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## The Trope of Domesticity: Neo-Slave Narrative Satire on Patriarchy and Black Masculinity

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THE TROPE OF DOMESTICITY: NEO- SLAVE NARRATIVE SATIRE ON  
PATRIARCHY AND BLACK MASCULINITY

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Bachelor of Arts in English

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THIS THESIS HAS BEEN APPROVED  
FOR THE DEPARTMENT OF ENGLISH  
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Dedicated to everyone who helped me achieve this goal.

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THE TROPE OF DOMESTICITY: NEO- SLAVE NARRATIVE SATIRE ON  
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DARRELL E. COLEMAN

**ABSTRACT**

The tradition of African-American satire developed from within the African village, provided a creative model of uncensored rhetorical criticism from within the limited discursive terrains of antebellum slavery to well into today's African-American artists' often satiric descriptions of contemporary society. Evolved from the nineteenth-century first-person slave narrative, the impulse of the neo-slave narrative is two fold: (1) cultural (re) appropriation of the dominant mythology, to correct the plantation pastoral, which had really been out there since 1870 to the 20<sup>th</sup> century (e.g., *Gone with the Wind* and *The Song of the South*), thus to recapture the image of the plantation from the popular imagination laden with negative stereotypes; (2) assess the lasting cultural meaning of slavery, in spite of America's constantly changing social climate. For the neo-slave narratives of Octavia Butler's *Kindred* (1979) and Charles Johnson's *Oxherding Tale* (1982), the social climate of the nineteen-sixties and early seventies, dominated by social division—punctuated by Black Nationalism's essentialism and state sanctioned reinforcement of social division the *Moynihan Report* – informs their unusual pairing of *satire* with the slave neo-narrative to examine black *masculinity* through the *domestic* narrative of the family. To differentiate and interpret the *satiric* perspective in *Kindred* and *Oxherding Tale*, it is through Mikhail Bakhtin's theories of *dialogism*, *polyphony*, *heteroglossia*, and *carnival* that establishes the critical focus of this thesis on the complex relationship between family and society, in their varying expressions of

destabilizing *patriarchal* discourse and its concomitant-- Black Nationalist *masculine* authority.



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## CHAPTER I

### INTRODUCTION

#### **Richard Pryor: Militant Satirist, Fall From Grace**

“ You want to know where black humor came from? It started on the slave ships. Cat was rowing and dude says, “ What you laughin’ about?” [The first cat replied,] “ Yesterday, I was a king.”-- Richard Pryor, *Pryor Convictions, and Other Life Sentences*

I want to begin by commenting on the above quote from African-American social critic, writer, actor, and stand-up comedian-- the late Richard Pryor. Pryor’s greatest influence was in his controversial standup comedic routines as an artistic form of cultural representation (hailed as brutally honest in some circles, and labeled as just plain “vulgar” in others) that often examined topical contemporary issues of race and gender in the context of the turbulent social climate during the mid nineteen-sixties to mid-nineteen-seventies, considered the early creative years of African American writers Octavia Butler and Charles Johnson’s development. A period when definitions associated with African-American culture that were inspired by an ethos of integration (and accommodation) were being usurped by an atmosphere of Black cultural Nationalist’s assertions of “cultural essentialism” were being advanced in direct opposition and

antithetical to the “Social Constructionist” who were more aligned with the Civil Rights Movement and American Progressive’s positions for social change.<sup>1</sup> For instance, the theme of the late sixties became “black power,” and akin to the aforementioned Richard Pryor quote, that power symbolized by a “black fist,” was a *black male* power. Notwithstanding the apparent inescapable differences between the oral delivery of stand-up comedy and the discursive practices of African American literature, one telling similarity characteristic of both is in their capacity to embrace a range of black cultural and artistic issues to the extent that uncritical acceptance of static notions like homogeneity and other forms of authoritarian rhetoric are open to critical interrogation. In some instances, this type of *decentering* interrogation, in post-structuralist terms, rightly called *signifying* by Henry Louis Gates, Jr. designates verbal skill in reversing, revising, or parodying another’s speech or discourse and thus provides a literary tradition through “rhetorical self-definition” (*Figures In Black* 242). Gates point is that the connection between African American *signifying* use of language as a rhetorical device that articulates the complexity of black life through mediation on the literal and the figurative constitutes a sustained multidimensional response to this notion of black identity.

As an example of the type of pliability of *signifying* implied by Gates, Pryor regularly would slip and slide back and forth between character types in his sketches, where in one portrait he would ventriloquize the voice of “de man,” trumpeting stereotypical markers of white patriarchal dominant cultural identity, while in the next

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<sup>1</sup> See Frederic Jameson, “Periodizing the 60s,” in *The 60’s Without Apology*, ed. Sohnya Sayres, Anders Stephanson, Stanley Aronowitz, and Jameson (Minneapolis: U of Minnesota P, 1984) 181, 193.

instant, he would transfigure into “a brother” spouting off animated expletives about all that “de man” has robbed him of (in essence his *manhood*); only seconds later to depict that same “brother” in “de man’s” office peppering every phrase with a “yeh sa boss,” and a “you sho is right boss.” This like many other Pryor character sketches performed before mixed audiences, were devoted to critiquing the various voices (combining the political and comedic) lodged in the American culture of the mid-nineteen-sixties to mid-nineteen-seventies through satire. Whereas it would be rather farfetched to categorize Richard Pryor as a Black Nationalist, particularly since he is on record as having often lampooned the Black Panther Party and his “brazen” fetish for “white women” as a satire on the anguished domestic relationship between African-American women and men in his comedy sketches<sup>2</sup>. Yet, not exclusive to his invocation of the “slave ship,” in the aforementioned quote, but coupled with his implications of a nostalgic tableau of a lost patriarchal regality, privileging black masculinity back in Africa, one finds identifiable projections of the black nationalist’s patriarchal ideology<sup>3</sup> embedded, masked in his brand of satiric humor that is quite insightful for the critical arc of this paper.

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<sup>2</sup> See Brian Flota, “What The Man Tryin’ To Lay On You Is Porkitis: The Literary Connections Of Richard Pryor In Berkeley, 1969-1971” in *African American Humor, Irony, and Satire: Ishmael Reed, Satirically Speaking*. ed. Dana A. Williams.( New Castle, UK: Cambridge Scholars Publishing, 2007), 106-109.

<sup>3</sup> My usage of the term *ideology* is in accordance to Richard Wright’s definition from “Between Laughter and Tears”: “By ideology I mean “an ordered system of cultural symbols” and “symbolic actions” that represent “a coherent, comprehensive set of beliefs”” (Wright, qtd. in Tate 99).

## CHAPTER II

### SATIRIC TRADITIONS, NEO-SLAVE NARRATIVES, READING AND (RE) WRITING HISTORY

One may wonder, however, why African American writers would bring a satiric tradition to bear on the singular tragedy of chattel slavery, particularly since as a social condition best summarized by historian Orlando Patterson's argument that "[u]nder chattel slavery, the African imported to North America was divested as much as possible of his or her culture..." culminating in "social death" (qtd. in *The Norton* 155). An adequate rejoinder to the challenging nature of combining satire with the neo-slave narrative, however, begins with the significance of satire in its particular historical resonances rooted within African and African American cultures. For instance, on traditional occasions that required indirection to speak as loudly as direct criticism, to paraphrase according to Nobel Prize winning, Nigerian author and playwright Wole Soyinka<sup>4</sup>, if you had a problem with a neighboring tribe you would send out your satirist

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<sup>4</sup> Wolye Soyinka was Henry Louise Gates Jr.'s tutor at Cambridge.

that would make them feel so bad that they would want to just pack-up and leave. This statement is revealing in two ways. First, in the historical context of the African village, the impression one gets from Soyinka on the one hand is that the importance of the satirist was lodged in the legitimization of her/ his rhetorical power to persuasively defy the status quo; and, on the other hand, to dispel the colonialist notion of exotic primitive Africa, by portraying in the communal context a society with a hierarchy of recognizable social systems influenced by exclusionary practices. Ironically, in seventeenth-century America it was the articulation of a different set of exclusionary practices organized around ostracizing all Africans-- the 51<sup>st</sup> and 54<sup>th</sup> *Federalist Papers*-- that characterizes the historical framework for the bridge between African American satire and the neo-slave narrative. Fundamentally, the 54<sup>th</sup> extends the 51<sup>st</sup> theoretical framework by explicitly defining an elite property owning minority white males prerogative of reinforcing an inequitable distribution of power within the absurd language of “dividing” a human being under the 3/5<sup>th</sup> *Compromise*. Perhaps not as conspicuous in comic intent, and often beyond entertainment purposes, African American satire typically provided veiled expressions of protest through slave spirituals or “sorrow songs,” work songs, and the minstrel show<sup>5</sup>.

As cultural productions of the twentieth-century, neo-slave narratives are the most recent installment of a new mode of literary expression found in the long line of the slave narrative genre. Dating from the antebellum slave narratives, neo-slave narratives are considered modern or contemporary texts, explains literary critic Valerie Smith, that “

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<sup>5</sup> For a more comprehensive analysis of the satiric role inherent in the minstrel show see Mel Watkins, *On the Real Side: Laughing, Lying, and Signifying-: The Underground Tradition of African-American Humor*. (New York: Simon & Schuster, 1994).

...includes some of the most compelling fiction produced in the last fifty years, ” that “ has evolved to include texts set during the period of slavery as well as those set afterwards” (168). This view of the neo-slave narrative genre by Smith is indicative of the multifarious dimensions available under its first-person slave narrative approach, and its pliability in juxtaposing contemporary issues with plantation slavery. Whereas my application of the term “neo-slave narrative” is indebted to Bernard Bell, who is credited with the initial usage of the term “neo-slave narrative” in *The Afro-American Novel and Its Tradition* (1987), where he explains that the “neo-slave narratives” are “ residually oral, modern narratives of escape from bondage to freedom<sup>6</sup>,” but it is Ashraf H.A. Rushdy’s utilization of the term that my praxis is much more aligned with: neo-slave narratives are generally categorized as texts that “assume the form, adopt the conventions, and take on the first-person voice of the ante-bellum slave narrative,” (3).

As neo-slave narratives both, Octavia Butler’s *Kindred* (1979) and Charles Johnson’s *Oxherding Tale* (1982) demonstrate how contemporary fictions can adopt the historical phenomenon of slavery in addressing modern social concerns. And it is my position in essence that both Butler and Johnson operating under the rubric of *domesticity*<sup>7</sup>, are satirically interrogating both the presumptive findings of the *Moynihan*

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<sup>6</sup> See Bernard W. Bell, *The Afro-American Novel and Its Tradition* (1987; Amherst: U of Massachusetts P, 1989) 289; and Ashraf H.A. Rushdy, “Neo-Slave Narrative,” in *The Oxford Companion to African American Literature*, ed. William L. Andrews, Trudier Harris, and Frances Smith Foster (New York: Oxford UP, 1997) 533-35.

<sup>7</sup>According to Lora Romero, *Home Fronts: Domesticity And Its Critics In The Antebellum United States*. (Durham, NC: Duke UP, 1997), “Responding in part to Rousseau in her *Strictures on the Modern System of Female Education* (1799), British educator Hannah More (who is generally credited with the founding of *domestic* ideology) criticized her contemporaries for educating their daughter “for the world, and



*Report*, the merits of the black nationalist identity politics coming out of the nineteen-sixties and their relationship to black masculinity.

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not for themselves” ” (118).

### CHAPTER III

#### AN UNLIKELY MARRIAGE: SATIRE AND THE NEO- SLAVE NARRATIVE

In particular, Darryl Dickson-Carr in *African American Satire: The Sacredly Profane Novel* (2001), explores how slaves established a brand of satire on the plantation that protected them from direct retribution since “the ontological condition of most African Americans during the era of chattel slavery alone normally precluded the free and direct expression of the black individual ideas” (3). There was a code of conduct, or a code of discourse behind the slaves public displays of servility and masks of accommodation toward the master, that was both subversive in intent and steeped in the art of imitation. For example, Dickson-Carr notes how “African American satire’s earliest purpose in both oral and written form [abolitionist literature] was to lampoon the (il) logic of chattel slavery and racism itself...[and] expose the sheer absurdity of slavery itself” (4). Yet, despite African American satirist’s long and storied history of agitation against both America’s slave system and its lingering racist affects after Emancipation, acknowledgement of the importance African American satiric literature has fallen out of favor with twentieth-century critics of African American literature for several reasons.

