floyd's stories work in conjunction with or altogether replace the

tutelage gained from the biological mother. Thus, *Floyds Flowers* offers advice and instruction on nurturing to children *and* parents.

The dolls' complexions are shaded in colors varying from dark to white. Some dolls are larger than others, and the smallest, darkest doll sits in the middle, protected by two larger, presumably older dolls on either side. As Mary holds a doll, one of its arms is draped around Mary's neck as if it were a real child. The dolls all wear different clothing, some in traditional country and others in urban style. The implication of these differences in class and race in the dolls' appearance suggests that despite one's race or social class, elevation may occur with adequate nurturance and tutelage.

Textual images of black girls playing with dolls appear throughout *Floyd's Flowers*, and suggest that the acquisition of black dolls fostered racial pride and increased black consciousness. Indeed, black parents were convinced that girls who owned black dolls and were surrounded by black literature, pictures, and art were more likely to marry, raise strong families, love and care for their own children, and create "a comprehensive home culture built upon race pride" (Mitchell 177).

In her work on racial destiny in African American culture, Michelle Mitchell provides extensive research on how the National Baptist Convention (NBC) recognized the need to make "colored dolls" more accessible to black consumers to promote the idea that dolls helped shape black children's self-esteem. In 1908, the NBC launched several such initiatives. Baptist women organized the Negro Dolls Clubs in 1914 and hosted "doll bazaars" during Christmas, while Black Baptists opened the National Negro Doll Company (NNDC).⁷⁰ Mitchell's recounting of the history of black dolls explores how

⁷⁰See Mitchell 182. For more information on dolls in American culture, see Miriam Formanek-Brunell's *Dolls and the Commercialization of American Culture* New Haven: Yale University Press, 1993.

“race dolls were powerful toys,” as black reformers “considered the placement of certain kinds of material culture within domestic spaces to be a symbol of collective progress” (178). Such “celebration of the race’s likeness” in dolls could “reduce concubinage, miscegenation, black on white rape and lynching” (183). Race reformers also maintained that dolls “played a particular role in black home reform in that they ostensibly had a direct influence on morality, sexuality, and racial reproduction” (188). It was thought among reformists that dolls “became possessed with a power to influence children’s sexuality and eventual sexual preferences. Reformers imbued them with eugenic properties and the ability to ensure racial purity” (177). Mitchell concludes that a “specific discourse surrounding the utility of colored dolls primarily underscored that children’s toys shaped consciousness, identity, and the most personal of tastes” (195). Although Floyd discusses “the power in dolls,” he specifically emphasizes the dolls’ connection to “domestic life, skills, and the acquisition of maternal feeling” (195).

Thus, Mary’s appearance and her dutifulness were designed to inspire young readers. Reflecting Floyd’s messages throughout the conduct book, Mary’s dress and demeanor are as simple, uncomplicated, plain, unpretentious, and straightforward as she is. Her appearance, along with her determination to keep and care for dolls as she would her own children rather than give one away, reinforces ideals of domesticity. Mary’s progressive awareness of social class and her obligation to maintain the gendered role of caring for her dolls in preparation for motherhood conveys Floyd’s image of a woman prepared to maintain her family’s safety and cohesiveness.

“True Little Ladies”: Floyd’s Beautiful Girls

In conjunction with duty and commitment to the domestic sphere, the figure of the black girl defined female beauty. Beauty ideals involved both behavioral characteristics (manner, mood) and exterior appearance (dress). They encompassed all aspects of respectability and informed girls how to adhere to social codes of behavior through her outward appearance and interaction with others. The figure of the girl functioned as an expression of beauty, with the goal of regulating how African Americans represented themselves in public places.

In “Directions for Little Ladies,” Floyd offers specific behavioral instructions that dictate how a girl should act at home, in public spaces, and in everyday life. “A true little lady” will always say “‘I thank you’ whenever someone assists her”; she is “never loud and boisterous on the streets, in public places, or at home”; she is clean and well-dressed because “every true little lady hates dirt”; “she will not tattle or seek to gossip; she loves Sunday school and church; she loves her mother and will help her mother in any way; finally, a true little lady will be a Christian” (264-265). These guidelines leave little space for girls to develop their imaginations or to participate in precocious or playful activity.⁷¹

In stories that focus on the amoral behavior of black girls, such as in “The Loud Girl” and “The Don’t Care Girl,” Floyd warns of behavioral characteristics that diminish “beautiful traits,” such as yelling, wearing unbecoming dress, and maintaining a poor appearance. Floyd claims that the “loud girl” and the “don’t care girl” are “two things of which we have seen enough of in this world” and that children who exhibit such behavior are “things; they are hardly worth the dignity of being called human beings” (51). The

⁷¹In her work on etiquette books for black children, Katharine Capshaw Smith claims that “amending the child’s body would come through modifying the child’s thought” (802).

“loud girl” contests the qualities that Floyd defines as “beautiful.” She is “always an object of pity and she is a sorry object for her own contemplation” (50). She is “regarded with dislike, distrust, and even disdain by the better class of people. She acquires a reputation for rudeness and coarseness, and the people of refinement will not associate with her” (50). Ultimately, Floyd states, “her character suffers, no matter how innocent she may be of any intention of wrongdoing” (50). The “don’t care girl” is “the worst girl in all this world” because she “doesn’t care what people think or say about her conduct; the girl goes to every ‘hop,’ to every party” and she “stays out late at night with the boys” (49). Floyd wonders why these girls exhibit such “strange conduct” and “throw to the winds that charm of all girlhood—modesty” (46).

Floyd’s stories not only focus on the social implications of “purity” and “modesty,” but also send a cautionary message that girls who exhibit good behavior will not become victims of sexual abuse by white men, a pervasive threat during slavery and persisting throughout the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. Floyd further suggests that by behaving like ladies, black girls can eliminate the tarnished reputation of black women, who have been stereotyped as impure, immodest, and overly sexual.

In “The Loud Girl,” an illustration depicts two girls (one older and taller than the other), both of whom exhibit immodest behavior. Their gestures—one clenches her hands into fists while the other raises her hands in the air as if ready to clap—suggest aggression. Widespread legs, broad gaping mouths, boyish hats, and rumpled clothes depart from the feminine ideal of the period. The older, taller girl, with her body tipped forward, appears to hover over the younger girl. Her features and characteristics are more exaggerated than those of the younger girl; specifically, her cap is more boyish and her

facial features less feminine. The image suggests that if the younger girl's unfeminine behavior continues, she will grow to become like the older one. While the younger girl's behavior might be excused and perhaps even transformed, the older girl's face has already hardened.

The stakes only increase when girls engage in rowdy behavior and wear unfeminine dress in public places. As the story of "The Loud Girl" demonstrates, three girls ride in a streetcar and make a ruckus while eating chocolates, talking, laughing loudly, and throwing candies at one another; passengers who enter the streetcar stumble over their outstretched legs. Floyd warns that girls are often unaware of how others perceive their public behavior and that it is a "sorrowful spectacle" to witness a girl who is "loud in her dress, loud in her manners and loud in her speech" (46). He continues that "it is a great mistake for a girl to suppose that this loudness will be mistaken by her friends and acquaintances for smartness" (46). The behavior and dress of the three girls suggest a highly-charged, unruly performance that contributes to the girls' diminished moral character and questions their class.

They all wore boys' hats. One wore a vivid red jacket with brass buttons, and another had on a brass belt. A third one had on a most conspicuous plaid skirt. This third one had a box of bonbons, and when the three were seated she opened the box and offered it to her companions, saying as she did so, in a voice loud enough and shrill enough to be heard in every part of the car: "it's my treat; have some, chums!" (47-48)

These three black girls eating chocolates on a public train while wearing wrinkled, disheveled, boyish clothing with garish accessories create a public spectacle that attracts negative attention. Described as "blab-mouthed and noisy," the girls' roaring laughter fills the train, and their commotion elicits the stares of onlookers (50). Eating chocolate in public further reinforces a subversive energy that is only emphasized when one of the

girls invites her friends to participate in the treat. With little understanding or interest in propriety, the girls exhibit behavior that challenges dominant codes of decorum. Floyd critiques the girls' inability or unwillingness to observe how their behavior in public affects others' perceptions of them. The story teaches readers how behavior, dress, voice, and manners affect perceptions of class for African Americans.

The occurrence of this behavior on a streetcar, a public space in an urban setting, suggests that the girls will attract the kind of attention that will only lead to assumptions about their sexual mores. Their disregard for the public space of the streetcar and for propriety adds to a sense of sexual degeneracy that Floyd condemns. In this context, the girls' brass buttons and brass belt serve several functions. First, brass is a protective, defensive shield that anticipates danger and guards the girls against unwanted solicitation or threats of violence, suggesting that the girls, although rambunctious, have a resiliency that is durable and flexible like brass. Second, the girls demonstrate boldness, which is ammunition that reinforces an aggressive, *offensive* stance against danger. Lastly, while the brass might indicate boldness and strength as a raw material often associated with warfare, it also suggests fake gold, a vulgarity and showiness that should not be displayed in public.

Floyd's streetcar scene echoes a similar scene in Pauline Hopkins's novel, *Contending Forces: A Romance Illustrative of Negro Life North and South* (1901), in which black girls cause a ruckus on a streetcar. In a chapter in which black people from the community gather in a parlor to discuss "questions of the day and their effects upon the colored people" (110), Mrs. Davis relates a story in which she chastises a group of black girls who act unruly on a street car:

Some o' them was a-standin' up in the car, an' every once in a while I noticed thet a passenger'd squirm as ef suthin' had hit him. Finally I got so mad I jes' couldn't see along with sech antics from them critters a-disgracin' theirselves and the whole o' the res' o' the colored population, an' I jes' elbowed myself into the crowd o' young jades—what's thet (as Will murmured something under his breath), was they gals? Yas, they was; young *jades*, every one o' them! Now what do yer think they was a-doin'? . . . *They was a-trampin' onto the feet of every white man an' woman in the car to show the white folks how free they was!* I jes' took my ambriller an' knocked it into two or three o' them thet I knowed, an' tol'em' I'd tell ther mothers. (Hopkins 110-111)

Although Mrs. Davis is a respectable member of the black community, Hopkins gives her dialect speech to assign agreement with someone from this class who has a sense of manners and congeniality. Her concern is not only that the black girls act so badly that their behavior affects “the whole o' the res' o' the colored population,” but that they demonstrate bravado and “show white folks how free they was.” Mrs. Davis's choice of the word “free” is sarcastic and suggests that the girls are unwilling to subscribe to rules of propriety and choose to act as “free” as they wish. The severe restrictions black people were under to prevent violence necessitated strict etiquette to prevent blacks from being judged and condemned by the behavior of one or a few. Floyd's text works in conjunction with other literary works to reveal rigid depictions of femininity that black intellectuals relied on to resolve the social and political implications of racial representation.

As his stories confirm, Floyd's writings attempted to protect girls against the dangers prevalent in the Jim Crow era. Certain black female race activists during this postbellum period nevertheless *had* to act “loud” to advance racial progress. The activist Ida B. Wells wrote inflammatory articles and spoke publicly and openly about violence toward African Americans. Her actions demonstrated an unwillingness to stay silent despite her constant endangerment. However, while she spoke clearly and directly against

injustice, she did not behave in a manner that would have distracted from the delivery of their message. The ironic tension in “The Loud Girl” is that the attributes which Floyd assigns to the “loud girl” reveal the kind of girl who could channel her passion to grow into a woman who is self-assured and confident. She will refute the “good opinion” of others, speak “boldly,” and “shoot her head way up in the air” when she addresses others. She will be “bold and defiant” and will challenge the rules of decorum and convention. In other words, the characteristics that describe the “loud girl”—loud, bold, defiant—actually depict someone who is strong-willed, independent, and outspoken—qualities that could be admired rather than shunned by society. In *Our Nig* (1859), Frado acts “loud” when she refuses beatings from Mrs. Belmont and blame for incidents she did not commit. Her “loudness” is a form of protection, despite the punishment she often receives for asserting herself. Nevertheless, the politics of respectability, as Evelyn Higginbotham suggests, attached shame to such qualities because of the fear not only of derogatory racial stereotypes, but also the threat of rape by white men. Black intellectuals like Floyd criticized any type of outward behavior that could be construed as sexual. These codes of behavior were defined by a patriarchal agenda meant to steer and keep the girl and woman in a domestic sphere.