With few exceptions, African American satirists were considered either advocates for a proscriptive authoritative system of governance, or they were deemed radical extremists dismissive of all humanity. And this state of affairs was rendered even more untenable by conflation of satire with stereotypical humor, as in the inability of the public to distinguish the former from the latter, and male satirists were branded as “sexist,” either due to the content of their material, or because of the sparse number of female satirists’ comments (Dickson-Carr (5)). Whereas, all of these points stand as contributing factors to satires’ relegation to the periphery of African American literary discussions, in particular as having outlived its usefulness to the contemporary plight of African-Americans; yet, the history of *satire* betrays a constantly changing genre, where each succeeding generation’s reinterpretation in its own time period served as material evidence to support emerging challenges to an older tradition or mode of *satire* (5). As Dustin Griffin notes in his *Satire: A Critical Reintroduction* (1994), “[o]ne result of broadening our recognition of satiric forms is to be reminded of satire’s immense and perhaps incomprehensible variety” (3). Griffin’s point of satire’s “incomprehensible variety” is extremely useful for this paper because it sheds light on the difficult problem of identifying what exactly is satiric terrain: A good point of departure is that *satire* does not rest on formal “censure” alone. Indeed, not to suggest that the genre of *satire* as a static, or fixed entity, occupying an unvarying space in the literary cosmos. After all, “if the etymology of “satire” begins with the Latin *satira* – a mix—then the satirical novel sits atop the generic mountain, mixing everything below it” stresses Dickson-Carr (8). Just as important for this discussion, Steven Weisenburger acknowledges that “...there once was a sense, prevalent in the sixties and dependent then on powerful sociopolitical

forces, that American culture was unfolding a new “age of satire” (2)<sup>8</sup>. Moreover, no form, notes the protagonist of Charles Johnson’s *Oxherding Tale* (1982) Andrew Hawkins, loses its ancestry; rather, as the form evolves, it accumulates layers of significance. And it is the charge of the modern writer, he continues, to “dig, dig, dig, -- call it spadework” if you will, but it’s deemed necessary to better understand the hidden secrets in the relationship between the history of form and the form history (119).

Similarly, continuing on this theme of literary indebtedness to the previous generation, the antebellum first-person slave narrative also underwent a period of transformation from the nineteenth-century to the twentieth-century. African American writers from the sixties, in what literary critic Ashraf H. Rushdy identified as “loosely imitating the original,” opened-up a new discourse on slavery’s enduring social consequences (13), as an extension of their relation to the long-standing literary tradition of the eighteenth and nineteenth-century slave narratives. The neo-slave narrative appeared at a time when the Civil Rights movement gave way to the Black Power movement of the sixties<sup>9</sup>, during a time of cultural reappropriation in response to the apocryphal romanticized images of plantation life (leftovers from the Reconstruction era): myths that featured, the benevolent “master” as the patriarch with his extend family of stereotyped African American colorful characters complacent with life on the plantation (“the happy darkies, etc.”). In response a rising contingent of African-American’s writers lent themselves to arguing for a more complex, balanced and gender

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<sup>8</sup> Steven Weisenburger, *Fables of Subversion*.

<sup>9</sup> Sohnya Sayres...[et al]. *The 60's Without Apology*. (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1984).

sensitive reinterpretation of America's peculiar institution: "[t]hrough the union of history, the fantastic, and oppositional politics, the contemporary author, the slave protagonists, and the text itself claim an authority over the past that traditional history, realistic historical novels, and postmodern texts cannot, or, in the case of the latter, will not," asserts Timothy A. Spaulding (77).

While Margaret Walker's *Jubilee* (1966) marks the entry point of the neo-slave narrative in what Rushdy and Spaulding formulate as a new discourse on slavery, it is the ability of this new discourse on slavery to achieve synthesis with the subversive side of satire that supports the second premise of this paper. Where this insistence on the destabilizing potential of satire, epitomized by Weisenburger: "it functions to subvert hierarchies of value and reflect suspiciously on all ways of making meaning, including its own" (3), converges with a particular pattern of engagement to embrace what Kiley and Shuttleworth in *Satire from Aesop to Buchwald* commends as a "literary manner which blends a critical attitude with humor and wit to ends that institutions or humanity may be improved" (479), in acts of subversion that can be viewed as the metaphorical lynchpin between satire and the neo-slave narrative. In other words, an alliance between subversive satire and the neo-slave narrative are well suited to mine the possibilities represented in the historical phenomenon of slavery and its enduring social consequences. Further, it is Bakhtin's theory--which reverses traditional hierarchy and privileges "dialogic" discourse that reflects this merger of the satiric perspective with the neo-slave narrative. Thus, the satiric within the neo-slave narrative can be viewed as a rubric for critics and artists of color, whereby the potential *dymythologizing*, to use Cornel West's

phrase, of American and African American culture-- in critical examination of both their profoundly hierarchically patriarchal heritages – can exist.

Although an array of critical studies on the neo-slave narrative have entered the ongoing discussion regarding African American slavery and its legacy, such as Ashraf Rushdy's *Neo-Slave Narratives: Studies in the Social Logic of a Literary Form* (1999) and *Remembering Generations: Race and Family in Contemporary African American Fiction* (2001), Caroline Rody's *The Daughter's Return: African American and Caribbean Women's Fictions of History* (2001), Angelyn Mitchell's *The Freedom to Remember: Narrative, Slavery, and Gender in Contemporary Black Women's Fiction* (2002), Arlene R. Keizer's *Black Subjects: Identity Formation in the Contemporary Narrative of Slavery* (2004), and A. Timothy Spaulding's *Re-Forming the Past: History, the Fantastic, and the Postmodern Slave Narrative* (2005), yet the impulse towards satire has been given slight mention if at all (with notable exceptions of Ishmael Reed's *Flight to Canada* (1976), and Charles Johnson's *Oxherding Tale* (1982)).

Whereas the tenor of most of the critical discussions of neo-slave narratives, ranging from an analysis of the conventions of the genre found in the various narratives, to the process of black identity formation as a theoretical discourse, reveals a somberness congruent with the weighty subject of slavery. For example, in Timothy Spaulding's analysis while using postmodernism as his focal point, neo-narratives “opt for a more serious approach even as they displace realism as the primary narrative mode of history” in presenting a counter discourse (4). And in her problematizing the formations of

resistance and black subjectivity, rather than limiting her focus to neo-narratives of slavery found in the U.S., Arlene R. Keizer acknowledges the dispersion of narratives of slavery, in that they "... have emerged from every site in the diaspora where people of African descent are present in significant numbers" (4).

I must concede that the deep struggle for a sense of self-determination and commitment to freedom of the slave narratives and neo-slave narratives do lend themselves most often to a humorless critical interpretive posture. Nor am I suggesting that there is direct correspondence between the neo-slaver narrative and satire evolving simultaneously in the sixties as a form of joint subversive discourse. But what I am suggesting is that Carr, Griffin, Weisenburger, Kiley and Shuttelworth's fluid understanding of what *now* constitutes the satiric perspective, coupled with Rushdy's and Spaulding's African American socio-political literary analysis of the neo-slave narrative provides profound insight in making a claim for compatibility of the complex dynamics between satire and the neo-slave narrative. And given Bakhtin's theory of many voices foregrounded in the novel, where each novel allows you to bring many voices together in a world of representation, it is invaluable for illuminating the provisional and variable mappings, which brings a satiric tradition to bear on the singular tragedy of chattel slavery through the neo-slave narrative.

In short, the most significant theme of this paper consists of drawing attention to and emphasizing the historical complexities of the sixties impacting Butler's *Kindred* and Johnson's *Oxherding* inventiveness within the *Janus-faced* genre of the neo-slave

narrative (contemporary authors looking back to the antebellum slave narrative to address present-day social issues). This theme, however, neither romanticizes nor idealizes mainstream culture, nor that of marginalized culture presented in both texts. Hence, both texts are mediating the cultural relationship of white and black America in their distinctive satiric techniques to represent slavery as a historical phenomenon that has lasting cultural meanings and enduring social consequences into their contemporary time period<sup>10</sup>. Whereas few scholars have addressed the correspondence between the two<sup>11</sup>, the intersection between satire and the neo-slave narrative provides critical impetus to explore the relationship between the American social narrative of family<sup>12</sup> under the rubric of domesticity and black masculinity. By extension, the first questions that I would like to set up is to what extent can the discursive practices around the social structures of family and race, as constructions that supports patriarchy found in both Octavia E.

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<sup>10</sup> Several critics, such as Ashraf H. Rushdy, Gary Storhoff, and Robert Crossley, among others, observe in their analysis of the texts how Butler and Johnson both dramatize the continuity and discontinuities between African American slave past and the social formation of contemporary issues confronting African Americans. See, for example, Rushdy, "Master Text and Slave Narratives" in *Neo-Slave Narratives*, (New York: Oxford U Press, 1999), 3-22; Storhoff, "Oxherding Tale," in *Understanding Charles Johnson* (Columbia: U of South Carolina P, 2004), 1-25; and Crossley, Introduction in Butler's *Kindred* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1979), x-xxvii.

<sup>11</sup> The most significant and recent study of the convergence between the satire and the neo-slave narrative is Darryl Dickson-Carr's, *African American Satire: The Sacredly Profane Novel*. (Columbia: University of Missouri Press, 2001).

<sup>12</sup> According to Stephanie Coontz (1992), this traditional family ideal never existed, even during the 1950's, which is often assumed to be the era of its realization. Feminist anthropologist also challenge the traditional family ideal by demonstrating that the nuclear, hetero-sexual married couple form in the United States is neither "natural," universal, normative cross-culturally (Collier et al. 1989). Recent family scholarship suggests that large numbers of American families never experienced the traditional family ideal, and those who may have once achieved this form are now abandoning it (Coontz 1992).



Butler's *Kindred* (1979) and Charles Johnson's *Oxherding Tale* (1982), convey a satiric message about nationalism and black masculinity?

## CHAPTER IV

### BUTLER: A DOUBLING BETWEEN PAST AND PRESENT

Written in 1979, a time period when there was a lot of fiction written about slavery, Octavia Butler's *Kindred*'s main concern is about the centrality of slavery and how the past influences the present. The story's main protagonist Edana Franklin (Dana), a black woman celebrating her twenty-sixth birthday, during America's bicentennial year, in her home in Los Angeles, California with her Caucasian husband Kevin—they met when they both were working in a temporary labor pool that she referred to by the sobriquet the “slave market”—uncontrollably travels (she is transported) repeatedly back and forth in time to an antebellum Maryland plantation to rescue her white slave holding great-grandfather Rufus Weylin (the father of Dana's grandmother, Hagar), whenever his life is in danger.

Dana's mission is complicated by the fact that she must, for the future generations of her family, not only save Rufus from any eminent danger, but she has to encourage the rape and impregnation of Alice Greenwood (her great-grandmother) to facilitate not only her grandmother Hagar's existence, but her own personal existence as well. Dana's education and articulateness puts her in a liminal state where she is viewed as a constant

threat to the patriarchal order and the slave community, where she is warned by Rufus that “[e]ducated slaves aren’t popular around here, ” or she must bear the brunt of name calling “Doctor-nigger” from other slaves, who tell her you “think you know so much” as forms of denigration. In Dana’s reoccurring impact with the harsh realities of antebellum slavery, we are reminded of the epistemological limitations that we all face when trying to decipher and grapple with history. For instance, all of Dana’s prior knowledge of slavery was being discounted as she proclaimed, “ I had seen people beaten on television and in the movies,” but it did not prepare her for the grim reality of slavery as she watched a group of night riders beat a defenseless male slave. She then recounts how she “smelled their sweat or heard them pleading and praying, shamed before their families and themselves” and she adds “ my stomach heaved . . .I was probably less prepared for the reality of slavery than the child crying not far from me” (36). Dana’s domestic life in 1976 contemporary Los Angeles ironically is contrasted with the domestic burdens she endures when called back in time by Rufus. For instance, Dana and Kevin were considered outcasts in both epochs. And Dana begins to conflate Kevin’s identity with Rufus and his father Tom Weylin (master of the plantation), as she declared they both had “pale eyes.”

Further, Dana discovers to her surprise in her spontaneous oscillations between 1976 and the perilous world of antebellum slavery that in a number of different situations, rather than having progressed, society on a range of domestic issues including the meaning of family, gender roles and race seemed to have replicated the same types of painful truths found back in history. As Hazel V. Carby says in her superb essay

“Ideologies of Black Folk: The Historical Novel of Slavery,” “slavery [still] haunts the literary imagination because its material conditions and social relations are frequently reproduced in fiction as historically dynamic; they continue to influence society long after emancipation” (126).

In much the same way as the problematic domestic relationships between husband and wives are inextricably linked to the structures of domination and subordination found in the eighteenth century as well as in the twentieth in the text. The impact on the children in being indoctrinated into the slave system as a learned behavior (in terms of blind attachment to the system) is also a central concern throughout the text. For instance, Dana becomes alarmed over how domestic relationships of the two periods mirror each other in her chance encounter with the little slave children’s mimicry of the cluster of social practices associated with the buying and selling of slaves. Although they were innocently reproducing the system of oppression, it causes Dana to snap at Kevin’s dismissing the children’s actions as just a harmless mindless “game” they are playing, to which she retorts, “... this place is diseased... They don’t have to understand. Even the games they play are preparing them for their future—and that future will come whether they understand it or not” (99).