Floyd’s treatment of boy figures in *Floyd’s Flowers* demonstrates that they too cannot act in an unruly way. While unruly girls are told they are “the worst girl in all this world” (49), however, Floyd encourages unruly boys to behave because they were “made for better things” (53). In “The Rowdy Boy,” “A Plucky Boy,” “Directions for Little Gentlemen,” and “The Bad Boy—How to Help Him,” Floyd offers examples of behavior unacceptable for young black men. He asserts that one can clearly identify a “rowdy boy”

anywhere in society because “there are certain marks or appearances which he carries about with him and which are never absent” (51). Floyd claims that a “rowdy boy” walks around with “a cigarette stuck in his mouth,” although he is aware that smoking is “one of the deadliest poisons in the world for a boy or man.” In addition to smoking, another marker of a “rowdy boy” is his appearance: “he wears his hat on the side or cocked back on his head. Frequently he stuffs both hands in his trousers’ pockets.” Such a boy is also immature, irresponsible, and impudent: “he doesn’t attend school regularly, sometimes he starts for school and ends at the bathing pond or the baseball park. He is late for Sunday school, if he goes at all, and he stands ‘round on the outside of the church while the service is going on inside” (51). A “rowdy boy” exhibits criminal behavior: “he steals rides on trains and on trolley cars,” and in speaking to adults, “he is saucy and impudent to older people, and is always ready and willing to quarrel or fight with his mates. He is what the boys call a ‘bully’” (51). According to Floyd, “no manly little boy” will act impudent to his parents or his peers. The story of “The Rowdy Boy” ends with a final word of advice: “Don’t be rowdy, boys; don’t be rough; don’t be rude. You were made for better things” (53). Acting unruly will prevent boys from achieving “better things,” which implies that unlike girls who remain in the home, boys leave their homes and make an impact on the world.

Rather than active, Floyd portrays the model black girl as “modest and quiet,” as the caption under her sketch states. She is not expected to speak much or make a verbal impact. She is good-natured, delicate, and gentle. Her body is calm and self-contained rather than out of control, with flailing arms and legs. Her stature is tall and upright, as captured by her full image filling the entire page, rather than only three-quarters of a page

provided for loud girls. In her hand she holds a closed fan, which suggests modesty and propriety, and mimics her body which appears closed, drawn in, and turned away from any confrontational stance. Her neatly-coiffed hair and long, full skirt are properly maintained—she does not need to wear a cap, nor are her clothes wrinkled or disheveled—and thus her exterior accentuates the ideal characteristics of womanhood.⁷² Only one of her arms appears in the image, as if to suggest that she need not have two arms because she will never work and will always have someone (presumably a husband) caring for her. Missing one arm, the girl seems incomplete, an impression reinforced by her slightly melancholic expression. Overall, she exhibits what dominant discourse would recognize as true womanhood, guided by a quiet demeanor and crisp outward appearance and without the vices of impurity. The picture thus demonstrates that Floyd was unconcerned with the young girl as social activist; rather, delicacy and gentleness of character are attributes necessary to represent the black race (50). Floyd's proper model of black girlhood focuses less on the improvement of her intellect, as with Annette in *Trial and Triumph*, than on the development of moral character and outward appearance.

As the good-natured girl appears to be lighter in skin tone, while the shade of skin on the “loud girl” is noticeably darker, the illustrations in Floyd's text seem to suggest that character is contingent on skin tone. Furthermore, the sketch depicts the model black girl's hair as long and shoulder-length, rather than short, coarse, and curly like that of the “loud girl.” Stereotypical racial characteristics make such character claims: darker-skinned girls are “loud” while lighter-skinned girls are “modest and quiet.” This differentiation between the darker-skinned girl as unruly and the lighter-skinned girl as

⁷²Shawn Michelle Smith argues that at the beginning of the twentieth century, middle-class women wore their hair pinned up because “containing the hair was a sign of modesty” (109).

demure and attractive suggests that Floyd aligned his text with white supremacist discourse that equated dignity with white or lighter-hued skin. His text encouraged an idea of uplift that centered class distinction on color and superficial, exterior components such as dress and hair, regardless of one's merit or intellect. In contrast, dark-skinned Annette in Harper's *Trial and Triumph* is initially unruly, but achieves dignity through her intellect and her role as valedictorian and teacher, and thus counters Floyd's attribution of dark skin with unruly behavior. This mindset points to an intra-racial division along class *and* color lines that create further divisions among African Americans, a lessened sense of community, and heightened perceptions of class difference.

Interrelationships of Text and Image in *Floyd's Flowers*

The illustrations in *Floyd's Flowers* act as important visual reminders or coded iconographic texts of proper, acceptable behavior that readers should observe and on which they should model themselves. As is reinforced in this book's prefatory notes, pictures draw readers in and pique their imagination:

There is something in a picture, even though the subjects be foreign to us, which readily takes hold of our innermost feelings and becomes companionable to the extent that we find ourselves loving that something whatever it is: a man, or a humble dog, or an old homestead, or what not. (7)

With its ability to recreate reality by stimulating the imagination, visual art combines with the written text to shape and reshape people's beliefs. This collaboration between text and image create a "third text" to teach young readers the impact that education and morality will have on the black race.

The collaborative work between Floyd's text and John Henry Adams directly confronted negative images of racial representation. Literary scholars Cherene Sherrard-

Johnson, Paul C. Gutjahr, Anne Carroll, and Caroline Goeser, among others, argue that the collaboration between text and image functioned to change public opinion. As Sherrard-Johnson notes in her work on images of the New Negro Woman, collaborative texts are “visual and literary cross-fertilization” (3), and operate as a counter-representational strategy to combat negative images of the black woman in the early decades of the twentieth century. In his examination of illustrations in literary texts, Gutjahr argues that “the interpretive importance of illustrations on the written text is often ignored” and the tendency is to treat visual and verbal texts as two separate entities rather than to explore their effect as a singular unit (79). Gutjahr argues that

you either study a book’s pictures or its written text, but little thought is given to how a separate, third text is created once visual and verbal texts are juxtaposed. Studying the third text provides an often untapped way of exploring the variable meaning of [a text] in different historical and cultural moments. (79)

In conjunction with these ideas, Carroll examines this “third text” in collaborative works written in the “New Negro” period of the first three decades of the twentieth century, during which writers and artists “used many kinds of texts in different media to represent African Americans” (3). According to Carroll, these collaborative efforts among participants in what becomes known as the Harlem Renaissance utilized “remarkable combinations of written and visual texts to create compelling new images of African American identity,” and these “multi-media works” performed “processes of representation” that defined African Americans in “complex, dynamic and highly innovative ways” (3). Such teamwork among writers and artists had occurred earlier in the African American literary tradition (Mrs. Amelia A. E. Johnson’s *Clarence and Corinne; or God’s Way* [1890]) and continued into the twentieth century, taking shape in institution building (the Niagara Movement, the National Association for Colored

Women) and in the creation of black literary magazines (*Crisis*, *Brownies Book*) and black newspapers (*Opportunity*, *New York Age*). Similar to Carroll, Goeser argues that the combination of illustration and text “highlights the early interplay of visual and literary production in print culture” in the early decades of the twentieth century (vii). She claims that illustration is “a hybrid medium” that “participated more fully than more traditional visual media in the burgeoning consumer culture” and helped to create modern images of black identity (2). Illustrators shared a common goal of providing newly-modern visual representations of African American figures that stood against negative stereotypes (5).

Floyd’s stories, then, combine text and image to portray a new generation invested in displaying positive representations of the black race. In “Keeping School,” text and images form a “third text” teaching young readers the importance of education at an early age. Tootsie, who is unable to read, tries to teach herself to read by looking at the pictures in a Christmas book, and connecting the pictures with the words in the text. In this way, Tootsie creates her own understanding of the “third text” by combining written text and image, which are the first and second texts. “Keeping School” helps readers understand how Floyd’s *own* written text and Adams’s sketched images work together to create meaning, especially for the youngest readers.

“Keeping School” begins, as Floyd states, “Every boy and girl in America ought to go to school” because school is one of “the best institutions” and is “connected with the life of our nation” (93). The story describes how Floyd’s black girl figure, Tootsie, too young to attend school, studies *despite* her age by incorporating reading into her everyday play. Although Tootsie has not yet gone to school, she prepares herself by

creating her own school at home through play and imagination: “There was no school-house, and no teachers; nothing [sic] only just little Tootsie; not even her dolls; just simply Tootsie sitting all alone on the couch near the window” (93). In Tootsie’s imagination, however, her large school has sixty pupils. She looks through Christmas books, attempting to connect words with images. Tootsie eventually teaches herself to read by asking family members to remind her of unfamiliar words:

[She] would ask mama and grandma, or whoever happened to be nearest, what the words of the picture-story were. She would then say the words of the story over to herself, and look at the picture. Next day she would read over the words of the same story as far as she could remember them, and when she came to a word that she did not know, up she would jump and go ask someone what it was. (94)

By using simple, direct language in a child’s voice, as when Tootsie asks her “mama” and “grandma” for assistance, Floyd simplifies his language to accommodate his youngest readers. Floyd’s text thus teaches young readers like Tootsie how to weave educational pursuits like reading into their recreational activities and keep school foremost in their minds even when at play: “Maybe one reason why Tootsie learned so fast was because her school is just like play to her and not like work. Of course, it is easier to play than it is to work. But could you think of any better thing to play than to play keeping school? Why not try it?” (95). Through Tootsie’s example, Floyd urges children to incorporate learning and school into their everyday activities. The text implies that children can better prepare themselves for adulthood and citizenship.

The reference to Tootsie’s “mama” and “grandma” also recognizes her lineage in a black family and in a household that is supportive of her educational pursuits. That Tootsie is able to ask not only her mama and grandma for help but “whoever is nearest” suggests that Tootsie, like Annette in *Trial and Triumph*, is a part of a community of

tutors invested in her learning. Floyd demonstrates how the black girl is no longer orphaned, but connected to and protected by her black family.

In Tootsie's early education, a "third" text does not yet exist because there remains a disconnect between the images and the words in her picture-story. Although she may "look at the pictures," Tootsie finds the words "unfamiliar" and thus resorts to the power of her imagination. At the same time, Floyd's girl figure underlines the significance inherent in a visual image to stimulate the imagination. Floyd's text and image enable even the youngest children to read and understand his message. Not only in Tootsie's story, but throughout *Floyd's Flowers*, illustrations are granted as much importance as the author and the written content.

Tootsie's imagination sparks a desire for reading rather than for other kinds of play often associated with images of black children in the public sphere. In choosing the name "Tootsie," Floyd might have been alluding to Harriet Beecher Stowe's character "Topsy," the mischievous, unruly young slave girl of unknown origin in *Uncle Tom's Cabin* (1852), and an example of the derogatory stereotype of the pickaninny. Floyd's Tootsie seeks to abolish the popularity of Stowe's *Uncle Tom's Cabin*, which persisted well into the twentieth century. His text interrupts the ongoing damage to African Americans caused by the image of Topsy.⁷³

Intending to offer a realistic portrait of slavery, Stowe's novel included pictures of slaves. Stowe emphasized her text's visual appeal and its connection to truth:

My vocation is simply that of a painter, and my object will be to hold up the most lifelike and graphic manner possible of slavery, its reverses, changes, and the Negro character, which I have had ample opportunities for studying. There is no

⁷³Given *Uncle Tom's Cabin's* popularity, Edwin S. Porter turned it into a silent film titled *Slavery Days* in 1903; as a film, it only served to offer the public more immediate access to racist images.

arguing with pictures, and everybody is impressed by them, whether they mean to be or not.”

In his work evaluating the visual history of Stowe’s novel, Gutjahr argues that a text’s interpretation is influenced not only by the written text, “but also by how the text has been packaged and presented to its reader” (89). *Floyd’s Flowers* contested the racist iconography that circulated in the antebellum period and continued to impact race relations at the turn of the twentieth century.⁷⁴ By employing his own stereotypical images, such as Grace’s image before she is educated, with her lopsided grin and messy hair, Floyd hoped to teach readers how to recognize the damage these images had on the perception of African Americans. Floyd juxtaposes popular stereotypes of African Americans as uncultured and uneducated with the well-mannered representation of Grace after she is educated to draw attention to the inequality and poverty that affected Grace and her family, and the progress made in her achievements after she acquired an education.

Conclusion

Conduct books written by black activists at the beginning of the twentieth century advocated a race that was cultured, malleable, law-abiding, and religious. The production of these texts aligned with black populations migrating from southern states to urban northern and western cities. These black movements changed the geography of race relations through a collision of classes, manners, dialects, and lifestyles and resulted in unease among the black elite. Many responded to changes in the growth of black populations in large cities by writing conduct books whose rhetoric offered specific protocols in behavioral codes to manage and reconstruct racial representation.

⁷⁴Gutjahr. “Pictures of Slavery,” quoted in Hedrick; Stowe 208, quoted 79.

Conduct rhetoric stipulated that for the black race to advance, the black woman and girl must maintain the image of the race by remaining at the center of the domestic economy to teach discipline, caution and morality. Floyd's stories about Grace's transformation, Mary's nurturance, and Tootsie's imaginative school taught readers lessons on how appearance, domesticity, and education might control the race's image and could protect against attacks on the collective character and individual bodies of black people. However, as Floyd reveals, there were "loud girls" and "don't-care girls" who were unconcerned with protocol, and navigated their own way in the city, on streetcars, and in workplaces, unwilling to be restricted by outdated protocol. Yet more "loud girls" who direct their passion to advocate in clear and direct ways as race leaders are necessary.

The continued unease generated by increasing numbers of black migrants in urban settings prompted later editions of Floyd's text. In the 1925 edition of *Floyd's Flowers*, Adams's sketches were replaced by photographic images. These photographs were identical to the images in the sketches, but because they were photographs of living people, they enhanced the urgency of Floyd's messages on behavior, decorum, and appearance. The photographs were more realistic, more true to life, more aligned with the modern era and its new technologies. They served to draw a wider range of readers into the text by offering qualities of drama and seriousness as well as farce and silliness. In her work on photographic images of the New Negro, Deborah Willis argues that in photography, African American artists found a medium to refute and critique stereotypes and caricatures. Willis argues that photographs "transformed the visual representation of black America, both in the public realm of popular culture and within the intimacy of the

family album” (“Picturing the New Negro Woman” 227). Perhaps photographs held stronger weight in combating popular racist images because

photographs were treasured and preserved in black family albums, while racist images circulated on postcards, stereographs, and posters. . . . Photographs that visually realized the dreams and desires of their individual communities and captured a spirit of transformation stood in sharp contrast to the mass produced images that reinforced widely held stereotypes that sought to diminish the humanity of African Americans. (228)

Extensive photographic records of African Americans at the beginning of the twentieth century represented African Americans in dignified attire and poses to reinforce a model of uplift that upheld attributes of refinement, such as cleanliness, leisure, and literacy. These portraits captured a stylized elegance that sought to portray ideals of race advancement.

In the story “Thanksgiving at Piney Grove,” for example, the photographic images of Grace’s transformation enabled readers to observe that although she is from the “black belt of Georgia” and her parents speak in dialect, Grace can change her lifestyle and mannerisms through education and she, too, can become dignified. Floyd considered it important that readers clearly observe the meaning of her change. Grace’s “before” image is a headshot that reveals only her lopsided grin and unruly hair, thus exaggerating the sense of absurdity associated with her unawareness of hygienic practices. Her “after” image, by contrast, reveals a full-body portrait of Grace after she graduates. She stands poised and stiff in a long skirt and blouse; her hair is styled and her expression hints at a slight smile. Turned to her side and away from the camera, she holds onto a chair in an awkward stance. Although Grace becomes educated and refined, the story ends with her serving Thanksgiving dinner and an announcement that she will marry the pastor’s son.

The image of Grace in a full dress and coiffed hair, yet holding onto a chair for support, suggests that she is refined and dependent, educated and submissive.

As Grace's transformation indicates, Floyd's text aimed to negotiate the public image of African Americans by reinforcing a return to domestic ideals. His text became a parenting guide whose instructive rhetoric and images replaced the black mother as the nurturing figure. Rather than the black mother, black male figures in the form of Floyd and Adams, the Pastor in Grace's story and Dr. Smithson, Mary's father, become authoritative, protective figures who guide the girl into a domesticated role. In their own way, these black men are activists who are visible members of the middle class, while the black mother, speaking in the dialect of the "Old Negro" in Grace's story and absent altogether from Mary and Tootsie's stories, assumes a marginal role in raising their children. Thus, Floyd's text teaches readers that the middle-class, black male figure will assume the role of uplift for the black race, while black women and girls support him through maintaining the domestic sphere. What results are girl figures who might have enjoyed imagination and play in their youth, as Tootsie does with her Christmas books and as Mary does with her dolls, but whose youth and imaginations are channeled to defer to domestic roles by becoming modest, matronly, and quiet.

In Chapter Four, I examine how Gwendolyn Brooks's modernist aesthetics reinforce her unease with the Victorian ideals of conduct rhetoric and its impact on the black girl figure. Her girlhood poems in *Annie Allen* (1949) explore what occurs when a black girl rejects her mother's lessons, resorts to her own imagination, and chooses to act "loud" rather than adhere to prescriptive teachings. Brooks insists that the black girl's imagination must survive amidst racial injustice and economic inequality. She exposes

this preference to readers through inter-generational conflict between mother and daughter, a tension that Floyd did not anticipate or express through his stories.

CHAPTER FOUR

BLACK GIRLHOOD IN GWENDOLYN BROOKS'S *ANNIE ALLEN*

Literature published in the nineteenth century and in the early decades of the twentieth century employed the black girl figure as a model to promote a Victorian ethic of morality that contributed to citizenship efforts and taught behavioral codes that if followed, would protect black bodies against violence in the urban sphere. Gwendolyn Brooks, however, privileges the black girl's interiority to acknowledge the complexity of her subjectivity and to connect with the frustrated voices and thoughts of the black, urban poor in post-World War II America. She explores the mind of the black girl who learns to reject external demands of the race and the unrealistic world of her own naïve imagination in favor of personal experience, first within the black family and later in the unstable and threatening world of romantic disillusion and racial violence.

The figure of the black girl during most of the nineteenth century was expressed in various rhetorical iterations—nurtured and protected, self-directed and self-protected, corrected and domesticated—by black women and black men wielding community standards of conduct, demands, and values to mold her into a shifting notion of the definitive citizenship model for the race. Post-World War II, African American activists and artists appropriated the figure to express the experience of African Americans migrating from the South to urban cities, and informed their critique through modernist

forms that privileged interiority and mocked and rejected conventional forms and standards.⁷⁵

Literary modernism arose when “the catastrophe of the war had shaken faith in the moral basis, coherence and durability of Western civilization and raised doubts about the adequacy of traditional literary modes to represent the harsh and dissonant realities of the postwar world” (Abrams, 202). Nicholas Leemann describes the “dissonant realities” and consequences of the war on black Americans migrating Northward from the south between 1940 and 1970. He argues that migrations changed the pattern of city life, disrupted education, made street crime an obsessive concern, changed the voting patterns in the country as a whole, and gave birth to the idea that government programs do not work. Poor rural folk affected by poverty and inequality attempted to make lives for themselves in urban cities.

This chapter argues that poems in the “Notes from the Childhood and the Girlhood” section of *Annie Allen*, Gwendolyn Brooks’s second collection of poetry published in 1949, for which she became the first black woman to win the Pulitzer Prize in 1950, employs the interior musings of a black girl to acknowledge the thoughts of the urban poor by utilizing the language and forms of modernism that focus on interiority and undermine the conventional forms and images of reality. While Brooks is drawn to modernism because of its rejection of traditional form, her critique of its elitism is articulated rhetorically through such techniques as unconventional meter and irregular

⁷⁵See M. H. Abrams and Geoffrey Galt Harpham, *A Glossary of Literary Terms*, 9th ed. (Boston: Wadsworth Cengage Learning, 2009) 201-203. Many critics of modernism agree that it involves a deliberate and radical break with some of the traditional bases not only of Western art, but of Western culture in general” (Abrams 202). 201-203.

rhyme scheme, and thematically, by exposing a black girl's preference for imagination and dreams over conformity and convention.⁷⁶

This chapter will analyze how Brooks's modernist techniques, themes, and images in *Annie Allen*'s girlhood poems function as a critique of nineteenth-century codes of behavior and prescriptive lessons. Rather than follow nineteenth-century precedents that domesticate black women and girls, Brooks frees Annie's imagination from an instructive, didactic role. Annie's awareness is acquired not from instructional manuals, but from her own intimate, *lived* experiences. Whereas prescriptive, nineteenth-century citizenship models stipulated that a girl figure's involvement in her home, her physical appearance, and her moral and ethical values should be pivotal to her development, Brooks forges her own counter-tradition. She dismisses Victorian discourse that placed a black girl at the center of the home and labels this notion detrimental to her growth and self-awareness. Brooks deliberately undermines rules of respectability requiring an outward appearance that accommodates a racist world. While her poems display some characteristics of the conduct genre, such as improvement of character and gender-role instruction, Brooks consciously rejects teachings that stifle a young black girl's imagination and desire. The girlhood poems in "Notes" thus serve as an alternative to the conduct manual.

I will offer a close reading of specific poems in "Notes" that are representative of the way Brooks expressed her critique of tradition through a black girl's subjectivity to represent the working-class poor. "The birth in a narrow room" describes Annie's birth into her home environment with her parents and vividly displays Annie's imaginative

⁷⁶See the work of scholars who have argued this universal point of Brooks's poetry, such as James Smethurst, Jacqueline Goldsby, D. H. Melhelm, Claudia Tate, and Mary Helen Washington.

nature and separateness from her parents. “maxie allen” and “the parents: people like our marriage: Maxie and Andrew” explore Annie’s dismissal of her parents’ orderly lifestyle and traditional teachings and indicate her unwillingness to absorb the experiences of an older generation. Finally, “do not be afraid of no” and “my own sweet good” demonstrate Annie’s awareness to enter a racist society. These later poems convey that Annie’s resistance is no longer directed at her mother, but rather has turned toward larger societal issues. Brooks’s depiction of black girlhood in “Notes” suggests that a black girl’s education *and* her imagination set the foundation for her self-awareness and social awareness as a woman.

Structure of “Notes”

Annie Allen portrays Annie Allen, a black woman from the South Side of Chicago, in different stages of life: as a girl, as a wife, and as a mother. The collection examines these stages in four sections: “Notes from the Childhood and the Girlhood,” “The Anniad,” “Appendix to The Anniad,” and “The Womanhood.”⁷⁷ This chapter examines the girlhood years of Annie’s life. Consisting of eleven poems, “Notes from the Childhood and the Girlhood” portrays Annie’s coming-of-age and emphasizes the importance of her youthful experience. These poems recount Annie’s experiences of loneliness, loss, and prejudice, and express her awareness of societal inequalities.

In the first four poems of “Notes”—“the birth in a narrow room,” “maxie allen,” “the parents: people like our marriage: Maxie and Andrew,” and “sunday chicken”—the

⁷⁷In the “The Anniad,” Annie has become a young woman and has married a man who leaves to fight in the war and returns, only to dismiss Annie for another woman. This mock epic poem recounts the cycle of love, loss, and loneliness that Annie experiences after her husband leaves her and eventually dies. Both “The Anniad” and the “Appendix to the Anniad” suggest the consequences of dismissing an older generation’s practical teachings on men and love. “The Womanhood” explores how racism and poverty impact motherhood, and demonstrates how nurturing racial wisdom is essential for a black girl as she matures into womanhood.

eponymous heroine of *Annie Allen* learns of the consequences of a life led with a naïve, idealistic outlook when discounting her mother's polished prescriptives and dismissing her parents' complacency. The next three poems, "old relative," "downtown vaudeville," and "pygmies are pygmies still, though perch on Alps," reveal how in rejecting her mother's instruction, Annie is forced to experience racism and prejudice with little practicality and awareness.⁷⁸ Even as she is confronted with issues of death and loneliness in "old relative," experiences racism at a vaudeville show in "downtown vaudeville," and learns to understand the inequality she will face in society, but feels she will continue to reach heights through her imagination because she "can see better" and "laugh[] there," as she reveals in "pygmies are pygmies still, though perch on Alps." Rather than be like "Giants who bleat and chafe in their small grass," and who have "Reached no Alps: or, knows no Alps to reach," Annie will "expand in cold, impossible air" and "cry fie on giantshine" (94). Yet, despite her grand claims, Annie possesses little racial wisdom. By rejecting her mother's teachings, and having no personal experience to substitute for them, Annie remains ungrounded, unable, and unwilling to escape from the imaginative realm in which she lives.