Likewise, Dana was ill prepared to face the domestic battles taking place on the plantation in the patriarchal nuclear family as well, to varying degrees between the Weylin’s – Rufus, Tom, and Margret (Tom’s wife)—nor those prevailing within the slave community. While Dana’s intentions, on Alice’s behalf, were to cultivate respect for not just African American women, but all women, in the young Rufus, Dana grows more

desponded over the signs of child abuse that Rufus has had to endure. In contrast to his father Tom who does a lot of whipping on the plantation, but is seen as being fair, Rufus as he grows into a young man began to show signs of the impulsive and scruple-less adult he would later become. Sex and power are intertwined and the violent pursuit of slave women becomes one of the underline themes throughout. The relationship between Dana, Kevin and Rufus has a weird dynamic tension suggesting a virtual nuclear family with Oedipus sensibilities. After Rufus impregnates Alice the situations worsens when she commits suicide. Rufus on the brink of madness attempts to rape Dana, and she as a result kills him, but loses her arm in the process. Dana and Kevin return back to their domestic lives in 1976 contemporary Los Angeles, in not a domestic happy ending, but one where having experienced the trauma slavery, -- and survived— from all of their adversity they are going to be a stronger family unit, as we learn from the beginning how they're saying to each other, and the reader, "if we tell anybody about our experience, they're going to put us in an insane asylum."

## CHAPTER V

### JOHNSON: THE EMERGENCE OF THE PHILOSOPHICAL ANTI-RACE MAN

In Charles Johnson's *Oxherding Tale*, written in 1982, we have another fictional first-person neo-slave narrative, where similar issues of histories influences on the present are mediated through a critique of antebellum slavery. In true *picaresque* form Andrew Hawkins the tales protagonist must undergo a series of challenges in order for him to extricate himself from slavery to achieve freedom, or what Johnson finds as his "moksha" – a Hindu word for enlightenment. One night, after a few drinks and inebriation was starting to creep in, slave George Hawkins at Jonathan Polkinghorne's (the master of *Cripplegate* plantation) insistence, impregnates Jonathan's wife Anna Polkinghorne, producing Andrew Hawkins. Although George was simply following the orders of his Master Polkinghorne, after that night of conception, during which according to Anna she was deceived, George was demoted from house slave to field slave. This establishes the novels horizon of interpretation under the rubric of domestic engagement where identity, masculinity, freedom and family are all interrogated as conflicting modes of thinking.

Similar to Dana, Andrew is in a liminal position on the plantation: unwelcomed in his master's house (though the plantation mistress Anna is his biological mother), and increasingly uncomfortable in his father George's cabin, after George's fall from grace. George had become "a flinty old race man," constantly plying Andrew with question of race solidarity "Which we you talkin about? ... Whitefolks -we or blackfolks- we?" (25). Moreover, George's relationship with his wife Mattie (Andrew's stepmother) was verbally combative, creating pre-designated parameters of race and gender in the household that would later impinge upon Andrew's quest for personal freedom. In fact, after witnessing several episodes of domestic abuse while on *Cripple Gate*-- some strategic, i.e., Anna Polkinghorne barricading herself in her room and refusing to leave, even for taking meals; some psychological, i.e., Mattie and George's shouting matches at each other and manipulative posturing towards each other; and some nakedly adhering to a rigid code of male privilege, abusive in every way, i.e., Minty's father Nate McKay who though he had fathered children throughout all of the neighboring plantations, thought himself too "pretty for hard work," but would routinely beat his wife "with both fists" in front of his children-- all of which led Andrew to view marriage as "sexual warfare." Andrew's quest for freedom continued as he came under the tutelage and mentorship of the eccentric Ezekiel Sykes- Withers.

Although Ezekiel introduced Andrew to philosophical ideas about gender and life, it became apparent that Ezekiel's ideology had impaired him from addressing life outside of theory, exemplified in his perplexity over what it really meant to "love" a real person. Likewise, idealized love for Minty was the apparent catalyst for Andrew's request for

manumission from his master at Cripplegate plantation. Master Jonathan Polkinghorne, however, decides to have Andrew work on Flo Hattfield's plantation *Leviathan* in a business arrangement where he can buy his freedom. Andrew soon discovers that, not only does Flo Hattfield have no intention of allowing him to buy his freedom, but that she is purposefully attempting to enslave him to *Leviathan* and to her body through her ideology of overindulging the senses with sex and drugs. Andrews befriends Reb the Coffin Maker (an Allmuseri craftsman living on the plantation) who became the true mentor towards Andrew achieving his "moksha." Minty proved once again the incentive for Andrews quest for freedom. After having learned that Jonathan Polkinghorne had sold Minty, Andrew violently attacks Flo leading to his and the Coffinmaker's trajectory entailing banishment from *Leviathan* to the mines for manual labor as punishment for striking his mistress/ master. While in route to the mines Andre and Reb escape and become fugitives on the run. Andrew, while passing for "white" meets and marries Peggy Undercliff, only to be relentlessly pursued by the sadistic slave catcher Horace Bannon. *Oxherding* ends with Andrew accidently reuniting with a now ailing Minty at a "slave auction," where he discovered her on display as all of the years of physical and psychological abuse she had weathered under slavery left her like a "farm tool squeezed, with no thought of preservation..." that had devoured her beauty leaving her "unlovely" and "drudgelike," and repulsive to would be buyers. Andrew, however, purchases Minty and he Peggy and Peggy's father Dr. Undercliff ensure that Minty spends her last days in relative comfort and peace before she dies. The novel ends with Andrew, Peggy and their little girl living as an ideal nuclear family celebrating the quotidian routines of *domesticity*.



## CHAPTER VI

### SUBVERSIVE HETEROGLOSSIC LENSES

In addition, it is Mikhail Bakhtin's notion of *polyphony*—literally meaning many voices, -- *dialogism*—juxtaposed, contradicting, and mutually supplementing one another in -- *heteroglossia* -- that emphasize the everyday conditions which makes dialog possible that I will apply to both texts. Bakhtin emphasizes that the unique features of each social group rests in its own “social dialect” as reflections of its cultural norms “intersect[ing] with each other in many different ways...As such they all may be juxtaposed to one another, mutually supplement one another, contradict one another and be interrelated dialogically” (292)<sup>13</sup>. Consistent with Bakhtin's formulations of the complex situated ideas of language within social environments in their modes of representing the differences and similarities between their fictional characters, Butler and Johnson can

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<sup>13</sup> Mikhail Bakhtin, “Discourse in the Novel,” reprinted in Michael Holquist, ed., *The Dialogic Imagination: Four Essays by M. M. Bakhtin* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1981), 292. As proposed by Mae Gwendolyn Henderson “Bakhtin's social groups are designated according to class, religion, generations, region, and profession. The interpretive model I propose extends and rereads Bakhtin's theory from the standpoint of race and gender, categories absent in Bakhtin's original system of social and linguistic stratification” in “Speaking in Tongues” *Reading Black, Reading Feminist: A Critical Anthology*, ed. Henry Louis Gates, Jr. (New York: Penguin Group, 1990), 139.

fruitfully be seen as reconstructing the past in a wide variety of speech types influenced by the nineteen-sixties. Moreover, as argued by Dickson-Carr, the potential that Bakhtin's theory of *heteroglossia* adds to diversity of thought as it unlocks satire and it unlocks "the novel thus allows through these diverse voices opportunities for sustained investigations and/ or critiques of a wide range of subjects and permits an author to develop her or his plot, characters, and potential messages or arguments—thoroughly and in a unified manner" (6). Thus the text itself under Bakhtin's theory of *heteroglossia* disestablishes the authoritative voice, and opens up prospects for the study of multiple perspectives for a dialogic understanding of literary genres such as satire.

## CHAPTER VII

### RECOURSE FROM THE 60'S

In response to questions about their personal reactions to the prevailing nationalism of the sixties both Butler and Johnson are on record as having lingering ambivalences. To take a case in point, in *Being & Race: Black Writing Since 1970*, published in 1980, recognized as Johnson's most definitive aesthetic statement on the sixties,<sup>14</sup> Johnson validates the significance of the Black Arts movement in that he points out how "[t]he sense of black literature since the 1960's, what it means for a literary work to be socially relevant, owes much to [Amiri] Baraka and his followers, and we shall not be free of this art-as-weapon conception for some time" (24). Basically, Johnson is saying that he is still appreciative to BAM for the role it played as a catalyst for a form of self-discovery that remains relevant as an advocate for black cultural awareness. Equally, Johnson's first collection of cartoons *Black Humor* was conceived immediately after his initial contact with BAM's Amiri Baraka (then LeRoi Jones) during a reading by the poet on the campus of Southern Illinois University back in 1969. Baraka, who by all accounts was seen "as the founder of the Black Aesthetic of the 1960's," is

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<sup>14</sup> William R. Nash, *Charles Johnson's Fiction*. (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2003), 30-37.

credited with numerous impassioned racially charged pronouncements as in this one from *Home*: “in order for the Black man in the West to absolutely know himself, it is necessary for him to see himself as culturally separate from the White man”; such an artistic separation would precede a physical separation to a new black nation in Africa.<sup>15</sup> When the poetry reading ended Jonson was enthralled, as he reflected back on how “this charismatic, brilliant black man was talking to me. I dragged home in the rain, dazed, seeing nothing on either side of me because my brain reeled with a hundred images for...expressing the culture of people of color.”<sup>16</sup> From this experience, Johnson wrote *Black Humor*, which in many ways laid the groundwork for the narrative development in *Oxherding Tale*, in that it included “an interracial couple and a black radical” as noted by Jonathan Little in *Charles Johnson’s Spiritual Imagination* (1997). Although this was an empowering experience for Johnson, eventually what he considers as the misplaced intellectual/cultural bravado of BAM, coupled with his growing dedication to Buddhism led Johnson to question the very core BAM’s ideological position –*race*. As illustrated in the Introduction to *Oxherding* where Johnson voices some clear dissatisfactions with whole the binary construction of *race* as he mused over if: “ontological dualism was one of the profoundest tricks of the mind” then...[w]as race an illusion...[?].

Similar mixed sentiments were shown by Butler, for instance, in an interview in *Black Scholar* where in answering a question concerning whether the sixties should be seen as an integral part of her incentive for writing *Kindred*, she answered, “I grew up

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<sup>15</sup> Phillip Brian Harper, “Nationalism and Social Division in Black Arts Poetry of the 1960’s,” 236-37; Amiri Baraka, *Home*, 246.

<sup>16</sup> Charles Johnson, “Where Fiction and Philosophy Meet,” 48.

during the sixties...and I was involved with the black consciousness raising that was taking place at the time,” but that eventually she became so disillusioned with the extremism of the movement in some of the “rash judgments” she witnessed being made, and to the disrespectful position it took on the “generation gap” that she broke from it ideologically and decided to address her discontent through her writing (15). Indeed, Butler and Johnson both were initially attracted to the existential appeal of black nationalism as young black people of the sixties, in both their quest for intellectual integrity and sympathy for the struggle for racial equality, yet ultimately they both demanded more than the movement could provide. Nevertheless, the sixties are very much a part of their modern literary discourse on display in their neo-slave narratives *Kindred* and *Oxherding*, as concluded by Rushdy “While there is certain nostalgia in each of the Neo-slave narratives, there is also a critical examination of those issues, movements, and outcomes of the sixties. Each author ...began writing in the sixties...then became disenchanted with the politics of Black Power” (*Neo* 5).