The impact of Annie's idealism is revealed in the next two poems, "the ballad of late Annie" and "throwing out the flowers." In "the ballad of late Annie," Annie lies in a bower and daydreams of the man she will marry while her mother sweeps and cleans and tries to instill in her daughter cautionary, practical messages concerning love, men, and

⁷⁸Brooks uses as a title to the poem "pygmies are pygmies still, though perch on Alps," a poem by Edward Young, English poet (1683-1765). The poem is published in *Night Thoughts*.

Pygmies are pygmies still, though perch on Alps;
And pyramids are pyramids in vales.
Each man makes his own stature, builds himself.
Virtue alone outbuilds the Pyramids;
Her monuments shall last when Egypt's fall.

loss. Death and rot consume the entire poem, “throwing out the flowers,” which describes a family member’s death. Together, these two poems foreshadow Annie’s fate if she were to continue in the same idealistic fashion.

But it is her own experience, not her mother’s, which will accomplish Annie’s maturation. Not until the last two poems in “Notes,” “do not be afraid of no” and “my own sweet good,” does Annie, now entering young womanhood, begin to understand the importance of a confident, *realistic* outlook for her own life to prepare for the everyday racism she will encounter and for her relationships with men. In “do not be afraid of no,” Annie learns to be assertive and understands what happens to those who refuse to say “no.” In “my own sweet good,” Annie’s relationship with a man leads her to develop wisdom enough to recognize that the relationship is hurtful. These eleven poems in “Notes” function together as an essential record of Annie’s self-education. The poems follow Annie’s education as she learns to enjoy and protect her imagination while young, but to prepare for the hurt, poverty, and dismay she will surely endure once she is married, becomes a mother, and works to maintain a life in a racist society.

Many scholars remark that Brooks’s poetry is distinct from the literary works of African Americans in earlier decades because of its emphasis on appropriating modernist techniques to express the voice and experiences of the urban poor post-World War I. James Smethurst argues that after the New Negro Renaissance of the 1920s, African American literary works expressed strategies for representing the folk and recreating the folk voice. He states that “poetic texts during these decades share formal strategies and thematic concerns that distinguish these works from most texts of the preceding periods of African American writing, most notably in the representation and recreation of the folk

and the folk voice” (7). Similarly, Elizabeth Alexander argues that Brooks’s poems captured the intimate lives of those living in poverty in large, urban cities. Alexander states that Brooks was “attuned to the sounds heard and spoken in various spaces on Chicago’s South Side” (xvii). She claims that Brooks writes

of the front and back yards, beauty shops, vacant lots, and bars. Her formal range is most impressive, as she experiments with sonnets, ballads, spirituals, blues, full and off-rhymes. She is nothing short of a technical virtuoso. Her incisive, distilled portraits of individuals taken together give us a collage of a very specific community. . . . (xvii)

John Grey argues that Brooks’s “application of high art to the commonplace” (45) is a subversive method of writing that undermines the stereotypical assumptions of the working class poor and thus “create[s] a basis for social change where a more oppositional poetry would polarize readers” (46). Grey notes that Brooks’s early poems in *A Street in Bronzeville*, her first collection of poetry published in 1945, and in *Annie Allen*, “create a unique voice that renders her subjects accessible to any reader (often white) able to negotiate her formal dexterity, even as, inversely, they render her artistry available to any reader (often black) able to understand the social context she depicts” (45). Ultimately, Grey notes that “by establishing a formal distance in poems composed from within the black community, Brooks devises a parodic voice that ultimately suspends overall characterizations of race for both black and white readers, thereby opening up new linguistic and ideological space” (45-46). I argue that Brooks employs the interior voice of a black girl figure in *Annie Allen* to accommodate the aspirations, simple wants, and everyday lives of the black urban poor. Brooks insisted on the importance of these ordinary lives, and their relationship to the economic, social and political conditions of an emerging, fully industrialized, racist world. The black girl’s

interiority opens an ideological space that makes accessible these frustrated voices in black urban communities.

“Notes from the Childhood and the Girlhood” remains underexamined in scholarship on Brooks’s collection. Critics have made important contributions to Brooks’s legacy by dissecting the complexity of her verse, exploring how her poetic techniques reinforce humanitarian concerns, uncovering her emphasis on genealogical mother-daughter relationships, and locating her black aesthetic. A survey of the critical landscape, however, reveals that few have examined Brooks’s depiction of the girl figure in “Notes.”

In her analysis of how Brooks employs the apostrophe as political form in “The Anniad” and “The Womanhood,” Lesley Wheeler remarks in passing on “Notes from the Childhood and the Girlhood” that these “light lyrics” parallel Annie’s expectations for a happy marriage. A. Yemisi Jimoh brilliantly uncovers how the “tenuously poised yet successfully meshed content and form” in “The Anniad” reveal a struggle against double consciousness, yet her analysis skips over “Notes,” the very section on Annie’s girlhood in which such double consciousness developed. Gertrude Reif Hughes explores how Brooks’s use of modernist verse in “The Anniad” challenges patriarchal privilege, but mentions little about modernism in the first eleven poems of the collection. Ann Fowell Stanford argues that *Annie Allen* maintains a “profound ambivalence toward female power” and that Brooks fails to empower female characters, particularly Annie (283).⁷⁹ While Stanford critiques Annie’s romantic idealism and penchant for “potentially

⁷⁹See reviews of *Annie Allen*. J. Saunders Redding’s review of *Annie Allen* blames Brooks’s representation of racially-specific experiences that only “another Negro can get” as “coterie stuff.” Stanley Kunitz’s review of *Annie Allen* finds Brooks’s treatments “of caste and prejudice” to be uncertain but praises her “technical assurance.”

crippling dreams” in a few of the first eleven poems, she limits her analysis of this section to one paragraph, while the rest of the essay examines “The Anniad.” Brooke Kenton Horvath provides an extended analysis of poetics in “do not be afraid of no,” the last poem of “Notes”; however, the other ten poems receive little mention. D. H. Melhem offers a concise treatment of the “Notes” section in *Gwendolyn Brooks: Poetry and the Heroic Voice*, but she gives little focus to aspects of girlhood. Finally, while George Kent’s biography of Brooks provides a window into the poet’s *own* girlhood years, he offers little analysis of the girlhood poems. Of Brooks’s childhood, Kent writes that

Gwendolyn made her universe flexible. She lived in two guises—one being the real-life girl of quiet games, wild inner delight over the aspects of physical nature, and occasional rebelliousness; the other guise being the prancing, dancing figures of her imagination, of fantasy, and of poetic geographical features: dales, hills, mountains, brooks. (16)⁸⁰

Perhaps Brooks’s own girlhood years inform her privileging of a black girl’s imagination as an important component of her interiority.

Imagination and the Black Girl

In “the birth in a narrow room,” the first poem of “Notes,” Brooks encourages nurturing a young girl’s imagination.⁸¹ In exposing how Annie’s home stifles her budding idealism, Brooks challenges former models of race progress that stipulate the importance of the home and the care of the body as necessary for training black girls. “The birth in a

⁸⁰See George Kent, “Beginnings,” *A Life of Gwendolyn Brooks* (Lexington: The University Press of Kentucky, 1990), 1-34.

⁸¹Alternative readings of “birth in a narrow room” exists that precede mine. See D.H. Melhelm, *Gwendolyn Brooks: Poetry and the Heroic Voice*. Lexington: UP of Kentucky, 1987, and Claudia Tate, Tate, Claudia. “Anger So Flat: Gwendolyn Brooks’s *Annie Allen*.” *A Life Distilled: Gwendolyn Brooks, Her Poetry and Fiction*. Maria K. Mootry and Gary Smith, eds. Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1987. 140-52.

narrow room” portrays Annie as a young black girl whose imagination and nonconformity reinforce her smug and assertive outlook on life. Annie is precocious and persistent, and though her desire for life is unfocused, she remains resistant to convention and decorum and opts instead to pursue her own course. With her limitless imagination, Annie is free to daydream and unwilling to face her reality.

Brooks’s insistence in celebrating Annie’s imagination counters earlier representations of black girl figures in this study. In *Our Nig* (1859), Frado seeks to imagine, especially when she is outside of the Bellmont home. However, unable to gain the time and space for her mind to roam imaginatively as Annie does, Frado roams with her body and seeks moments of escape and play through daring *physical* acts. Frado climbs to dangerous heights in a barn, where she “mounted in high glee on the topmost board,” and, after she “mounted the highest point of land nearest the stream,” Frado accomplishes another daring act when she tricks sheep into falling into the water (Wilson 31). While her body accomplishes these fearless acts, Frado’s imagination remains restricted. Frado eventually relies on another form of reprieve, spirituality, to relieve her from the torment she endures through constant work and brutal beatings.

In *Incidents in the Life of a Slave Girl* (1861), Linda Brent’s relationship to imaginative thought differs from Frado and Annie. When Linda is six, the same age as Frado when she is brought to the Bellmont home, Linda “learned, by the talk around [her], that [she] was a slave,” but “no toilsome duties were imposed upon [her]” (Jacobs 10). Instead, Linda describes how, as a young girl, she would sit with her mistress “sewing diligently,” and if she grew tired, the mistress would ask her to “run and jump,” or “gather berries or flowers to decorate her room” (10). Yet, when Linda turns fifteen,

her mind is filled not with playful, imaginative thought; rather, Linda's master "peopled her young mind with unclean images, such as only a vile monster would think of" (Jacobs 26). Linda will replace these unclean images with plans to orchestrate her safe escape and that of her children. While these calculated and strategic thoughts, which she refers to as her "meditations," to preserve her own and her children's physical safety may be devoid of childlike wonder and were often "very sad," Linda expresses imagination when she thinks of another kind of life for herself in freedom (116).

Similar to Frado, Annette in *Trial and Triumph* (1888-1889) enjoys pranks and playing tricks on her neighbors, but because she is intelligent, community members channel her penchant for play and idealism into intellectualism and service. Mrs. Lassette, a community member and nurturer, observes Annette's budding intellectualism: "she has been left a great deal to herself, and in her loneliness, she has developed a thoughtfulness past her years, and I think that a love for her race and a desire to serve it has become a growing passion in her soul; her heart has supplied her intellect" (Harper 243). Annette's "thoughtfulness" replaces her playfulness. Rather than imagine, Annette engages herself in "some active work which will engross [her] mind and use every faculty of [her] soul" (280). While Wilson and Jacobs describe their protagonists' imaginations to teach readers about the experience of girls growing up in the antebellum North and South, and Annette functions as a model of intellectualism and service to the race, Brooks frees her girl figure from an instructive role and allows Annie the will to imagine. Brooks insists on the importance of nurturing this imaginative space as necessary for girls to grow into self-aware, conscious women.

"The birth" announces Annie's arrival into her home and conveys her childish yet

brash nature. The first stanza describes Annie as detached and with a lofty vision of her own world as distinct from that of her parents.⁸²

Weeps out of western country something new.
Blurred and stupendous. Wanted and unplanned.
Winks. Twines, and weakly winks
Upon the milk-glass fruit bowl, iron pot,
The bashful china child tipping forever
Yellow apron and spilling pretty cherries. (83)

The poem's language suggests that Annie's entry into her home is enveloped in sorrow, ambiguity, and angst; yet despite her parents' ambivalence toward Annie's arrival, the presence of action words in the poem—*weeps*, *winks*, *twines*, *tipping*, *spilling*—imply that Annie will claim her space, alter her new environment, and resist the negativity surrounding her arrival. Arriving through an act of weeping—a gesture of mourning, sorrow, loneliness, and grief—Annie is received with overpowering but contradictory emotion. Her presence is surrounded by conflicting images: she is blurred, sullied, obscured, and masked, yet simultaneously stupendous, amazingly large, and prodigious. Such paradoxical images immediately suggest that Annie cannot be easily contained or categorized. She resists categorization, and her entry makes a profound yet ambiguous and confusing impact. By juxtaposing the power of Annie's birth with apprehension, Brooks vividly presents the potential yet complex impact that this black

⁸²See Stanley Kunitz, "Bronze by Gold." *Poetry* (April 1950): 52-56, in which he writes that "the birth in a narrow room" "displays technical assurance, combined with freshness and spontaneity. The imagery, recaptured out of the world of childhood, has a particularized intensity, and almost painful luminosity of individuation, which is enhanced by devices of syntax proper to a design of separateness" (11).

girl will make on her environment. The contradictory images also hint at the potential danger inherent in her social position as a black girl entering a racist world.

In *Our Nig*, Frado's birth and resistance to the confinement of her home are met with similar apprehension. Frado's own mother, Mag, decides to rid herself of her children, asking "who'll take the black devils?" Mag does not envision for Frado any future or potential. She describes Frado in monetary terms, stating simply that "she'd be a prize somewhere" (Wilson 11). Even Seth, Mag's lover, shows little loyalty to Frado, as he claims that "she's a hard one . . . I'd risk her at Bellmont's" (12). Similar to Annie, Frado resists the confinement of her home. She leaves with a companion, and together they "climbed fences and walls, passed through thickets and marshes" until she was "some miles from home" (13). However, as a result of Frado's excursion, Frado's mother confirms that "severe restraint would be healthful," and Frado's removal to the Bellmonts was "all arranged" (13). Unlike Annie, Frado is punished for revealing a spark of playfulness.

Unrestrained and uninhibited, Annie arrives "out of western world something new," and her entry clashes with the normal routine of her home. Annie boldly announces her presence and her rejection of her home's limitations. As Annie settles in, she "weakly winks" at or dismisses a number of household items that decorate her mother's home. The "narrow room," specifically the kitchen, contains steady, practical, domestic items like an "iron pot," and delicate, desirable items such as "the milk-glass fruit bowl" and "the bashful china" that sit awkwardly on the kitchen table. Annie senses vulnerability within her home and responds to it by defiantly knocking down the china to proclaim her resistance. In this instance of disruption, Annie "twines" or attempts to twist into this

environment, but she denies the home and its items and separates from the discomfort they represent. The result is Annie's incompatibility with the domestic items that Annie's mother cherishes. Annie disrupts the neat order of the kitchen and rejects the domesticity that the household items imply.

The title alone, "the birth in a narrow room," characterizes the home as a limiting environment that challenges Annie's existence, limits her vision, and stifles her ideas. "The birth" suggests lineage, as of a princess or a queen descending into the world. Like royalty, Annie immediately sets herself apart from the mundane, menial occurrences of her parents' lifestyle. With her heightened view of the world and her great expectations, Annie reluctantly descends into the "narrow" room. Hers is a home lacking in breadth of view and depth of mind. By establishing Annie's conflict with a constricted setting, the first stanza introduces a black girl's resistance to conformity as an important component of her subjectivity.

Critiquing Tradition

Manipulation of rhyme and meter throughout "the birth" further reveals Brooks's insistence on expressing a black girl's subjectivity. Irregular rhyme schemes, such as internal, half, and end rhymes, changes in meter through alliteration, and stops and pauses in the verses through caesurae capture Brooks's *own* discomfort with tradition and reinforce the parents' unease surrounding Annie's arrival.⁸³

⁸³My reading of rhyme scheme and alliteration is informed by Jacqueline Goldsby's analysis of Brooks's poetic form in Brooks's lynching ballads, specifically "A Ballad of Pearl Mae Lee," published in *A Street in Bronzeville* (1945). Goldsby argues that Brooks's "tightly tuned rhyme scheme" and alliteration express Pearl Mae Lee's hurt at Sammy's betrayal of sleeping with a white woman and his subsequent lynching. Goldsby explains how the poem's poetic devices helps us to understand not only Pearl Mae Lee's pain, but the devices also "turned [her] attention to the lovers, wives, children, sisters, brothers, friends, and extended kin who survived lynching's violence. How did communities remain or become that—communities—in the face of mob assaults?" I draw from Goldsby's analysis to explore how Brooks's

Irregular rhyme schemes within a single line of verse convey the anxiety that accompanies Annie's arrival. While a poem's rhyme scheme often helps to make expression and coherence easily accessible for the reader, Brooks is unconcerned with neatly packaged, accessible rhymes. Her placement of rhymes throughout "the birth" creates dissonance and expresses not only Annie's parents' angst towards Annie's arrival, but also Annie's *own* self-consciousness as she looks upon her new environment. Annie arrives "blurred and stupendous. Wanted and unplanned." The matching final consonants within one verse (the "-ed" endings of "blurred," "wanted," and "unplanned") and the double letters in the outermost words (the "rr" in "blurred" and the "nn" in "planned") create half-rhymes that place emphasis on Annie's parents' ambivalent view of their daughter's arrival. The paired words, "wanted and unplanned," could have made the line symmetrical had Brooks written "unwanted and unplanned." The glaring omission of the "un," which prevents a rhyme, discomforts the reader and simultaneously expresses the parents' discomfort. Despite the appearance of symmetry in the verse, demonstrated by the paired word phrases separated by a period, the phrases are contradictory. Likewise, the appearance of symmetry and rhyme with words endings in "ed" ("wanted and unplanned"), which actually do *not* rhyme, convey unease and discomfort. Similarly, twinning of letters within words (Blurred, unplanned) demonstrates the parents' angst and apprehension. Form does not comfort or put the reader at ease; rather, Brooks's techniques result in disharmony and confusion. Such inconsistency demonstrates Brooks's departure from traditional discourse.

techniques in "Notes" helps us understand how Annie's interiority reflects the sufferings of the black community. See Jacqueline Goldsby, *A Spectacular Secret: Lynching in American Life and Literature* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2006), 2-3.

To demonstrate Annie's childlike point of view and the comfort that she seeks in finding meaning in her home and in the world, Brooks writes that Annie "winks. Twines, and weakly winks" upon household items. This verse combines two kinds of rhymes in one line: head rhymes with matching initial consonants (**W**inks, **T**wines, **w**eakly, **w**inks) and half rhymes with matching final consonants (Winks, weakly winks). These rhyming, matching consonants create internal rhymes that offer Annie inner comfort and the space to express her point of view. An internal rhyme occurs when a word at the end of a line of verse rhymes with a word in the interior of that line of verse. The interior rhymes in the line, "Winks.Twines and weakly winks," create an interconnectedness of words and sounds that offer a space for Annie to come to terms with her new environment.⁸⁴ The two "winks" that flank the line of verse function as protective boundaries that allows Annie to look upon her new home with ease and consider its options.

Brooks employs alliteration, the repetition of the same consonant in close succession, to convey further Annie's childlike view of her home and her attempt to make meaning of the new environment. Alliteration is a rhetorical practice that poets and authors commonly employ to capture children's interests through memorable phrases. The alliterative, soft sounding "w's (**W**inks, **T**wines, **w**eakly, **w**inks) along with the repetitive whisper of the "ch" and the long "i" in "china child" reinforce inner feelings of inhibition and self-consciousness that any child might feel in a new environment.

⁸⁴In her analysis of "the Ballad of Pearl Mae Lee," Jacqueline Goldsby argues that the "tightly tuned rhyme scheme ("after," matched with "laughter") . . . together with the alliteration between lines ("A hundred," "hooting," "breasts," "back" and "Buick") constrain the fury of the poem without confining it, making the poem's turn of events all the more memorable to the reader" (2). I draw from Goldsby's analysis of rhyme and alliteration to convey how these poetic forms heighten Annie's parents' ambivalence and protect Annie's imaginative idealism from her parents.

Brooks controls the pace of the poem's meter through caesurae, pauses, and stops in a verse that steer the reader's eye and help to shape a perception of Annie and her parents. Caesurae are pauses indicated by punctuation marks—a period, a colon, a dash, or a comma—that interrupt the overall rhythmic structure of a verse. These word boundaries are distinguished by their location: a terminal caesura occurs at the very end of a verse, while an initial caesura, which is very rare, occurs at the beginning of a verse, as with the period placed after the initial “winks” in “Winks. Twines and weakly winks.” The caesura after the initial “winks” creates a compulsory boundary that forces the reader to pause and take note of Annie's arrival. This period also expresses Annie's *own* pause as she blinks and tries to make sense of what she sees. Brooks's unconventional placement of a period after a single word demonstrates her unconcern with the formal rules of punctuation marks and conveys as well that Annie's arrival is unbound by protocol or restriction. However, the period might also foreshadow the boundaries, fissures or bumps in the road that Annie will surely face as a black girl in an unequal, racist society.

Brooks juxtaposes the caesura after “winks” with another modernist device, enjambment, which occurs when the sense of one line of verse carries over to the next line without a pause. Enjambment quickens the pace of the poem and captures a sense of childhood glee, as revealed below when Brooks describes the objects on which Annie fixates and then “tips” over.

Winks. Twines, and weakly winks
Upon the milk-glass fruit bowl, iron pot,
The bashful china child tipping forever

Yellow apron and spilling pretty cherries. (83)

Annie pauses to look at the fruit bowl and pauses again after she examines the iron pot, as demonstrated through commas (“weakly winks/Upon the milk-glass fruit bowl, iron pot,”). However, the *lack* of punctuation in the next two lines of the poem quickens the pace and forces the reader to follow Annie’s unruly actions, which end with her tipping “forever” her mother’s “bashful” china and “spilling pretty cherries.” While the child might simply “tip” the china to look at its image, the word “forever” conveys a sense of finality—the contents “spill,” and the verse’s quickened pace ends with lingering disorder. While the actions and the pace of the poem create anxiety that discomforts the reader, Annie most likely experiences glee at the surprise of the spilling cherries.

Through her manipulation of poetic form, Brooks captures the quiet excitement and exhilaration that a child certainly experiences after performing an act of mischief, while simultaneously appealing to the reader’s *adult* apprehension. Unlike the prescriptive codes of behavior and decorum encouraged in *Christian Recorder* girlhood stories, *Trial and Triumph*, and *Floyd’s Flowers*, Brooks demonstrates how Annie enters her home and refuses to be bound by restrictive codes of behavior. Yet, even after Annie spills the cherries and enjoys her moment of mischief, an image that remains of Annie is that she is still “blurred,” a description that indicates a character without strong consciousness. Annie’s arrogance in deliberately tipping over her mother’s china is unflattering and hints at Brooks’s own misgivings about Annie’s behavior.

Although Brooks portrays Annie as dismissive of an orderly home life, Brooks critiques her carefree nature as foolish. Annie separates herself from what she feels is a stifling situation and instead imagines a realm where she can freely expand her

imagination. By becoming preoccupied with her own imaginative realm, as revealed in the vivid, colorful, playful images of the second stanza, Annie assumes a reckless attitude and separates herself from the realities of her home. She seeks to satisfy her childlike idealism in the context of the adult world, but she ignores altogether her reality, which Brooks suggests might be dangerous, especially in a racist world.

Now, weeks and years will go before she thinks
“How pinchy is my room! How can I breathe!
I am not anything and I have got
Not anything, or anything to do!”—
But prances nevertheless with gods and fairies
Blithely about the pump and then beneath
The elms and grapevines, then in darling endeavor
By privy foyer, where the screenings stand
And where the bugs buzz by in private cars
Across old peach cans and old jelly jars. (83)

At a young age, Annie is able to manipulate her own world and merge surrealism with her own inner reality. Unsure of her own impact, Annie acknowledges her awareness of external restraints. She complains that her mother’s home does not encourage any ambition or certainty and devises instead, in a kind of highly detached and willfully naïve way, an exploration of her imaginative land “in darling endeavor.” She does not yet realize how her home will restrict her growth and desires. Repetition of the word “anything” (“I am not anything and I have got/Not anything, or anything to do!”—) reveals that Annie is incapable of expression through words—she “thinks” these thoughts

rather than says them. Rather than express her frustrations vocally, she escapes into her dreams and imagination. This lack of verbal communication will create further distance between herself and her mother.

In Annie's imaginative world, Brooks contrasts an ordinary object that sustains a household, such as a water "pump," with an object of modern production, a "private car," to critique how post-World War II society, with its innovations, introduced modern ways of living that were often inaccessible to the poor. Brooks critiques the inaccessibility of certain innovations of the period, such as exciting, new, and rapidly evolving forms of transport and modern amenities that could enable contemporary lifestyles for impoverished people, as demonstrated when Annie dances "blithely about the pump," an action that suggests her family uses an outside water pump to retrieve water. Detached from her own reality, Annie imagines the bugs flying about as if they were that "buzz by in private cars," a thought that introduces a modern production—the car—into the ordinariness of her family's common life. The speed suggested in the sound of the cars that "buzz by," a phrase also enhanced through alliteration, is juxtaposed against the slow dullness of the "pump." Even the rot of the discarded "old peach cans and old jelly jars" conveys the family's unwillingness or an inability because of poverty and racism to participate in the industrial advances already underway. Brooks repeats the word "old" to distinguish the clash between Annie and the familiar, everyday lifestyle of her home. Annie is a different kind of bug, trapped in the jelly jar, who can buzz away only in her imagination. At the end of the poem, the solid, round vowel sound of the "o" in the twice-repeated word "old" returns the reader to the reality of poverty and everydayness, even if Annie chooses to "buzz by" this reality and remain within her dreams.