We can best examine the specific and complex ways Butler and Johnson are addressing nationalist discourse from the sixties through satire-- as interlocutors in a cultural *heteroglossia* conversation about African American domesticity by first tracing the historical moment to the dominant concerns of the different types of discourses in the cultural matrix that were in play. In the mid nineteen-sixties, while Daniel Patrick Moynihan’s report, officially titled *The Negro Family: The Case for National Action* (March 1965), ripple effects were still being felt as described by Kimberlé Crenshaw: “critics characterized the report as racist for its blind use of white cultural norms as the

standard for evaluating Black families” (227), the country simultaneously was undergoing a time of profound national and international identity crisis instantiated by the undeclared war in Vietnam, *Bay of Pigs* invasion of Cuba, and the Cuban Missile Crisis (Baker, *The Norton* 1831); moreover, anti-imperialist sentiments abroad that paralleled the intensified black struggles against racism domestically, drew critical public attention to the vast social inequalities between mainstream America and the black community, as interpreted by Stanley Aronowitz, and signaled an inchoate form of “ participatory democracy,” characterized by “the people” fighting to have control over their own lives (19). While the *Moynihan Report* (1965) attempted to explain the phenomena of the growing matriarchy in the black domestic sphere by identifying the absence of the black male in the home—dating back to slavery as a catalyst for a host of chronic social conditions plaguing the urban black community: escalating rates of divorces, single parenthood, out-of-wedlock births, infant mortality, and welfare dependency (Rainwater and Yancey 5). The political context in which the report was produced underpinned a certain supposition that the urban black family was in crises because by implication the American white family is what it failed to replicate during the sixties. And that in essence black family stability and social class were being jeopardized because of female--matriarchal leadership (Rainwater and Yancey 7-10). Additionally, the turbulent historical matrix of the sixties that cultivated the creation of the *Moynihan Report* was followed by an emerging social climate of similar uncertainty in the seventies, punctuated by the economic crises of nineteen-seventy- three that found writers referring to that decade as “the Hobbesian age” (12), notes Rushdy in *Remembering Generations* (20001). Derived from the findings of nineteen-seventies economist George Gilder, “the

Hobbesian age,” forewarned of Western civilization’s imminent downfall in the face of *pathological* male behaviors unregulated by the institution of marriage. The unmarried man, he wrote, “is disposed to criminality, drugs, and violence... irresponsible about his debts, alcoholic, accident prone, and venereal diseased. Unless he can marry,” Gilder concluded, “he is often destined to a Hobbesian life—solitary, poor, nasty, brutish, and short”(Gilder, qtd. Rushdy 12). Whereas the *Moynihan Report* and Gilder’s findings were both organized around projects to “rein in the potential pathology of undomesticated men,” they differed in that “Gilder urges marriage as” a solution to a life-time of the general male populations social misery, in contrast to *Moynihan’s* race specific answer to the “matriarchal black family,” phenomena was that “black men might find” masculine “strength to govern their women” to restore their families to states of patriarchal authority (12). Thus, when aroused by destabilizing threats to the economic climate of the nation, the American political apparatus turned inward to the discourse of the family-- embodied in both the *Moynihan Report* and Gilder’s findings— underscored by the promotion of normative images of family life that were bifurcated by *race*.

Although, one of the primary more troubling aspect of the report was that traditional definitions of masculine black male leadership/ authority were being touted as the needed recipe for renovating the black family, likewise it was the specific timing of the report that also came under intense scrutiny as feminist and black liberals made greater demands on the establishment. For example, Patricia Hill Collins draws the correlation between “the public depictions of U.S. Black women as unfeminine matriarchs” in response to the *Moynihan Report*, and how those sentiments curiously

“came at precisely the same moment that the women’s movement critiqued U.S. patriarchy” (82). And simultaneously it was argued that the report was a reaction by the liberal political establishment of the Johnson administration that “by 1965” not only was becoming increasingly unsettled as “the words “compensation,” “reparations,” and “preference” had already crept into a black political discourse that white liberals were beginning to display their disquiet” in adjusting to. Indeed, with Dr. King’s essay, “Why We Can’t Wait,” the anxiety and divisiveness between blacks and whites within the liberal ranks themselves had become quite pronounced, finds Stephen Steinberg (16).

Whereas the debate over the merits of the report being (in its one-dimensional representation of the African-American family) viewed as either the white liberal establishments backlash against an inchoate climate of assertive political maneuvering by black liberals<sup>17</sup>, or whether it was a patriarchal retaliation, attributable in part to the emergence of a focus on the oppression of women, one thing that was quite evident in spite of the contested political climate of its creation—it functioned as a recognizable reconstruction of African American women. For instance, Crenshaw as she continued her assessment epitomized the concerns of Black Feminist’s over the types of critical responses to the report, “few [critics] pointed out the sexism apparent in Moynihan’s labeling Black women as pathological for their failure to live up to a white female standard of motherhood”(227). Whereas the report came under severe criticism as

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<sup>17</sup> See Lee Rainwater and William L. Yancey, *The Moynihan Report and the Politics of Controversy* 427-9 (MIT Press, 1967) (containing criticism of the Moynihan Report by, among others, Charles E. Silberman, Christopher Jencks, William Ryan, Laura Carper, Frank Riesman and Herbert Gans. Also, 395-7 (critics include Martin Luther King, Jr., Benjamin Payton, James Farmer, Whitney Young, Jr., and Bayard Rustin).



constituting racist depictions of African-American families, yet effective patriarchal control glossed-over the oppositional pairings between Black and White “womanhood.” Hortense J. Spillers situated the report in the “reversal of the castration thematic” where “displacing the Name and Law of the Father to the territory of the Mother and Daughter, becomes an aspect of the African-American female’s misnaming,” characterized in the context of constructions of a “class of symbolic paradigms,” functions, where “the “white” family, by implication, and the “Negro Family,” by outright assertion,” are contested “ in constant opposition of binary meaning” (Spillers 58-59). In other words, for Spillers, the *Moynihan Report* was not only the latest installment of misrepresentations of African Americans in the nations history used to symbolize racial differences through a stereotypical monolithic African American figure, but that misrepresentation was part of a sustained attack against African American womanhood represented by the ideology of the *cult of true womanhood*.

## CHAPTER VIII

### (Re) CONSTRUCTED IMAGES OF THE BLACK FAMILY

America's preoccupation with furnishing negative stereotypical images of African-American women and men-- in a motley bunch of degenerate forms-- to put it crudely—constitutes a legacy from slavery of inscribed cultural prejudices that had been cultivated especially to demoralize the African-American family—in a complex linkage of socially constructed identities has been well established. For instance, Collins building on Spiller's argument determined that Moynihan's report reached back to the antebellum slave systems representation of the "*Mammy*" stereotype that " typifies the Black mother figure in the White homes," and brought that "*Mammy*" stereotype into stark relief in contrast to the contemporary stereotype of the "*Matriarch*" that "represents the Black mother figure in Black homes" of today in an "intersection of oppressions" (82).

Collins's bold suggestion here relates one of the distinctive binary transformative features of constructed stereotypes of black women, reworked into discursive practices of the twentieth-century, out of slavery, where on the antebellum southern plantation a general climate of binary thinking was also advanced in the stereotypes of African-American men, as historian John W. Blassingame points out in *The Slave Community*, " a dialectical relationship between the simultaneous existence of two male slave stereotypes

existed: a rebellious and potentially murderous “*Nat*” and a passive, contented “*Sambo*,” became fixed images in the consciousness of southern plantation slave owners as a dichotomous answer to their lingering psychological anxieties in the aftermath of Nat Turner’s rebellion of 1831. Even if an owner felt a slave’s personality by all outward appearances was that of a “*Sambo*,” that slave owner reconciled herself or himself to the fact that that slave was a potential “*Nat*,” just waiting to seize an opportunity for insurrection (230-235). What is more, these two antebellum African American slave stereotypes by the turn of the century had morphed into minstrel figures such as *pickaninnies*, *jigaboos*, *superstitious Jims*, and *bumbling chicken and watermelon thieves* (mostly out of the imaginations of southern reactionary writers)<sup>18</sup>. Thus, combined with the aforementioned malevolent depictions of African American women, we have two distinctions running together between the mainstream view that the stereotypes represented an index of the prevalent culture of oppression that African-American families purportedly thrived in, and the view that the stereotypes served as a concrete praxis for assimilationist as well Black Nationalist intervention. As Kevin Gains observes in *Uplifting the Race: Black Leadership, Politics, and Culture in the Twentieth Century* (1996) (76-77), during the *Reconstruction* in a cultural response to these controlling images which minstrelsy during this period was the predominant form of representation of the African American family in general and women specifically<sup>19</sup>, black leaders made

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<sup>18</sup> See Reggie Young, “Black Stereotypes,” in *The Oxford Companion to African American Literature*, ed. William L. Andrews, Trudier Harris, and Frances Smith Foster (New York: Oxford UP, 1997) 698-699.

<sup>19</sup> According to Joseph Boskin ( *Sambo: The Rise and Fall of an American Jester*, 1986), minstrel images such as *Sambo* and the black mammy greatly influenced white perceptions of African Americans until the late 1950’s and 1960’s.

social claims to middle class respectability through extolling the virtues of the black family. Gains confirms that to combat the white supremacist's propaganda model of images of degradation, debauchery and dissolution constantly applied thru minstrelsy to black families who migrated north, black leaders started to distinguish "patriarchal gender conventions of sexual difference, and male protection and protected femininity, were proffered as a rebuke to minstrel stereotypes that denied conventional gender roles to black men and women"<sup>20</sup>(78). Thus, black leaders during the *Reconstruction* encouraged an image of black family solidarity by adopting and asserting the mainstream's ideology of domesticity with *the mother in home*.

Moreover, due to the resurgent extreme racial oppression of the times that forecasted the threat of more violence directed at them (lynching) and other the mainstream racialized stereotypes constructed precisely to marginalize them out of the dominant standards of *domesticity*, African American leaders during *Reconstruction* put forward a strategy for identity formation sought to disrupt such distortions by emphasizing intra-racial class binaries through discourses of American middle-class society. As Claudia Tate observes, "this elite class excluded other black people from its social stratum in a desperate attempt to elude the racist covenants that were becoming

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<sup>20</sup> "Notwithstanding its renewed commitment to racist stereotypes, minstrelsy was nearly the only mainstream outlet for African American stage talent: the coon show provided a venue for the work of Will Marion Cook, Paul Laurence Dunbar, Bert Williams, and others, while artists such as W.C. Handy and Ma Rainey got their start in black minstrelsy." See Eric Lott, "Minstrelsy," in *The Oxford Companion to African American Literature*, ed. William L. Andrews, Trudier Harris, and Frances Smith Foster (New York: Oxford UP, 1997) 502-503.

Also, Robert C. Toll, in *Blacking Up: The Minstrel Show in Nineteenth-Century America*, 1974. Eric Lott, *Love and Theft: Blackface Minstrelsy and the American Working Class*, 1993.

more pervasive (59). For Tate, elite blacks within assumptions of *normality* articulated *Victorian* standards of respectability designed to debunk white stereotypes of the black families, yet polarized the black community based on class hierarchy as they internalized the causes of their oppression. In fact, since race presides over other intersecting identities—such as gender, sexuality, and class—in a complex interplay of contradictions in a system of white supremacy, as recognized by Hazel V. Carby in *Reconstructing Womanhood* (16-19), then the defining measure of the dominant culture's attacks becomes obscured rather than deconstructed by devoting attention to simplistic intra-racial class distinctions that seems more reflective of the Du Boisian concept of *Double-Consciousness*: as explained in *The Souls Of Black Folk* (1903), the logic behind the psychological reactions of the black elites to the cumulative effects of racism and negative images of everyday black life found during post-Reconstruction: “ It is a peculiar sensation, this double-consciousness, this sense of always looking at one's self through the eyes of others, of measuring one's soul by the tape of a world that looks on in amused contempt and pity.”<sup>21</sup> Whereas this passage from *Souls* by Du Bois is widely considered a disquisition on the psychic life of the African American community grappling with its sense of double-consciousness; yet, ironically it also betrays a homogenizing impulse that also elides the class biases of the author—namely as an identity crises-- where his liminal middle class status (a combination of indefinite white acceptance and internalized associations of the black masses with inferiority) becomes subsumed in light of broader aims of combating stereotypes.

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<sup>21</sup> W.E.B. Du Bois, *The Souls of Black Folk* (New York: W.W. Norton, 1999 [1903]).

Whereas post-Reconstruction African-Americans elites and nationalist leaders appropriated mainstreams ideals of *domesticity* and *patriarchy* as representational of their equal *manhood* within the paradigm of the dominant cultures expectations, particularly in excoriating the minstrel show, and ostensibly extolling the virtues of *domesticity*. In contrast, in the nineteen-sixties to early seventies despite the fact that the social dynamics of the relationship between the black community and mainstream America had shown significant progress since the post-Reconstruction era (e.g., 1954 *Brown vs. Board of Education*, *Civil Rights Act* of 1964 and the *Voting Rights Act* of 1965), the ramifications of the deaths of Malcolm X 1965 and Martin Luther King in 1968 produced the oppositional logic of black nationalism. A nationalist logic that reflected back to their elitists nationalist predecessors from the nineteenth century, that entailed adopting an American discourse of *domesticity* -- rooted in reclamation of black *masculinity* -- which revolved around countering those stereotypical cultural deficiencies of the African-American family: the *Matriarch*.

## CHAPTER IX

### RECLAMATION OF SO-CALLED “LOST MALE LEADERSHIP”: BLACK ARTS MOVEMENT

At the same time, in the sixties the stimulus for a new revolutionary philosophy emerged-- *the Black Arts Movement*: a social political movement privileging cultural aesthetics integrated with and inextricably tied to militant political expectations for the black community-- symbolized by the polemical guiding principle of *Black Power*.<sup>22</sup> This emerging nationalist impulse inspired a cadre of African American writers employing the role of black literature to now serve as “a critical re-examination of Western political, social and artistic values” (Larry Neal, qtd. in Napier 69), as discussed by one of the leading early spokesperson for the black arts movement Larry Neal. Neal’s views were reverberated by Amiri Baraka (formerly LeRoi Jones) in *Conversations with Amiri Baraka* as he unsparingly specifies black art as “a weapon ...to show [black] people how to make a revolution in this society” or as the *sine qua non* for black liberation (97). While Black Nationalist leaders were grappling with the critical process

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<sup>22</sup> See James Cone, *Martin and Malcolm and America: A Dream or a Nightmare* (Maryknoll, N.Y.: Orbis, 1991), especially pp. 213-243. Angelyn Mitchell, Introduction. *Within the Circle: An Anthology of African American Literary Criticism from the Harlem Renaissance to the Present*, ed. Angelyn Mitchell (Durham, N.C.: Duke UP, 1994), 10-12.

of transforming the black community from a dependent state into an independent existence within the confines of Westernized culture, the first stages of that independence entailed addressing the core gender implication of the *Moynihan Report*. As Michelle Wallace points out, the report tapped into and validated suspicions that black men had been harboring prior to its findings: “ the existence of anything so subversive as a “strong black woman” precluded the existence of a strong black man, or indeed, any black “man” at all” (31). Thus, as a kind of ironic precondition to garnering autonomy from white male domination, the subordination of African American women would become a necessary factor in the reconstruction of African American male *masculine* identity.