In Annie's imaginative play, a private room reserved for royalty clash with an image of an outhouse, which is a juxtaposition that further reinforces Annie's fantasy world. Annie's imaginative world contains a "privy foyer, where the screenings stand" (83). The privy foyer is a private area in a royal residence reserved for the exclusive use of a sovereign. However, a privy is also a toilet, and the screen protects against "buzzing" flies. The combination of cinematic and royal references, the realism of a toilet, and Annie's childhood idealism reveal how Annie's fantasies are captivating, but they also convey her inability to acknowledge reality.

Despite her confining domestic space, Annie's imagination enables her to enjoy physical and figurative mobility. Only in Annie's imaginative world does she find *much* movement, as when she "prances" about the pump, and when "bugs buzz by in private cars/ across old peach cans and old jelly jars" (83). These rustic items replace the refined "bashful china" and "milk-glass fruit bowl" that Annie destroyed. Brooks juxtaposes the carefree, imaginative world of the child with the busy world of adulthood, and Annie frolics in her surroundings, despite her awareness of its limitations. Rhyming alliterative verses enhance Annie's movement. She "prances nevertheless with gods and fairies / Blithely about the pump and then / Beneath the elms and grapevines." The repetition of the "-th" (nevertheless, with, blithely, the, then, beneathth, the) creates internal rhymes that create inner spaces of comfort and ease apart from the public, racist, outside world. Additional alliterative devices in the final verses (the "y" in "privy foyer"), (the "s" in "screenings stand"), and the "b's" ("bugs buzz by") reinforce Annie's childlike wonder of the outdoors and make her experience memorable. The alliteration enhances Annie's

interiority and conveys that her imagination is private, protected, and accessible only to her.

Rejecting Parental Guidance

As revealed by the poem “maxie allen,” Annie rebels against her parents’ conformist, practical lifestyle—a notable departure from traditional conduct rhetoric in *Colored American* articles, *Christian Recorder* girlhood stories, and *Floyd’s Flowers* stories in which girls adhere to parental instruction. “maxie allen” explores generational conflict by recording Annie and her mother’s different outlooks on love, men, and life. Maxie tries to instill in her daughter practical lessons, yet Annie rejects them. The tone and language in the poem suggest an antagonistic relationship, wherein Annie’s imaginative desires are undermined and Maxie’s traditional ideas are dismissed.

Annie’s tone and language differ from those of girls speaking to their mothers in *Colored American* articles, in which exchanges between mother and daughter consist of dialogue that is laced with encouraging sentiment. Although mothers instruct their daughters on everyday duties and obligations, their tone is light-hearted and carefree, and the dialogue consists of loving exchanges as in “I Wish I was a Kitten” (published in *Christian Recorder* on 22 May 1841), in which a mother kindly teaches her daughter about the importance of doing her chores, and “Order and Neatness” (published in *Christian Recorder* on 30 October 1841), in which a mother lovingly tells her daughter to keep her clothing and playthings off the floor, both published in 1841.

Similarly, in *Christian Recorder* girlhood stories, girls learn from mothers and extended family, but readers begin to witness more of the girl’s subjectivity as she learns to make decisions and express her opinions. In “Kitty and ‘Please’” (published in

Christian Recorder on 17 May 1862), Kitty becomes indignant and speaks in a rude manner to her friend, but eventually learns that such behavior is wrong and decides to change her tone when speaking to others. In “Pleasing Mamma” (published in *Christian Recorder* on 3 December 1870), Minnie learns to obey her mother’s advice to wear a dress better suited to accommodate the cold weather rather than a thin dress. While these girls initially express frustration with their mothers, the stories end with reconciliation through nurturance, understanding, and advice. However, Annie rejects her mother’s lessons and their interactions are neither agreeable nor appreciative. Her rejection demonstrates a departure from codes of behavior that black girl figures followed in earlier instructional rhetoric.

In the first stanza, Annie sarcastically discounts her mother’s advice and lessons in a tone that ridicules the nightly prayers her mother makes her recite and mocks her mother’s practical, penny-pinching ways.

Maxie Allen always taught her
Stipendiary little daughter
To thank her Lord and lucky star
For eye that let her see so far,
For throat enabling her to eat
Her Quaker Oats and Cream-of-Wheat,
For tongue to tantrum for the penny,
For ear to hear the haven’t-any,
For arm to toss, for leg to chance,
For heart to hanker for romance. (84)

The rhymes in this stanza are simple and easy, suggesting a lack of sophistication and a proscribed way of life. Likewise, the series of empty instructions expressed in iambic pentameter reflect Maxie's regimented, practical preference for taking care of the physical self rather than nurturing the interior. Verses ending in single-syllabic end rhymes, such as "star," "far," "eat," and "wheat," are easily understood and accessible. This simple rhyme scheme accentuates the familiar everydayness of Maxie's routine. The rote repetition of the word "for" in the tiresome, obligatory nightly prayer that Maxie "always taught" her daughter further reveals Maxie's regimented lifestyle. The word "stipendiary" contrasts sharply with the simple words and easy rhyming throughout the poem. The word startles the reader, not only for its erudite formality, but because it defines Annie, the "stipendiary little daughter," as "living on the dole"—i.e., receiving benefits which she has not earned and, implicitly, to which she is not entitled since she has not reciprocated with the appropriate degree of gratitude and obedience. Despite Maxie's hard work in providing her daughter with essential necessities, Brooks hints that Maxie finds Annie ungrateful and oblivious to the great sacrifice she has made for her daughter's well-being.⁸⁵

This stanza, which represents Annie's point of view, rhetorically mocks Maxie's old-fashioned perspectives and belittles her maxims as trite and insignificant. Maxie is rooted in the practical, trapped in a domesticated way of life, and resigned to a painstaking running of her household. She leads a bland life, feeds her daughter

⁸⁵My reading of "Maxie Allen" is informed by critical analyses that precede mine by Claudia Tate and Mary Helen Washington. See Claudia Tate, "Anger So Flat: Gwendolyn Brooks's *Annie Allen*" in *A Life Distilled: Gwendolyn Brooks, Her Poetry and Fiction*, eds. Maria K. Mootry and Gary Smith (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1987), 140-152, and Mary Helen Washington, "Taming All That Anger Down": Rage and Silence in the Writing of Gwendolyn Brooks" in *Invented Lives: Narratives of Black Women, 1860-1960* (New York: Doubleday, 1987), 387-405.

serviceable foods such as “Quaker Oats and Cream-of-Wheat,” and speaks everyday phrases such as “thank her Lord and lucky star.” Such prosaic aphorisms suggest that Maxie’s views are dictated by popular practices and sayings in society. Similar to the fairy-tale frameworks in *Christian Recorder* girlhood stories that reinforce happy endings and hope in a new beginning, Maxie finds comfort and security in her nightly nursery rhymes. In keeping with the fairy-tale framework, Maxie prays for her daughter’s heart “to hanker for romance.” In fact, Maxie’s very name resonates with the “maxims” she lives by. The alliteration (“tongue to tantrum for the penny”) and simple rhyming (“For ear to hear the haven’t-any”) classify Maxie’s prayers as routine, ordinary, and predictable, leaving little room for imagination.

In the second stanza, the idealistic Annie asserts her own dreams and urges her mother to consider a less cautious, less inhibited way of approaching life and loving a person—protestations that only further reinforce their generational divide:

Annie tried to teach her mother
There was somewhat of something other.
And whether it was veils and God
And whistling ghosts to go unshod
Across the broad and bitter sod,
Or fleet love stopping at her foot
And giving her its never-root
To put into her pocket-book,
Or just a deep and human look,
She did not know; but tried to tell. (84)

Rather than listen to her mother's advice, Annie practices a kind of role-reversal, trying to "teach" her mother by attempting to invest her mother in her own dreamy scenarios of love. The rhyme is childlike and song-like. The lines that begin with "and," as in "And whether it was veils and God/And whistling ghosts to go unshod," and the end rhymes in every verse ("never-root," pocket-book, "human look"), suggest a continuous stream of thought reminiscent of an anxious, excited child telling a story. Her romance consists of "veils and God," or the cloistered life of a nun, which is consumed with spirits "whistling" along the "broad and bitter sod." Another scenario of love is the "fleet love" on which she will thrive. In yet another scenario is the love expressed by a "deep and human look," a description that ironically suggests contradiction. *Deep* implies a profound, mysterious, obscured look. *Human*, on the other hand, suggests sympathy, even benevolence. The contradictions that permeate this stanza—the ghost that whistles, the fleet love that plants itself—emphasize the lofty, idealistic nature of Annie's dreams in tandem with her lack of preparation for the relationships she will encounter as a woman. The fast-paced meter in the poem, which ends bluntly with the last incomplete and unrhymed line—"She did not know; but tried to tell"—reveals Annie's inability to fully and clearly articulate her desires.

The second stanza emphasizes the impossible contradictions of Annie's wishes, for it is precisely this fanciful, unrealistic thinking about "ghosts" running barefoot across the "sod" that drives Annie's desires. She wants "fleet love" to stop at her feet and give her "its never-root"; therefore, love will never leave her. Annie sees herself as always having options. While desiring the depth of "just a deep and human look," however, she is unable to fully articulate or express what she truly desires. In turn, such a lack of voice

and powerlessness suggests Annie's inability to communicate her desires to her mother. She becomes a captive of her mother's everyday teachings. As in "the birth in a narrow room," Annie is trapped. Her distressed voice captures the frustration she feels toward a mother who is inaccessible to her idealism and unwilling to accommodate her imagination. In Annie's attempt to describe to her mother the transcendental possibilities for love that she feels exist beyond her mother's traditional expectations, Brooks conveys their communicative dissonance.

A tension thus exists between an idealistic young mind and a mother whose experience has taught her to be a realist. Maxie offers her daughter tangible, practical items that feed the body—"Quaker Oats" and "Cream-of-Wheat"—while Annie explores the grandeur of the intangible. She cares about that which she *cannot* see: "veils," "God," and "ghosts." Annie is concerned with "love," an entity much more complicated than romance. The lines "She did not know; but tried to tell" and "there was somewhat of something other" are expressions that signify something felt, but without the words to express it.

In the third stanza, an exasperated Maxie tells Annie that she did not raise her to think foolishly about men and that she has sacrificed much to avoid exposing her daughter to hurt and betrayal. Despite the generational conflict between them, Maxie tries to teach her daughter the importance of being sensible, especially in a racist and sexist world. Following the common cultural expectation for black women in the post-World War II era, Maxie chose to remain in the home and be wholly domestic. Many black women stayed home in some cases because jobs were often given only to men, and black women were forced out of the workforce. Therefore, Maxie tries to teach Annie from her

own experiences about negotiating the racial discrimination she surely will encounter as a black woman in a racist, public world, and how to seek ways to offset the solitary, mundane lifestyle of private domesticity.

The tension in Maxie's voice when she speaks to her daughter derives from the angst she feels as a black woman raising a girl who fails to understand how racism works in society and invades the home. In the final stanza, Maxie worries over the problems Annie will face if she does not develop more practical views on men and love. However, Maxie's expresses these worries in an *inner* voice that Annie does not hear:

Her mother thought at her full well,
In inner voice not like a bell
(Which though not social has a ring
Akin to wrought bedeviling)
But like an oceanic thing:
 What do you guess I am?
 You've lots of jacks and strawberry jam.
And you don't have to go to bed, I remark,
With two dill pickles in the dark,
Nor prop what hardly calls you honey
And gives you only a little money. (85)

Maxie expresses her frustrations through private thoughts, and her experiences never reach Annie because rather than *speaking* to Annie, Maxie "thought at her full well,/In inner voice not like a bell," and these thoughts are vast and unfocused "like an oceanic thing." Maxie has consciously and deliberately chosen not to tell Annie exactly how she

feels. Although Maxie has arranged her own life in order to nurture Annie and provide a home in which her daughter can grow into a confident, knowing woman, her determination not to speak to her daughter will cause Annie to grow up without the benefit of her mother's experience. Maxie asks her daughter, "What do you guess I am," a question that not only challenges Annie's dismissiveness, but also amounts to an acknowledgement of Maxie's domesticated lifestyle as a kind of objectification. The question is profound, for Maxie does not ask "who" Annie thinks she is, but "what." The distinction exposes Maxie's awareness of Annie's view of her mother as beneath her and Maxie's anger at being treated as a "what." However, Maxie gets the last word in this exchange. She sternly reminds Annie of how she has sacrificed to provide her with "lots of jacks and strawberry jam," thus ensuring Annie's comfort and happiness. Maxie trivializes Annie's dreams of splendor, and transforms them to childhood pleasures akin to "jacks" and "strawberry jam."

The final two lines of the poem reveal bitterness behind Maxie's words. Maxie describes *her* husband who is not a "who" but a "what." He is not an equal partner; rather, he is nothing more than a source of "little money." Attempting to teach her stubborn daughter to always remain self-sufficient, independent, and smart-minded about men, Maxie asserts that Annie should never have to know hardship or go to bed hungry "with two dill pickles in the dark." Disbelievingly, Maxie tells Annie that she did not raise her daughter to "prop" a man who gives her neither love nor financial support—although "little money" from men is what Maxie herself has endured. Brooks creates a poem that describes, even commiserates with, the frustrated thoughts of a mother unable to relate to her daughter, but which nevertheless clearly distinguishes between their views

on tradition, men, love, and responsibility and frankly chooses Annie's untraditional views over Maxie's traditional ones.

As a text in the modernist tradition, *Annie Allen* goes beyond what was possible in the nineteenth-century—the representation of interiority. Rather than show a daughter who is compliant with her mother's teachings, as was the experience between girl figures and their (surrogate) mothers in the newspaper articles, novels, and instructional manuals of earlier eras, Brooks resists this traditional rhetoric and displays the opposite: she expresses the inner feelings of a mother unable to reach her daughter, and a daughter who does not hear her mother's frustrations and will not accept her second-hand experience, choosing instead to learn from her own experience. This mother-daughter tension assesses the inevitable strain or void between the practical traditions of the old and the optimistic, self-assertive visions of the young. In contrast to Floyd's "dutiful" girl figures in *Floyd's Flowers*, Brooks offers a vision of the daughter who is "undutiful" as a radical break from a tradition of progress grounded in propriety and decorum. Brooks reflects on this break with tradition as painful and not without its costs for daughters as well as for mothers; nonetheless, she offers the "undutiful" daughter as a critique of the earlier master conduct narrative of conformity.

In her piece titled "Anger So Flat," Claudia Tate claims that Annie is actually silenced by the affection and nurturance of her mother, and that Maxie stifles Annie's spirit and "drives her imagination underground" (142). According to Tate, Maxie is unable to nurture Annie's emerging spirit, while Annie is unable to explain her imaginative longings to her mother. Therefore, Annie suppresses her anger and her discontent and, as Tate suggests, conceals her desires within herself, "flattening them,

denying them visible, surface expression” (143). Annie retreats, and her outward aggression resurfaces not in words or actions but in daydreams, where she “frolics with imaginative sprites, finds adventure among embellished commonplace objects in the recesses of her mind” (144). With this emerging duality in Annie’s character—her “external outward expression of inactivity, acquiescence, and resignation” versus her inner life of “willful adventure” and desires for an autonomous, “stupendous” self—Brooks voices Annie’s suppressed emotions. I argue that Annie does retreat into her own imagination, but ultimately schools that imagination by her own instructive experience and thus manages to synthesize reality and imagination.

Critiquing Conformism

In “the parents: people like our marriage: Maxie and Andrew,” Brooks critiques the stifling teachings handed down by parents, particularly teachings that promote insecure, bland ways of living life and running a household. She scrutinizes, in particular, the restrictive influence that parents exert on their daughters by exposing them to their own closeted lifestyle, characterized by grim conservatism and compliance with societal expectations. Such a lifestyle, according to Brooks, compromises a black girl’s development.

Brooks paints a sobering picture of Annie’s parents’ mundane existence. Maxie and Andrew live daily routines that reveal that they, as a couple, have lost their drive for life and impulse for vitality. The resulting complacency has damaging effects on their child.

Clogged and soft and sloppy eyes

Have lost the light that bites or terrifies.

There are no swans and swallows any more.

The people settled for chicken and shut the door.

But one by one

They got things done:

Watch for porches as you pass

And prim low fencing pinching in the grass.

Pleasant custards sit behind

The white Venetian blind. (86)

The parents have lost their grace, and their view is obstructed by routine and the need to take care of a family. No longer do Maxie and Andrew make an impression; no longer are they beautiful; no longer do they stand out. Instead, they live closeted lives shut off from society, with “clogged” eyes that are no longer able to claim a fresh perspective. Indeed, their “soft” eyes suggest submission; they have relinquished their own visions for the practicalities of life or those of others. Their visual perception has lost its sting or “the light that bites.” The heavy, round “o’s” repeated in “clogged,” “soft” and “sloppy” eyes insinuate a careless, loose way of observing the world. The “o’s” replace the carefree lightness of the “i’s” in “light that bites,” a phrase whose rhyme conveys that the parents no longer take risks, nor do they do anything that excites or terrifies them. The double “g’s” and “p’s” in “clogged” and “sloppy” refer back to the double letters in “birth in a narrow room” (“blurred and stupendous. Wanted and unplanned”). As with these double letters in “the birth,” Brooks manipulates form to express the parents’ anxiety and

discomfort with an unequal society and its effect on their lives.⁸⁶ Maxie and Andrew shut themselves off from the world, and they live in complacency rather than make their own impression upon the world. The parents can offer little to their daughter concerning resistance against conformity; rather, their acquiescence prevents Annie's development into a self-reliant woman.

Brooks sustains her critical appraisal of Annie's parents with bird imagery that emphasizes the parents' loss of vitality and also warns Annie of the possibility of a fate similar to her parents. In this household, "there are no swans and swallows anymore." By extension, one understands that Maxie and Andrew must once have been full of grace and movement like those of swans and swallows, whose respective long necks and long wings create unusual beauty and elegant flight, evoking confidence and freedom rather than rigidity and rootedness. The movement of both birds speaks to a versatility and vivacity that the parents, who have "settled for chicken and shut the door," no longer possess. Consumption of the chicken expresses the further depletion of their vitality. The chicken suggests that the parents have turned to the practical side of life, as represented by a common meal that must be cooked.

The short, clipped, declarative sentences in the verse, "one by one/They got things done," convey frustrated hopes and a rote list of duties completed. The parents fix the porch. They mend the fence. The lengthening and descending of the lines in the final verse emulate the visual appearance of this fence, which encloses the parents. The parents

⁸⁶In an interview, poet Paul Angle asked Brooks whether the poet is ever affected by social unrest. She responded, "The poet, first and foremost, an individual with a personal vision, is also a member of society. What effects society affects the poet. So I, starting out, usually in the grip of a high and private suffusion, may find by the time I have arrived at a last line that there is quite some public clamor in my product" (Engle 19). See Paul Engle, "An Interview with Gwendolyn Brooks, 1967," *Conversations with Gwendolyn Brooks*, ed. Gloria Wade Gales (Jackson: University Press of Mississippi, 2003), 13-25.

succumb to conformity, obligation, and regulation as the shut door finalizes their untimely defeat. The parents have withdrawn from life, acquiesced to inhibition, and are unable to make an impact.

Further illustrating Annie's aversion to the life her parents have chosen, Brooks deploys images of their captivity: the parents remain trapped and hidden in their home. Spiritual confinement, Brooks suggests, is one's fate if one conforms to societal expectations. Vivid phrases such as the "prim low fencing pinching in the grass" express the artificiality that encloses Maxie and Andrew. Their world is not warm and open but closed off, as suggested by the "pleasant custards" cooling behind "the white Venetian blinds." The parents have insulated themselves from both the frightening and the exciting. Docile and domesticated, they are alienated even from regular society. In this way, their confinement bears the stamp of racism. Maxie and Andrew withdraw because an unequal society confines them to certain spaces and prevents certain possibilities. Their enclosure behind the "Venetian blind" reflects the result of conforming to an image they feel is acceptable in a racist society. They sit behind blinds in a shut-off home to protect themselves against an unwelcoming, unequal society.

The tone of Brooks's language suggests the degree to which she resists the restrained and enclosed lifestyle of parents who model complacency, and whose hopelessness and defeat fail to provide their daughter with the inner strength she will need to face life as a woman. Brooks thus offers a two-pronged critique: one shows how a risk-free and empty life leads to a mundane existence; the other shows how a closeted environment will also stifle the imagination of a young girl.

Advocating Active Participation

At the end of “Notes,” Brooks thoroughly rejects a cautious lifestyle by encouraging black women to take risks and actively participate in relationships and life decisions. In “do not be afraid of no” and “my own sweet good,” Brooks openly urges women to be proactive and embrace adventure in love and in life rather than take the safe route. In these poems, Annie has left home, become a young woman who has left behind her world of imagination, and learned from her own experience to take an active stance through relationships with men and encounters with racism. She experiences the public when she goes to a Vaudeville show in “downtown vaudeville.” Through her grandmother’s death in “throwing out the flowers,” Annie learns of loss. In these latter poems, Annie prepares for the struggles she will experience as a woman and a mother.

Nowhere are Brooks’s critique of complacency and her subversion of conduct rhetoric more resounding than in “do not be afraid of no.” In this poem, Brooks opens with a declarative statement to advocate an active approach to life. Annie is the subject of the poem, and is told “do not be afraid of no,/Who has so far so very far to go;”. Brooks warns Annie, in a lyrical manner, that she has a long life ahead of her and she must learn now how to negotiate encounters with racism *and* heartache. Inserted near the end of “Notes” to demonstrate how Annie finally understands the importance of maintaining a strong, defiant voice to avoid settling for less, vivid images illustrate the consequences of acquiescence—the dead ends, the death, the powerlessness.

“Do not be afraid of no,
Who has so far so very far to go”:

New caution to occur

To one whose inner scream set her to cede, for softer lap-
ping and smooth fur!

Whose esoteric need

Was merely to avoid the nettle, to not-bleed.

Stupid, like a street

That beats into a dead end and dies there, with nothing
Left to reprimand or meet.

And like a candle fixed

Against dismay and countershine of mixed

Wild moon and sun. And like

A flying furniture, or bird with lattice wing; or gaunt thing,
a-stammer down a nightmare neon peopled with con-
dor, hawk and shrike.

To say yes is to die

A lot or a little. The dead wear capably their wry

Enameled emblems. They smell.

But that and that they do not altogether yell is all that we

Know well.

It is brave to be involved,
To be not fearful to be unresolved.

Her new wish was to smile

When answers took no airships, walked a while. (92-93)

The images in this poem fall into four major categories, each of which teaches Annie how to say “no” and direct her resistance not toward her parents, but toward the realities of racism and prejudice she is yet to meet. First, images of clothing suggest acquiescence and deception. Annie’s unwillingness to speak out against injustice, for example, envelops her in “smooth fur” and “softer lappings.” In addition to signifying the lure of compliance, these garments represent finery that masks insufficiency. The cost of such a weakness of character is formidable. Brooks warns Annie that her penchant for “avoid[ing] the nettle” will result in nothing less than death; Annie’s inability to let out her “inner scream” will cause her to “cede,” to surrender, and to succumb.

Second, Brooks peppers the poem with images that suggest an equation between fear and negation. For Brooks, succumbing to silence and fear is being “stupid, like a street / That beats into a dead end and dies.” In being afraid to say “no,” one reaches a dead end in life, unable to express any sentiment, whether as anger or agreement. Brooks claims that to live in fear is in essence to die—an outcome that she deems nothing less than “stupid.” Moreover, to be afraid is also to produce no results, as in a candle that is “fixed / Against dismay and countershine of mixed / Wild moon and sun.” Such an image reinforces a canceling out of life. A candle that shines against wild moon and sun is never seen and will gradually become extinguished. Furthermore, the diminutive, man-made light of a candle placed against the abstract “dismay” and the powerful “Wild moon and

sun,” which are large sources of natural light, will likely never be seen because the light of a candle has little power.