## CHAPTER X

### A PARTNERSHIP: ENGLISH AND AMERICAN DOMESTICITY

I think it would be useful at this point to situate the ideology of American nineteenth century domesticity in the context of its English precursor to the critical discourse suggestive of marginalized societal constructions of family. There is a dimension to American domesticity that is substantively organized around principled English social history where the struggle for individuality becomes broadly engaged with cultural thought. For example, Lena Orlin in *Private Matters and Public Culture in Post-Reformation England* finds that, according to the pioneering historian of private life, Phillippe Aries, “England is the birthplace of privacy.” Identity became the pivotal point in the propaganda of the nation state’s move towards sanctioning the private home as the social political and theological replacement of that authoritarian role that the Catholic Church once shared with the monarchy. The outcome was that the hierarchy of accountable male dominance in the domestic home was constructed to mimic the absolute political dominance of the state (Orlin 3). However, it was a form of authoritarian government pervading into the private lives of its citizens that would have come under scrutiny if the designated “head” of the household were to find himself usurped of that newly acquired status. Whereas, state law designated the patriarch as the final authority

in the home, as Lawrence Stone insists in *The Family, Sex and Marriage in England, 1500—1800*, “the evolution of the of the *Patriarchal Nuclear Family* gave the father more power, resulting in his becoming a “legalized petty tyrant within the home”” (7), but the additional pressures of having to live up to the nation state mandated concepts of what was and was not acceptable in the privacy of the domestic home could have fostered subversive ideas to circulate within the general population. This point is borne out by declaration that “Not all heads of households were capable of fulfilling these heavy responsibilities...”(111) acknowledges Stone, because as Orlin confirms “A recurrent crux involves the global accountability of the householder (in his various roles as husband, father, brother, master, and host) for not only the well-being but also the actions of wife, son, sister, servant, and guest” (3). Moreover, it was is in those “various” roles expressed in the state doctrine of England that the meaning and strain of living up to the ideal of what the head of a household and his nuclear family should exemplify that influenced and situated the standard value of the model family that American-European settlers calibrated into American *domesticity*. Illustrated by the proverbial expression (with its many gender inflected connotations) “a man’s home is his castle,” American ideals of domesticity gained popularity by highlighting gender difference as the dominant form of social difference, based in large part upon what Barbara Welter in her seminal essay “The Cult of True Womanhood” (1966) states as being enforced by religious doctrine and one of “the four attributes of “the cult of True-Womanhood<sup>23</sup>”: purity, piety, domesticity, and submissiveness” (152). In fact the other three cherished attributes of

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<sup>23</sup> According to Welter, this is a term that was considered so ubiquitous in the early to mid-nineteenth century that most readers of the period (primarily women) did not require a specific definition of the meaning.

“true- womanhood” (purity, piety, and submissiveness) were instilled primarily through literature in young nineteenth-century women in preparation for their role as wife under the ideology of domesticity (Welter 160). Traditionally, promoted in literature that was denominated variously as “sentimentalism,” “women’s fiction,” or “the domestic novel,”<sup>24</sup> during the late eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, domesticity became a dominant American discourse of white middle-class feminine interiority analyzed as a racialized ideology,<sup>25</sup> in what critics Lora Romero, Lori Merish, Nancy Armstrong, and Ann Douglas have rated as a “construction” of female social identity, in America that can be traced back to “... at least the publication of Herman Melville’s famous review of Nathaniel Hawthorne’s *Twice-Told Tales*”<sup>26</sup>

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<sup>24</sup> Lora Romero, *Home Fronts: Domesticity And Its Critics In The Antebellum United States*. (Durham, NC: Duke UP, 1997),1.

<sup>25</sup> Laura Wexler, “Tender Violence: Literary Eavesdropping, Domestic Fiction, and Educational Reform.” In *The Culture of Sentiment: Race, Gender, and Sentimentality in Nineteenth-Century America*, ed. Shirley Samuels, (12-32. New York: Oxford University Press, 1993).

<sup>26</sup> Lora Romero, *Home Fronts: Domesticity And Its Critics In The Antebellum United States*. Durham, NC: Duke UP, 1997; Lori Merish, *Sentimental Materialism: Gender, Commodity Culture, and Nineteenth-Century American Literature*. Durham: Duke University Press, 2000; Nancy Armstrong, *Desire and Domestic Fiction: A Political History of the Novel*. New York: Oxford University Press, 1987; Ann Douglas, *The Feminization of American Culture*. Knopf: New York, 1977.

## CHAPTER XI

### DOUBLING, DOMESTICITY, EXOGAMY AND THE FACETIOUS

Although, admittedly I agree with the standard critical view that perhaps recognition of Butler's satiric perspective in *Kindred* would be occluded by the inescapable intensity of its reading like "a horror tale of the real," particularly since the "violence" *in toto* "is not passed over quickly."<sup>27</sup> Nonetheless, in the context of Northrop Frye's "two things, [that] are essential to satire; one is wit or humor founded on fantasy" qualified through the inexplicable time travel of Dana and Kevin, the other "or a sense of the grotesque or absurd," met in the barbaric scenes of beatings throughout *Kindred*, and "the other is an object of attack," found in the sixties Black Nationalist agenda for race purity which reflects suspiciously in the exchanges between Alice and Dana (*Anatomy* 224). In *Kindred* Butler achieves this dual effect through shifting her treatment of the past to the present where she juxtaposes language used selectively to emphasize the inferiority and inhumanity of African Americans during slavery with what in David Walker's *Appeal*, Walker points out as the *pretenders* to Christianity and inferring to the Black

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<sup>27</sup> Dorothy Allison, "The Future of Female" in *Reading Black, Reading Feminist: A Critical Anthology*, ed. Henry Louis Gates, Jr. (New York: Penguin Group, 1990), 474.

Power movements damning critique of the hypocrisy of American and African American religious traditions.<sup>28</sup> As illustrated by this discussion between Dana and Rufus Weylin, her slaveholding ancestor, about their (first of many) fateful encounters where she was called back by him to save his life while withstanding the horrific conditions of nineteenth-century slavery: “Mamma said she tried to stop you when she saw you doing that to me because you were just some [nigger] she had never seen before. Then she remembered Second Kings” (24). In a move I further categorize as a type of *sly* satire with signifying<sup>29</sup> intent, Butler not only brings into focus the conflation of unconscious white American sanctimony and the types of toxic family discourse that reproduces itself through passed-down racist stereotypes, but the black church within a white patriarchal social context is implicit in the moral inquiry also. Butler’s use of a Biblical reference as a base for societal institutional derision and the distinction between Christian profession and its actual practice brings more perspicuity to her satiric perspective.

The subject of religion for the satirist, according to Valentine Cunningham in *Twentieth-century Fictional Satire*, is a topic that often finds a reference point in that “our satirists keep finding in the Christian tradition the words with which to make their satirical point” (426). In addition, the historical relationship between black men and

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<sup>28</sup> See also, Carter G. Woodson, *The History of the Negro Church*, 1921; C. Eric Lincoln, *The Black Muslims in America*, 1961; LeRoi Jones and Larry Neal, eds., *Black Fire*, 1968; Albert B. Cleage, Jr., *The Black Messiah*, 1969; James H. Cone, *A Black Theology of Liberation*, 1970; Gayraud S. Wilmore, *Black Religion and Black Radicalism*, 1973; J.F. Maxwell, *Slavery and the Catholic Church*, 1975; Albert J. Raboteau, *Slave Religion*, 1978.

<sup>29</sup> In his “The Blackness of Blackness: A Critique on the sign and the signifying Monkey,” Henry Louis Gates, Jr., articulates a model of African-American intertextuality as “signifyin(g),” which is derived from a long-standing African American tradition with roots in West African, North and South American, and Caribbean cultures.

women in regards to the sexist and patriarchal practices within the black church are scrutinized as well. For example, Jarena Lee, one of the first African American female preachers to issue an official challenge to black male leadership in the church (in a text which prefigures much of the post-civil rights literature by black women writers, c. 1811) declared “ if the man may preach, because, the Savior died for him, why not the woman? Seeing he died for her also...” as opposed to “those who hold it wrong for a woman to preach, would seem to make it.”<sup>30</sup>

Certainly black womens exclusion from position of power within the quintessential *patriarchal* African-American institution—the black church-- that held, and continues to hold tremendous influence in the African American community -- “except for the church, there are few potent traditions on which one can fall back in dealing with hopelessness and meaninglessness”<sup>31</sup>-- would have been a part of the discursive practices that Butler would have come in contact with. Indeed, by the mid-twentieth-century, Dr. Martin Luther King’s influence by dent of his sermons served as a catalyst for much of the civil rights organizing principles, as the rhetoric of his preaching inspired more diverse voices to advocate for equality in the pulpit. Ironically, while Dr. King was calling on America to end its legacy of racism, black women through

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<sup>30</sup> Bert James Loewenberg and Ruth Bogin, eds., *Black Women in Nineteenth Century American Life*, 1976); Jarena Lee, *The Life and Religious Experience of Jarena Lee*, 1836; rpt. in *Sisters of the Spirit: Three Black Women’s Autobiographies of the Nineteenth Century*, ed. William L. Andrews, 1986.

<sup>31</sup> Cornel West. *The Cornel West Reader*. (New York: Basic Civitas Books, 1999) 293.

womanism<sup>32</sup> were calling on the male-dominated pulpit fraternity to end its legacy of sexism. For instance, Alice Walker's *In Search of Our Mother's Gardens* (1983), for instance, addresses issues from the womanist perspective issued from the pew to the pulpit that reflects on the type of *sly* satire with the signifying intent that I argue is found in Butler's *Kindred*.

Additionally, the types of discourse that takes place between Alice and Dana where the many voices that are foregrounded in the novel echoes the sentiments of African-American women in the nineteen seventies, if not later periods. *Carnival*, or the *carnivalesque*—reversing of the prevailing social hierarchies (like a world that is turned upside down) -- provides the primary model for this approach, illustrated when Andrew Hawkins (*Oxherding*) reverses the readers' expectations of the protagonist in a first-person slave narrative. After all, since Frederick Douglass in one of the most widely read slave narratives in history privileges throughout his text his acquisition of "letters," and the ability to read and write as a critical moment of subversion; then, by contrast, with Hawkins and his classical education, intellectual acumen for hyper-philosophizing the world, he turns the expected trope of the procurement of literacy in the first-person slave narrative on its head. Similarly, in the case of *Kindred* where Dana's world is overturned and the slave society of the antebellum South echoes much of her and Kevin's life in California in 1976 , such as shown in the way that she refers to the temp agency "I was working out of a casual labor agency—we regulars called it a slave market" (52) . In making this comment Butler is urging the reader towards this sense of a correlation

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<sup>32</sup> The term was first used in print in Delores S. Williams's 1987 article "Womanist Theology: Black Women's Voices."

between alienation in the present (since they both are working in jobs that are beneath them) that connects them (her and Kevin) to the toil of slavery in the past. Incidentally, Dorothy Allison reads the same passage as “a reference that takes on new meaning when” Dana “finds herself on an antebellum plantation where the everyday horrors of slavery are no metaphor” (474). I am of two minds about Allison’s claim that the reality of slavery dispels any idealized notions of slavery. On the one hand, many of the preconceived ideas Dana might have had about slavery viewed from the twentieth-century vantage point are upended by her face-to-face encounters. For example, Butler portrays the protagonist, Dana Franklin, a black writer as encountering a series of repetitions where her acquired epistemological base is undercut in juxtaposition of the past and the present: “I almost wished I hadn’t read about it,” she laments after being severely beaten after a failed escape attempt from the Weylin plantation, because “nothing in my education or knowledge of the future had helped to escape” (177). Hereupon, Dana’s world has been profoundly turned upside down, as a self-assured “I always got good grades,” independent, “I got a job, moved away from home” (56), twentieth-century knowledgeable black woman whose theoretical strategies of resistance have been negated by her discovery that escape from antebellum slavery is fraught with real life difficulties that she had not read about in books. On the other hand, I view it as a form of *indirect* satire modeled on a Greek form developed by the cynic philosopher *Menippus* (sometimes called *Varronian* after Roman imitator Varro)<sup>33</sup>. While respectfully acknowledging the two commonly distinguished types of satire as *formal* satire (also known as *direct* satire) found in the *Horatian* and the *Juvenalian*, it is the indirect type of

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<sup>33</sup> Steven Weisenburger, *Fables of Subversion*, 6.



satire employed in the third type of satire-- the *Menippean* that can potentially disrupt our contemporary literary conventions. This idea of satiric disruption also comes in the form of disabusing its audience of the progressive view of African-American history that elides the social contradictions of contemporary slavery as a form of economic exploitation that is bound to progressive ideas of human agency<sup>34</sup>.