Images of death turn into surreal visions that become increasingly vivid and horrific and emphasize the consequences of submission. To be fearful is to be like “flying furniture or bird with lattice wing”; furniture does not fly nor do lattice wings enable a bird to fear. Similarly, Brooks writes that being afraid is to be like a “gaunt thing,” an image that suggests being on the verge of death. This demise is further accentuated as a “nightmare,” in which an emaciated, bony bird falls toward its death among “con/dor hawk and shrike”—savage, strong birds of prey. With their sharp, hooked beaks, condors, hawks, and shrikes feast on this weaker bird. Although the nightmare is a dream that expresses subconscious fears, the actual fears are real and haunting. The repetitious use of bird imagery—also found in “the parents : people like our marriage: Maxie and Andrew” where the parents are described as swans, swallows, and chickens—reveals how the parents’ compliance turns them into targets for birds of prey who willingly ravage weaker, meeker, non-resistant birds.

Brooks reinforces her message to take risks in life with sensory imagery that she hopes will deliver her message to a wide audience. In asserting that to comply is “to die / A lot or a little,” Brooks suggests that small pieces of one’s self will diminish if one refuses to take a stance. Continuing to focus on the senses, Brooks states that the dead, those who refuse to say no, “wear capably their wry / Enameled emblems.” These are visual markers of acquiescence. The meaning of these enameled emblems echoes that of “soft lappings” and “smooth fur.” These objects provide a glossy, protective finish. Like tokens, they are lacquered objects symbolic of a mask or shield that advertise capability

and a need for perfection over assertiveness. In connoting that these glossy covers mislead and prevent awareness, Brooks criticizes people who rely on such objects: “They smell.” The soft lappings of deception, the enameled emblems of approval, and the smell of consent are sensory images that attract the reader’s attention and emphasize Brooks’s message against conformity. She ends her series of examples by asserting that “all we know well” is that those who conform “do not altogether yell.” This simple rhyme telegraphs Brooks’s frustration and contempt for those who do not assert their voices.

Having resoundingly critiqued passivity and silence, Brooks emphasizes the bravery of risk-taking as a key quality in a strong woman: “It is brave to be involved, / To be not fearful / to be unresolved.” For Brooks, bravery is to be unresolved, in the sense of being ready to meet any contingency—flexible but firm and determined in purpose. Annie understands that she must remain grounded, resistant, and speak without trepidation. Negative terminology (“*not* fearful,” “*unresolved*”) mirrors the poem’s title, “do not be afraid of no,” which uses a double negative and thus reinforces the affirmative—to say *yes*. Brooks’s rhetorical maneuver of turning a negative into a positive resonates powerfully with her persistent message. Thus, as “Notes” nears its end, Annie comes to understand what it means to be resistant and to say “no.” She is a little older, a little wiser, and a little bolder. She is better prepared for the struggles she will face as an older woman.

The final poem of “Notes” is similar to “do not be afraid of no” through its critique of externally-imposed power in black girls’ socialization and its call for resistance, boldness, and action. Describing the emotional pain a woman experiences as a result of her involvement with a wayward man, “my own sweet good” suggests that

romantic relationships, whether hurtful or not, are a necessary part of a black girl's transition to womanhood and that they too are affected by societal inequalities. The poem reveals that wisdom gained through one's own experience at an early age can enable a black girl to recognize when to leave a hurtful relationship. As the poem begins, Annie sits at home waiting for her lover to return. She provides a detailed account of her boyfriend's philandering and of the hurt she feels toward a man who no longer needs her.

“Not needing, really, my own sweet good,
To dimple you everyday,
For knowing you roam like a gold half-god
And your golden promise so gay.

“Somewhere, you put on your overcoat,
And others mind what you say
Ill-knowing your route rides to me roundabout.
For promise so golden and gay.

“Somewhere, you lattice your berries with bran,
Readying for riding my way.
You kiss all the great-lipped girls that you can.
If only they knew that it's little today
And nothing tomorrow to take or to pay,
For sake of a promise so golden, gay,
For promise so golden and gay.” (95)

Annie paints a picture of a womanizer without substance who charms with his false promises and antics. Annie's youthful *lack* of wisdom and practicality, however, prevents her from leaving the relationship, and enables the man to diminish "her own sweet good."

"My own sweet good" teaches the consequences of dismissing the experience of one's mother and the necessity of learning from one's own experiences what the experiences of one's mother could not teach her. As Mary Helen Washington notes, "sometimes Brooks's women manage to be "decently wild" as girls, but they grow up to be worried and fearful, or fretful over the loss of a man" (Washington, "Taming," 397). The poem relates back to "maxie allen," where Annie, unwilling to absorb her mother's warnings about unfaithful men, finds herself trapped within her own fairytale. Unlike the hopeful, happy fairytale endings in the *Christian Recorder* girlhood stories, Annie's romance does not conclude with a happy ending. The ballad form of "my own sweet good" reinforces the imaginative life that Annie longed for as a girl. She wanted to be in love with a charming, lacquered man, yet her unhappiness suggests the cost of fulfilling this desire. As in "do not be afraid of no," clothing imagery in the form of the man's overcoat suggests hidden incentives, a false and capricious nature, and a deficient core. This man womanizes through lies, as suggested when he dons his coat "and the others mind what [he] say[s]." Annie describes how the man takes her for granted and constantly leaves her to "roam like a gold half-god" while he seeks other women and offers them false promises that are "golden" and "gay." Along with the ballad format, Brooks's melodic, repetitious rhyme schemes—as in "so golden so gay"—suggest the superficiality and emptiness of the man's promises.⁸⁷ Although Annie continues to

⁸⁷I draw my reading of this ballad from Gladys Williams's "The Ballads of Gwendolyn Brooks," in which she argues that Brooks "has written nine ballads" (207), which include "Sadie and Maud," "Ballad

discount this man, knowing all too well the lifestyle he leads, she, like other women before her, falls prey to his overtures. Annie's "own sweet good" may be the virtuous and honorable image that she upholds, but the man clearly does not appreciate it. Thus, as this poem illustrates, Annie must face the consequences of having lived in her imaginative world and learn from her own experience.

Conclusion

Through the lens of Annie's coming-of-age and her interaction with her mother, Brooks put a human face on the necessity of comprehending and building adequate defenses against the inhumane violence of racial oppression and economic inequality that affected many black families post-World War II. This violence is evoked through the voice and experience of the black girl figure and *felt* through Brooks's poetics—in stiff, uncompromising stanzas, truncated sentences, boiled-down thoughts, and the expression of a clipped, stifled, muffled rage. These voices depict the private relationships of people *without* power that are often ignored and unrecognized. Brooks insists on the importance of hearing these marginal voices—black, urban, poor, female—to understand the realities that many black families experienced in post-World War II America. Though Brooks presents lives that are hindered by a lack of economic opportunity and material wealth, she shows how the black girl figure is a resilient one. Brooks's political intervention is to

of Pearl May Lee," and "the ballad of chocolate Mabbie," the ballad of Rudolph Reed," The Last Quatrain of the ballad of Emmett Till" among others. I add to her list my analysis of "my own sweet good," a ballad that she does not mention, and which has received little attention. See Gladys Williams, "The Ballads of Gwendolyn Brooks," *A Life Distilled: Gwendolyn Brooks, Her Poetry and Fiction*. Ed. Maria K. Mootry and Gary Smith. Chicago: University of Illinois Press. 1987. (205-223). See also Maria K. Mootry, "'Chocolate Mabbie' and 'Pearl May Lee': Gwendolyn Brooks and the Ballad Tradition." *A Life Distilled: Gwendolyn Brooks, Her Poetry and Fiction*. Ed. Maria K. Mootry and Gary Smith. Chicago: University of Illinois Press. 1987. 278-293.

convey these frustrations and put a human face on the everyday, lived experiences and thoughts of the working-class poor through the singular journey of experience and self-discovery of one black girl.

Brooks appropriates the forms and conventions of modernism as a political tool to empower her readers and make known the experience of black girlhood. The black girl functions as a model of racial progress because she is the most beleaguered figure of American cultural mythology—triple-obstacled and powerless by virtue of race, gender, and youth, and yet the most important figure to lift up symbolically. The poems in “Notes” emphasize the power of a black girl’s imagination and the importance of rejecting parental and other external teachings. The poems advocate that the black girl privileges action over caution in creating her own life, and nurtures an awareness of racial discrimination in preparation for womanhood. In conveying the necessity of nurturing a black female consciousness in order to operate in a racist society, Brooks’s poems revolutionize traditional literary form and invent new rhetorical patterns to speak directly to the experience of black girls.

In many ways reminiscent of the conduct rhetoric of the nineteenth and early twentieth century, Brooks’s didacticism nevertheless overturns many nostrums of the past century. Brooks offers a new interpretation of the black girl that departs from nineteenth-century rhetoric. No longer is the black girl figure lauded as a model of advancement and achievement, as with Phillis Wheatley, Lucy Terry, and Sylvia in the *Liberator*’s “The Little Black Girl.” Her coming-of-age from slave girl to educated poet through the nurturance and tutelage of white surrogate-mother figures solidified a representative citizenship model of the black girl figure as *capable* of transformation and progress. The

benevolent relationship between slave girl and white surrogate mother figure introduced to American literature a model of citizenship that privileged the white woman as the nurturing Republican Mother.

Because a citizenship model has been achieved in earlier decades, Brooks liberates the black girl from an instructive role. Her didactic role existed in articles on girlhood in the early black press and in narratives written by black women writers to express the citizenship concerns of black populations in the North and South in the antebellum period. To convey the citizenship concerns for black populations in the North, black male editors incorporated the black girl's image in articles as orphaned, unprotected, and, thus, susceptible to violence to mobilize black readers, heighten the urgency for their appeal to be treated as men, and gain citizenship rights of voting, property ownership, and protection of their families. In addition to claims for citizenship as their natural rights as men, editors sought equality based upon their character, so that the dominant culture would recognize their inclusion in the body politic as *mannered* citizens. Thus, editors assigned the *black* mother to nurture the black girl and refine her image through tutelage in dress, manners, and education. This focus on educating and nurturing the black family redirected citizenship aims towards an emphasis on character.

To express the experiences of free black girls and women in the antebellum North and enslaved black girls in the South, black women took advantage of the black girl's presence in print culture and adopted her image as a model to tell their *own* courageous stories of freedom. In their representations, the black girl remained victimized, beaten, and abused, as this experience was still true for many black women, but she acquired a willful determination to fight back against her oppressors. Frado in *Our Nig* and Linda

Brent in *Incidents in the Life of a Slave Girl* make decisions that affect the directions of their lives. No longer willing to be victims of violent physical or sexual abuse, both Frado and Linda willfully resist further oppression and protect themselves not only through their bodies but through their minds.

After Emancipation, black writers of *Christian Recorder* girlhood stories deployed the indeterminately raced girl as an expression of reconstruction efforts to support the viable black family and the hope of a unified America. When Reconstruction efforts failed, many black activists claimed the black girl as a post-Reconstruction model to represent the everyday lives of black Americans, as in Mrs. N. F. Mossell's advice columns, and as a potential figure of uplift and activism, as in Frances Harper's serialized novel, *Trial and Triumph*. Mrs. N. F. Mossell and Frances Harper offered parents and black girls warnings and advice on how to prepare girls for their increasingly visible role in the public sphere. In conduct books written by black activists at the turn of the century, such as *Floyd's Flowers, or Duty and Beauty for Colored Children*, representations of black girls moved away from activist representations to an image in which black girls became educated and refined, but returned to the domestic sphere in deference to black male leadership. Brooks re-constructed the black girl's image from these earlier, didactic representations by manipulating poetic form to convey the complexity of her girlhood subjectivity as an essential component of protest.

Brooks's recommendations for the way the black girl in a racist society should behave are, in light of the earlier instructional stories discussed in the previous chapters, quite revolutionary. Brooks revises the home, the kitchen, and motherhood as sites that stifle a black girl's imagination and purpose. Her modernist poetics constitute in form and

advocate in substance an alternative to the life lived in silence, without power or resistance, and its fatal consequences and limitations—the deployment of the black girl's imagination disciplined by her own experience as a crucial site for self-empowerment in a racist society. In this way, Brooks offers a renewed portrayal of this pivotal figure in African American literature.

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