If as Dickson-Carr suggests, “satires purpose frequently extends beyond that of mere entertainment; its primary purpose is to act as an invaluable mode of social and political critique” (5), then the implicit satirical argument by Butler in reference to the temp agency, “It was nearly always mindless work, and as far as most employers were concerned, it was done by mindless people,” virtually a “[non] on people” (53), could be viewed as speaking to the political powerlessness of the underclass working poor and speaking to the precarious economic status of African American women, whose perennial impoverishment could stand as a satirical repudiation of the ideals promised within the *United States Constitution* and *Declaration of Independence*. For, as Spaulding argues, when Dana confronts the connection between her life as an impoverished, twentieth-century black woman and her life as a slave forced into labor for the profit of her enslavers (49), not only is she dealing with the painful history of slavery, but I maintain she is also arousing social indignation through the social currency of *Menippean* satire.

W. Scott Blanchard concurs, as suggested by his essay “Renaissance Prose Satire,” where

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<sup>34</sup> This is an extension of Steven Weisenburger’s theory of postmodern fiction and the role of satire: “these fictions are keenly attentive to the violence and pain wrought by the structures and conventions for representation in Western culture, they ways that identifiable interests thrive on that suffering, especially in their promotion of violent, transgressive stories whose paradoxical function is to support legitimizing myths of progress and emancipation” (259).

he asserts that it is *Menippean* satire, which was bequeathed to us from those “ancient Cynics who had as the object of attack the pretenses...of the most authoritative voices of their time – professional philosophers and rhetoricians”(119), with a satiric perspective “...[that] forces readers to question the very boundaries that separate the comic from the serious...in a sort of “deep play”” (123). Consider Dana’s declaration for instance that “ I laughed without humor,” in response to Kevin’s wishful remark of having a choice other than going back in time to the era of slavery “There are so many really fascinating times we could have gone back to visit,” registers as emblematic of the stony-faced brand of *sly* satire that I argue is employed by Butler (77).

In fact, *Kindred* in dramatizing this serious form of satire, parallels one principle facet of *Juvenalian* satire, as defined by M.H. Abrams as, “evoking readers moral indignation, or an unillusioned sadness at the aberrations of humanity” (188), supplemented by Bakhtin , and Blanchard’s definition for *Menippean* satire – an extended dialog amongst literary types that achieves its effect through a paradoxical anti-intellectual posture towards themselves (121). And, this self-reflective posture of the *Menippean* satirist is suggested in the tension between second-hand acquired knowledge versus actual lived experience. Restated by Butler in a 1997 interview with Charles H. Rowell. Butler describes how the inkling for *Kindred* was her dissatisfaction with her 1960’s generation misplaced shame towards the previous generations perceived lack of aggressive black revolutionary posturing. As a matter of fact, in a later interview with Randall Kenan in 1991, Butler makes a similar assessment. Her observation bears repeating in full:

My mother did domestic work and I was around sometimes when people talked about her as if she were not there, and I got to watch her going in back doors and generally being treated in a way that made me...I spent a lot of my childhood being ashamed of what she did, and I think one of the reasons I wrote *Kindred* was to resolve my feelings, because after all, I ate because of what she did... *Kindred* was a kind of reaction to some of the things going on during the sixties when people were feeling ashamed of, or more strongly, angry with their parents for not having improved things faster, and I wanted to take a person from today and send that person back to slavery. My mother was born in 1914 and spent her early childhood on a sugar plantation in Louisiana. From what she's told me of it, it wasn't that far removed from slavery, the only difference was that they could leave, which they did. (496)

In participating in this critical discourse on the sixties younger generations prevailing misappropriation of the heritage of the sacrifices and value of the experiences endured by their generational forebears. In contrast to an overreliance on a textbook understanding of the struggle, Butler's firsthand account and analytical consciousness interrogates Black Power's constraints on the debt owed to the previous generation in situating *Kindred* in a complex juxtaposition between the past and the present that cuts across class, racial and gendered divisions. In addition, I can, in any case, admit that this particular quote from Butler struck a deep cord within me personally also—both of my

grandmothers (maternal and patriarchal) worked as domestics. And, while I cannot in good conscience testify to ever having witnessed where “people talked about” them “as if” they “were not there,” nor can I say “I watched” them “going in back doors,” nor being treated in any type of insulting manner to cause me to harbor any feelings of shame towards them. Yet, it would be a clear case of naiveté on my part to assume that they both were not vulnerable at some point to the more pernicious practices of patriarchal dominance, or innocuous to the constant threats of sexual abuse as a tacit demand for continued *domestic* employment in those households.

As Angela Davis in *Women, Race & Class* explains, “from Reconstruction to the present, Black women household workers have considered sexual abuse perpetrated by the “man of the house” as one of their major occupational hazards. Time after time they have been victims of extortion on the job, compelled to choose between sexual submission and absolute poverty for themselves and their families” (91). Moreover, from their experiences as domestics, black women were often placed in a quandary of sorts compares Claudia Tate in *Domestic Allegories of Political Desire*: black women would either work and become potentially exploited psychologically and sexually<sup>35</sup>, combined with diminishing “the amount of” quality “time black women could spend in their own homes,” placing great restraints on their “solidarity” in creating a “nurturing” family

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<sup>35</sup>Angela Davis illustrates the psychosocial stigma associated with black women engaged in domestic work: “Since slavery, the vulnerable condition of the household worker has continued to nourish many of the lingering myths about the “immorality” of Black women. In this classic “catch-22” situation, household work is considered degrading because it has been disproportionately performed by Black women, who in turn are viewed as “inept” and “promiscuous.” But their ostensible ineptness and promiscuity are myths which are repeatedly confined by the degrading work they are compelled to do” (92-93).

“environment;” or, expose their families to continual economic disruptions and hardship in light of the dominant culture’s chronic underemployment, or unemployment of black men (52).<sup>36</sup> Domestic employment and domesticity were bound to the meaning of womanhood and motherhood as noted by Hazel Carby in *Reconstructing Womanhood* in her assessment of Linda Brent (and Harriet Jacobs) “any power or influence a women could exercise was limited to the boundaries of the home,” and though as a slave woman she was “excluded” from the traditional definition of both, “the narrative of Linda Brent’s life” stands as a textual production to critique the sexually degrading dimension of slavery exposed in the domain of the home (49). Intertextuality, Harriet Jacobs’s *Incidents in the Life of a Slave Girl* and Octavia Butler’s *Kindred* offers similar versions of perversions of domesticity where there are generational abuses, virtue is deemed almost impossible, economics converts people to live-stock, religion is called into question, and the domestic perils of black womanhood are investigated.

In *Kindred*, however, the domestic discourse is more nuanced not just by the fact that the text offers few examples to support the domestic dream of the ideal family:

“Dana is left wounded and unsure even of her own sanity. Just as we never learn the mechanism of her time travel, we do not know what will become of her marriage to

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<sup>36</sup> Bettina Aptheker diagrams a compelling explanation for “[white] male presumption of the sexual accessibility of household workers” (123). See her *Woman’s Legacy: Essays on Race, Sex, and Class in American History* (Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 1981), 122-28. Also, for an informative discussion about the exploited labor of black domestic workers, see Bettina Aptheker, “Domestic Labor: Patterns in Black and White” in *Woman’s Legacy*, pp. 111-28. Toni Morrison dramatizes the consequences of exploited black domesticity in her 1970 novel *The Bluest Eye*. See also, “The Accusations Are False” by Fannie Barrier Williams in *Black Women in White America: A Documentary History*, edited by Gerda Lerner (New York: Vintage, 1973), 122-28.

Kevin, a white man,” deduces Dorothy Allison (476).<sup>37</sup> Nor, I am suggesting that there is a need to highlight the domestic discourse in *Kindred* simply because nationalist’s views of the sixties are *signified* on in domestic situations throughout the text (in a series of Bakhtinian *heteroglossia*, *polyphony*, and *carnavalesque* sketches), but because of all of those things, coupled with the uncanny domestic juxtapositions between the past and the present.

For instance, from Dana’s contemporary experience of poverty and low-wage employment to her thinly veiled parallels between her white husband Kevin and her antebellum slave masters Tom and Rufus Weylin – Dana seems to be casting a critical eye on that notion coming out of the sixties of progress and equality. As Sarah Eden Schiff says in “Recovering (from) the Double: Fiction as Historical Revision in Octavia E. Butler’s *Kindred*”(2009), “If the present is just a double of the past, then automatically, a cyclical temporality that undermines a progressive historical narrative is established” (111). Schiff’s theory dovetails with Butler’s comments in 1997, in separate interviews, one with Charles H. Rowell and another later that same year with Joan Fry, where she says: “We don’t really learn from history, because from one generation to the next we do tend to reproduce our errors. There are cycles in history” (Rowell 56), and in particular “I don’t think that black people have made peace with ourselves, and I don’t think white America has made any peace with us” (Fry 65).

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<sup>37</sup> Dorothy Allison, “The Future of Female” in *Reading Black, Reading Feminist: A Critical Anthology*, ed. Henry Louis Gates, Jr. (New York: Penguin Group, 1990), 476.

For Schiff, as well as for Butler, then, the notion of assuming a seamless continuity of progress in the relationship between the dominant society and a homogeneous minority culture-- past and present -- is one fraught with overlap, contradiction, doppelgängers, and both (minority and mainstream cultures) are as inextricably linked to the history of American slavery just as Dana is linked to her black and white ancestors. Moreover, *Kindred* is symbolic of a distinct feature or theme of African-American literature declares Christine Levecq in *Power and Repetition: Philosophies of (Literary) History in Octavia E. Butler's Kindred*, where she finds that the text should be read as an "historiographical fiction" that is "defined by heterogeneity and conflict rather than solidarity and commonality" illustrating an historical quandary producing an "end-less repetition of power struggles", which becomes cyclical (526). Consequently, as she explores the text beyond the theme level, Levecq declares that in *Kindred*, besides portraying the customary positions of oscillations of power struggles of African American literature, Butler rewrote the slave narrative from the standpoint of its "textual constructedness" and "documentary value" and debunks the notion of "essence or purity" when it comes to the idea literary history (526). Whereas it is true that individual differences in the face of society's expectations are a reoccurring theme in *Kindred*, as Levecq speculates, and that through the neo-slave narrative we can draw an explicit connection to Butler's intervention in contemporary debates about the sixties, addressing issues of race "purity," identity, and gender in a manner Ashraf Rushdy in in *Remembering Generations: Race and Family in Contemporary African American fiction*, interprets as a "palimpsest"<sup>38</sup> narrative: "texts that ...explore the idea of a memory

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<sup>38</sup> A *palimpsest* is defined as either a parchment on which the original writing can be

repetitively haunted by a historical event, and meditate on what the past means, can mean, should mean, to African American person in late-twentieth-century America ” reserving more than theoretical reflections on history (5).

But most important, Butler’s emphasis on slavery and its cultural implications deliberately suggests complicated comparisons between what Mae Gwendolyn Henderson in “Speaking in Tongues” measures as “an appropriate model for articulating a relation of mutuality and reciprocity ... within a field of gender and ethnicity that supports the notion of community” (120). And similar to what Du Bois and others have called the *Sisyphus* syndrome to describe the history of African-Americans, as each generation that makes progress on the path to freedom is blocked by the forces of reaction and the next generation must *reinvent* the wheel of justice, freedom and self-determination all over again, in a cyclical way. In other words, Butler’s *Kindred* gives us the mappings of a critical discourse through *heteroglossia* that simultaneously brings into relief the complex negotiations between not just race, not just class and not just gender, but the generational ideological polarization of the African-American community in a perennial struggle for freedom.

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erased to provide space for a second writing or a manuscript on which a later writing is written over and effaced earlier writing. The *Oxford English Dictionary* give examples for the first use from the seventeenth century and for the second only from the nineteenth, when the term began to assume a more metaphorical set of connotations (Rushdy 7). Also, see Stephen Greenblatt’s *The Swerve: How the World Became Modern* (New York: W.W. Norton & Company, 2011). Greenblatt describes how in “the ancient world... these strange, layered manuscripts... from the Greek for “scraped again—*palimpsest*,” have been influential in the recovery of many ancient texts: “a unique fourth-century copy of Cicero’s *On the Republic* remained visible beneath a seventh-century of St. Augustine’s meditation on the *Psalms*”; and how “the sole surviving copy of Seneca’s book on friendship was deciphered beneath an Old Testament inscribed in the late sixth century” (39-43).



By the same token, if race is treated as the central axis of social relations that signify on the emergence of individuality (versus the emergence of cyclical conflict) in the African American literary tradition (Levecq 526-529), then the combination of the historical pretext of slavery in all of its sobering accounts, and the subtext of family and race as constructs, presents the reader with forms of discourse that privileges diverse voices to enter into the ongoing conversation about slavery that reverberates between past and present (Spaulding 46). In Butler's *Kindred*, for instance, her characters in their debates sounds like they could almost be a *polyphony* of voices from the turbulent nineteen-sixties, or even a *ventriloquism* of a Spike Lee movie --*Jungle Fever* (1991)-- from the nineteen-nineties. Demonstrated by this-- one of many polemical exchanges over family and race between Butler's main protagonist Edana Franklin (though she prefers Dana), who travels back in time to the antebellum South, and Alice Greenwood, her great-great-grandmother who admonishes Dana, "You ought to be ashamed of yourself, whining and crying after some poor white trash of a man, black as you are. You always try to act so white. White nigger, turning against your own people!" (165). Alice's fierce grievances towards Dana are emblematic and comparative of the conflict of the sixties where amongst many racial concerns miscegenation was one of the more topical concerns-- with a legacy that stretches from the antebellum period of the south to today's contemporary African-American culture. If, as Rushdy posits, "In this way, family becomes a means of excluding some from the race—"not really black," "not really a brother," "not really a sister"—in the name of establishing a race-based nationalism" (Remembering 111), then its source is found in the internecine wrangling over skin color

within the African-American community, and the mainstream American cultures inability to move beyond race, and in both groups incapacity to reconcile themselves with issues of domestic miscegenation, often viewed as a form of race betrayal by both cultures.<sup>39</sup>

As noted by the reactions of Dana's aunt and uncle and Kevin's sister when the interracial couple breaks the news of their impending marriage: Dana's aunt, who made it clear that "she prefers light-skinned blacks," ambivalently "accepted the idea" of Dana marrying a white man-- Kevin, since granted the children that they would presumably produce would "be light"-skinned, particularly important since "she always" felt that Dana's dark brown skin made her a little "too 'highly visible'" for her color conscience taste (111). Ironically, Dana's aunt is paired with Dana's uncle—a race man-- (who is African American) who responds to Dana's request by demanding that she marry within her own race, and choose a "black man." It follows then, that material reality and estranged biological and ethnic isolation are the impending threats to those who repudiate the demands of identity politics.<sup>40</sup> For instance, Dana's uncle threatens her that although

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<sup>39</sup> A subsidiary of the humiliating effect of *Jim Crow* and a double-conscious identity, labeled by W.E.B. Du Bois in 1903 as "the problem of the twentieth century is the problem of the color line." In an intraracial context, the color line refers to self-imposed color prejudices, coupled with imposed class divisions based on skin hue are illustrated in the writings of Charles Waddell Chestnutt, Nella Larsen, Jessie Redmon Fauset, Wallace Thurman, Ralph Ellison, and Toni Morrison. The idea of *double consciousness*, as used by W.E.B. Du Bois, comes into play also, emphasizing the problematic nature of African American identity, According to Pearlie Peters, "Color Line," in *The Oxford Companion to African American Literature*, ed. William L. Andrews, Trudier Harris, and Frances Smith Foster (New York: Oxford UP, 1997) 163.

<sup>40</sup> In discussing gender inequality associated with "crossing the color-line," there is a "double-standard," in the black community reports Anneeka Marshall in her 1994 study on mixed race relationships "Sensuous Sapphires: A Study of the Social Construction of Black Female Sexuality." where for "Black men to go out with white women," it is "more acceptable," "than for Black women to go out with white men." Since, "it's all about" patriarchal "control and power, a Black man is seen as the one who controls the

she was like the child that her aunt and him had always wanted (“they couldn’t have any”), he would rather disinherit her from the “couple of apartment houses” he owned, and “will them to his church,” should she follow through with her plans, rather than “see them fall into” Kevin’s “white hands” (112). Along those same lines race polarization, Kevin’s sister valorizes the same types of bifurcated cultural standards of perverse racism in her refusal to meet Dana, and she challenges Kevin’s allegiance to his biological as well as ethnic family-- marked by threats, similar to Dana’s uncle in that she shows intolerance towards the idea of their ensuing interracial marriage: “she...wouldn’t have you in her house -- or me either if I married you,” Kevin despairingly comments (110).

In fact, in forcing her readers to face repressed anxieties in America and the African-American community around skin color—internalization of the *one-drop rule* and interracial marriages, Butler is *signifying* on a historical legacy that predates the BAM’s essentialist rhetoric of the sixties, that continues to linger its affects into the twentieth-century. Ironically, Rufus as a *white male/plantation owner* in 1819, with all of the concomitant power and privilege associated with that appellation during the period, in an *carnavalesque* (reversal of the power structure in exposing his vulnerability to a slave) retelling of his historically fixed inherited identity politics, reveals his confinement within the boundaries of miscegenation under the rules of *patriarchal* power structure. From his pitiful “I begged her not to go with him...Do you hear me, I *begged her!*” (Butler’s italics), to how he woefully laments to Dana his (though unrequited) implausible nuptial intentions for Alice: “If I lived in your time, I would have married her. Or tried to”(124),

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relationship and so his ‘race’ isn’t being downtrodden and trampled. But if a Black woman does the same thing she is being submissive” (Marshall, qtd. in Collins 176).

gives license to the image of the prevailing social hierarchy of the antebellum south being reversed. Despite how Rufus's sincerity in this amorous protestation for a legalized union with Alice is later scrutinized further into the text, as his manipulative behavior and abusive treatment of Alice and Dana surely placed his integrity in doubt-- a fact that Sarah has to enlighten Dana on, "Sometimes Marse Rufe says what will make you feel good—not what's true" (150). Nevertheless, the widespread strictures on individual liaisons between blacks and whites in 1819 had far reaching ramifications even into the late twentieth-century; the landmark civil rights decision of the United States Supreme Court that invalidated interracial marriage—*Loving v. Virginia* (1967), stands as but a classic example of the types of protracted state policing in effect against miscegenation in America<sup>41</sup>. A lingering affect, however, that need not have been such a crucial factor in the lives of so many active participants in the national discourse on miscegenation as a barometer of lack of racial progress. For example, found in the charismatic words of Frederick Douglass "In my first marriage I paid my compliments to my mother's race; in my second marriage I paid my compliments to the race of my father," in response to questions about his opinion on the embroiled polemics of miscegenation in America in the nineteenth-century. Words perhaps, that could stand as a metaphor of a malleable courageous individual who endeavors to stand up at the intersection between racial identities of tensions, offering tolerance as an alternative spring board towards collective good, or point of departure-- not in eliding differences, but in interrogating false notions

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<sup>41</sup> Patricia Hill Collins asserts that miscegenation laws were designed as an economic disincentive for white men to pass-on wealth to black women: "Due to laws against miscegenation designed to render the children of unions between White men and Black women propertyless (d' Emilio and Freedman 1988, 106), few delusions of enjoying the privileges attached to White male power have existed among Black women" (176).

of essentialism.

On the one hand, Butler has situated Dana as representative of an integrationists stance suggested by her marriage to Kevin, a white man; and, it is also worth noting that when Dana goes back to the past, she teaches white children as well as black to read. Consequently, Kevin and Dana's interracial marriage in the twentieth -century results in the types of racism characteristic of the radical politics of Black Nationalism in her family as well as Kevin's. On the other, while she incorporates personal insights into how the enslavement of the past continues to impact contemporary American culture (organized around sustained violence, psychic and otherwise) through patriarchal authority and masculine discourse, she offers resistance to the dominant ideology and culture as she constructs links between the past and the present.

To take a case in point, as Dana continued to display more of her own individual proclivities towards independent action against patriarchal authority: back on the plantation— in a terror filled atmosphere where it was made explicitly clear to her that “educated slaves aren't popular around here” (80), Dana defied Tom Weylin's command and direct forewarning “you read to my boy,” he said. “I let you do that. But that's enough reading for you” (97). While Dana openly disregarded Tom's rule as she stealthily prepared to teach Nigel to read, she recognized the risk involved as she confides in Nigel that “yes,” after all she was scared, as she should have been, based on the brutal punishment involved in being caught, “but” because her mind was made up — “I'll teach you,” she said, and on “that same day” she “stole a book and began to teach

him” (98). From this account of Dana’s subversive tactics against her master’s domination within the confines of the nineteenth-century myth of the *patriarch* of the plantation as a father figure and all the slaves on the plantation his well cared for extended family, runs parallel to in the twentieth century- in her defiance of her families patriarch—her uncle-- in response to his admonishments against her marrying outside of her race-- ““I’m marrying you,” she defiantly tells Kevin, as she “reached up and twisted a few strands of his straight gray hair ” (111) . Thus, illustrating how there is a clear disruption of patriarchal discourse, the type of disruption explained by Toni Morrison in “The Afro-American Presence In American Literature,” in her description of Sula, described in the superlative as “daring, disruptive, imaginative, modern, out-of-the-house, outlawed, unpolicing, uncontained and uncontainable. And dangerously female (49). What Morrison is suggesting here is that Sula Peace as a black female character in a sphere of entrenched patriarchal and racist discourse actively redefined the hegemonies of black, white, etc., in her rejection of passive *domesticity*. By doing this Sula redresses the traditional gender role of black women in her trajectory (mother, wife, and maternity), and replaces it by adopting a masculine kind of agency. For example, she mimicked masculine privilege in how she viewed casual sex with men in the community (black and white), and reconciled her actions with the type of indifference often assigned to masculine privilege. Further, Sula’s gender as a black woman put in the context of believability in navigation and negotiation within the institution of slavery, can be said to lend itself to how Butler, in developing the main character Dana for *Kindred* rejected using a male protagonist because she “couldn’t realistically keep him alive,” since he would have been considered too dangerous for the antebellum era. Ironically, a “female

main character, who might be equally dangerous, would not be perceived so” (Row, qtd. in Richard 119), as she noted in an 1997 interview with Charles H. Row.

Additionally, Butler’s strategic use of Dana as an agent of resistance underscored by the doubling between the past and the present as a critical and satiric (though not explicitly), examination of the notion of domestic progress can also be found in her contrasting Kevin’s twentieth-century interactions with Dana to her interactions with Tom and Rufus in the nineteenth-century. While, Tom and Rufus figure prominently in Dana’s encounters with patriarchal authority in the antebellum period, the similarities between the family discourse of both periods under the auspices of domesticity repeatedly offers an indictment against not only twentieth-centuries black nationalist essentialist ideals, but also progressive ideals of social change emblematic in her interracial marriage with Kevin. For, as detailed by English professor Guy Mark Foster in his deemphasizing a concentration on slavery in his assessment of *Kindred* -- “The present-day circumstances of Butler’s novel circulate around issues and concerns that are relevant to Dana in the development of her relationship with her white husband, Kevin” (147). A relationship I might add that is fraught with issues of suspected domestic abuse, a series of renegotiations between Dana’s personal independence in conflict with Kevin’s patriarchal authority, and conflations between Kevin and her white slave masters.

Whereas, Dana became conscious of the many similarities between their lives: the fact that Kevin and her both as aspiring writers were working in positions beneath their intellectual capabilities; they were orphans, alienated from their immediate families

in the present; in the nineteenth-century they had no family structure to rely upon either, and early on in the text, after a brief courtship she revealed her budding affectionate sentiments for Kevin-- "His likes and dislikes were becoming important to me," and thereby stimulated her romantic imaginings "He was just like me..." and "it was pleasant thinking," of them both together as having a potential future of nuptial bliss as *Kindred* spirits (57). Dana's saccharine ideal of their happy union, however, quickly changes as Kevin engages in types of behavior that while not leading to complete disillusionment on Dana's part, yet it does receive her serious attention, as well as the readers', as being inseparable from the types dominant masculine authority she eschewed coming from her uncle in the twentieth-century and that of Rufus and Tom Weylin back in the antebellum South on the plantation.

At the end of the Prologue Dana informs Kevin that "[t]he police were here," and after they inspected the bruises on her face, she discloses to him that "[t]hey thought you had done this to me. Kevin's cunning response, "...there were no witnesses, and you won't co-operate," (10); Kevin's comment sets the stage for a chain of physical and psychological intersections between past and present of an interracial relationship (Spaulding 46), where the ambiguity surrounding Dana's movement through time disrupts readers' attention much less than Butler's erasure of the boundaries of time and space. In a powerful correspondence between her *domestic* interactions with Kevin and the violent confrontations she experiences while enslaved, as Rushdy elsewhere points out "By setting up her novel in this way, Butler is surely saying something about the meaning of "kindred," ... to describe and transform racial and interracial relations"



(*Remembering* 113). Rushdy's point is that Butler's approach to the dominant patriarchal discourse on family—hierarchically male dominant and female passive structure—and nationalist's immutable racialized categories are to question the core validity of both notions.

Further, the juxtaposition between Kevin and Tom Weylin's sensibilities to Dana's passion for reading are exposed over the allocation of domestic space when the couple initially moves in together. Whereas, they both being literary types had amassed sizeable book collections separately, Kevin takes the position of authority and required that she "...get rid of some of [her] books so that [she'd] fit into his place." And continuing in his assertion of masculine dominance of their newly arranged domestic space, he judges and then restricts her intellectual desire by demeaning her literature as "just some of that book-club stuff that you don't read." Dana no longer idealizing nor romanticizing her relationship with Kevin, while wrestling with suspicion confesses that she "...got less sleep than ever," after that initial domestic episode (108). Moreover, Kevin's attacks on Dana's intellectual wherewithal, underscored by statements like "What did you do...Flunk out?" as an assumption of the premise for Dana leaving college short of obtaining a degree (56), shows clear signs of his disbelief in her intelligence. While Kevin's ridicule shows clear differentiation in the level of severity in his reaction to that of Tom Weylin her slave master in condemnation of Dana for personal autonomy in pursuing her intellectual pursuits. For instance, Dana received her first "whipping" from Tom Weylin over books as he caught her teaching the slave children how to read: "He lowered his gaze a little and frowned. I realized that I was still holding the old

speller”; “ Didn’t I tell you I didn’t want you reading!” (106); “ I treated you good...and you pay be back by stealing from me! Stealing my books! Reading!” (107)“ Who in hell ever said your were an educated nigger?” (200). Surprisingly, Dana began to rationalize, or even justify Tom’s abuse, as her interpretation of Tom Weylin’s personal character took a rather peculiar turn: “He wasn’t a monster at all. Just an ordinary man who sometimes did the monstrous things his society said were legal and proper” (134). In fact, as she mentions how “His eyes went over me like man sizing up a woman for sex...” and “ his eyes, I noticed, not for the first time, were almost as pale as Kevin’s,” Dana’s comments on the parity between Kevin and Tom Weylin takes on even more sentimental meaning than just during moments of insult throughout the text (90). And in an almost parody of *masculine* competition between the two men to see who wins the girl, Kevin’s request that she “[q]uit ” working at the warehouse, “I’ll help you out until you find a better job,” inspiring “if I hadn’t already loved him by then, that would have done it” from Dana (108), has a direct resemblance to how Tom Weylin through intimidation attempts to coerce Dana into leaving her husband “ I could buy you. Then you’d live here instead of traveling around the country without even enough to eat or a place to sleep,” and “...you know there’s always a home for you here...(201) As a result it became a source of an additional emotional connection between Dana and Tom as she reflected “ I stared after him believing in spite of myself that he really felt sorry for me” (91). Admittedly, rereading this passage in a contemporary context brought to mind what is commonly referred to as *Stockholm syndrome*, or capture bonding, where hostages express empathy and sympathy for their captors to the point of even defending them. Rather than explaining Dana’s extended emotional attachment to her slave master

according to Freudian theory, however, I argue it is in the construction between the legacy of slavery and her interracial marriage that *satirically* challenges conventional notions of progress that deserves critical attention. As noted by Spaulding, “On a deeper level, Dana must acknowledge the connections between the patriarchal dimensions of her relationship with Kevin in the present and her complex interactions with Rufus and his father, Tom Weylin in the past”(49).

This patriarchal dimension of her relationship with Kevin manifests itself in parallels between him and Rufus in substantial ways as well. For example, Kevin’s series of repetitious marriage proposals doesn’t register as romantic, in fact, it reveals Kevin’s strong will and desire to control and manipulate Dana; particularly since the sincerity of his marriage proposal was tarnished by him rewarding her with “I’d let you type all my manuscripts,” an entreaty she had previously refused “three times” (109). Despite her disdain for typing, “...I did all but the final drafts of my stories in longhand,” and evidenced in her deliberate choice of warehouse work over secretarial, nevertheless, Kevin persisted with his insensitivity until she relented. Similarly, Rufus, while knowledgeable of Dana’s distaste for writing (he admits that Kevin told him about it), in a manipulative appeal to Dana’s emotions—if she does not help him by writing the letters to creditors, they could lose the plantation-- and he tells her with a more dire implied threat behind it “God knows why I didn’t leave you out there” in the fields, “You would have learned a few things,” willfully compels a reluctant Dana to write the “... letters for him” (227). The parallels do not end with the similarities between the patriarchal attitudes that the two men exhibit towards Dana. Because of the recognizable strong resemblances

between Alice and Dana, as Rufus lasciviously observes in his conflating the two women as “two halves of a whole” (257), the relationship between Dana’s cousin’s twentieth-century suspicions of Kevin as a domestic abuser of Dana: “ She assumed that my bruises were his work... I never thought you’d be fool enough to let a man beat you,” she said as she left...I never thought I would either,” I whispered when she was gone” (116); And Dana’s own nineteenth-century suspicions of Rufus as a domestic abuser of Alice: “...one morning after he’d really overdone it, Alice came downstairs with her whole face swollen and bruised” (169), both can be seen as one common experience of continuity between the past and the present where domestic abuse of black women perdures. Thus the exchange between Alice and Dana over whom one chooses as a significant other, illustrated by the proclamation --“turning against your own people!” can also serve as satiric sketch on the “race as family” trope, where “[t]he family is the approved, natural site where ethnicity and racial culture are reproduced”(Gilroy qtd. in Paulin 171), and the “race as family” trope provides a portrait of unchanging repressive patriarchal domains of control where gender and race intersect under its cultural offspring—*domesticity*.

## CHAPTER XII

### FLOUTING PATRIARCHAL DICTUMS

One of the factors accounting for the satiric perspective being more noticeable in *Oxherding* is that Charles Johnson's early literary career was as a cartoonist<sup>42</sup> (Butler's was as a science fiction writer)<sup>43</sup>. For instance, Charles Johnson emphasizing the slight-of-hand possibilities between author and reader in the art of fiction considers it a "testament to the writer's and the reader's own sense of play, their refusal to take this work or the world too seriously,"<sup>44</sup> is corroborated by Gary Storhoff in *Understanding Charles Johnson* (2004), comment that "when it comes to reading Charles Johnson, the reader should always be prepared to laugh as his work is characterized by "rich humor," (7). Humor, however, is but one of the many aesthetic qualities on display in Johnson's art, which Linda Furgerson Selzer in *Charles Johnson In Context* (2009) classifies as a "remarkably original," eclectic "fusion of literature, Buddhism, and philosophy" (2).

Along those same lines, Johnson does not favor the philosophical over the material;

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<sup>42</sup> Johnson's first book in print *Black Humor* (1970) was a collection of political cartoons.

<sup>43</sup> Butler, in her first work, *Patternmaster* (1976) devises a plot based on genetic evolution and vassalage.

<sup>44</sup> Charles Johnson, *Being & Race*, 59.

rather Johnson's intellectual approach to African-American literature, though grounded in his philosophical background<sup>45</sup>, raises issues of "identity, liberation and enlightenment," explains Rudolph P. Byrd in "Oxherding Tale and Siddhartha: Philosophy, Fiction, and the Emergence of a Hidden Tradition" (557). Indeed, anyone familiar with Johnson's oeuvre would agree with Storhoff, Selzer and Byrd's estimation that Johnson does expand the intellectual capabilities of the neo-slave narrative in ways that meld multifarious voices into an identifiable marker of literary achievement as he, dismissive of essentialist ideas on race, embraces alternative ways of being for African Americans (Selzer 2009; Byrd 1996). As an illustration, Johnson clearly defines his unconventional literary objectives for *Oxherding* in the preface of the text where he writes that this novel, his "platform book," with its obvious Eastern philosophical leanings<sup>46</sup>, placed the greatest strain on his ingenuity, as it extends the boundaries of the traditional slave narrative through an artistic fusion of slave narrative and philosophy in a first-person narrator striving for moral balance (ix-xix). Although it is true that *Oxherding* has proven to be as original and indefatigable in resisting a simple definition as Johnson had intended (Selzer 127-130), at the same time, Johnson through his promotion of humor into the text

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<sup>45</sup> Johnson earned a Ph.D. in philosophy from SUNY—Stony Brook in 1999, although it was backdated to 1988. After passing his doctoral examinations in 1988, Johnson left Stony Brook for the position at Washington without completing the Ph.D. Subsequently, Stony Brook awarded Johnson a Ph. D. in philosophy in 1999, and backdated it to 1988, the a same year he completed *Being and Race*.

<sup>46</sup> A term meant to announce a new direction in Johnson's artistic and intellectual development finds Linda Furgerson Selzer in *Charles Johnson In Context* (2009),129. According to Rudolph P. Byrd, "*Oxherding Tale* is perhaps the most widely taught and admired of Johnson's novels, and the author using a "playful reference" to The Platform Sutra of the Sixth Patriarch, a canonical work in Zen Buddhism" (549). *Oxherding* referenced by Johnson as the text which demanded the most of intellectual capabilities, "no novel has exhausted more than this one...everything else I attempted to do would in one way or another be based upon and refer to it" (*Oxherding* xvii).

infiltrates into the relatively underserved approach to African-American literature known as the satiric perspective echoing key points from nineteen-sixties debates, accomplished through Bakhtin's *heteroglosia* of speech.

Whereas Andrew's search for himself is dominated by race through interpersonal divisions linked to the separatist impulses of the Black Arts Movement, Andrew's adoption of domesticity at the end of the text, celebrating the quotidian, to the point of banality: "after dinner, facing the fireplace in a furniture less room, she resting against me," and in expressing his personal vision of "tranquility" as "nothing more than forty years of crawling home from the classroom, my suit coat lightly dusted with chalk, nerves humming with the peculiar blend of fatigue and exhilaration that follows an inspired lecture" (145,147), almost invokes a form of conflicted uber-domesticity. As Timothy Spaulding notes, although the ending of *Oxherding* posits "Andrew" presumably "settled into a life of domestic bliss with his new wife," while still a fugitive slave passing for white, it is actually a "culturally limited form of assimilation," implying that "the price for his freedom and domestic bliss is his black identity" (90). This means that Andrew's vision of liberation and enlightenment (for both the individual and the community) is a gallant yet flawed effort in this regard: gallant in the spirit of a Frederick Douglass, in that he directly addresses the conditions of slavery in the declaration of himself as a "free self" through his will-power that rejects various limiting notions of his individuality, coupled with the validation of his masculinity through the traditional structure of family; flawed in the sense of Andrew's inadequate reconciliation of the highly complex problem – *race*—by only pretentiously integrating into Western

mainstream culture, while at the same time casually glossing over the binary logic of race that's endemic to the structure of the culture.

Although it could very well be argued that Andrew's *passing* into mainstream culture is less reflective of a reductionist logic in surrendering his identity, and more a case of simply *passing* as a prerequisite appeal to meeting his economic needs, reflected in both Nella Larsen's *Quicksand* (1928) and *Passing* (1929), where the African-American protagonist of both novels indulge in constructed white identities in a quest for security that becomes complicated by class issues. Aida Ahmed Hussen argues, however, that for all of Andrew's passing-thru trials to "break free from the strictures of prescriptive identity" it is ironic that in his final expression of "freedom," which emphasizes "marriage, property ownership, and the patriarchal nuclear family"—in general, all fit the framework for middle-class power—he thus perpetuates the same system that he was ostensibly escaping from (241). In other instances, critics viewed Andrew's ultimate domestic engagement as of little substance, if not an idealistic pretense leading towards insularity, read in terms of domestic ending. Selzer, for example, sees *Oxherding* as offering the reader a philosophical trope "which operates to displace the epic spaces of national warfare to the domestic terrain of sexual warfare" (137), while Jonathan Little in *Charles Johnson's Spiritual Imagination* suggest that Andrew in a fusion of "Zen Buddhism" and "Hinduism," exemplifies the Hindu principle of "*dharma*" in abandoning his selfish desires as he methodically "transcends" each phase – "student," "householder," "forest dweller," and "world renouncer"—of Hindu's "four stages of life" (86-87). And although Johnson places Andrew in difficult



predicaments at every juncture that tests his resolve to exemplify his moral sense and conscience, but it is his existence in the “householder stage of life, in which one marries, works, has children...” and becomes responsible to, and integrated into the larger community that “perpetuates the social order” — that makes for “a somewhat surprising outcome for a former slave” (87). I agree that in estimating Andrew’s willful acceptance and aspirations of American middle-class standards of authentication through domesticity is a problematic ending, however, I think Johnson’s domestic aims are much broader than simply celebrating what it means to have a family in opposition to the formulaic slave narrative plot. Yet, while Johnson’s use of the domestic model as a means of exploring black male identity places Andrew in the middle of an ongoing conflicted discussion from the Black Arts Movement of the sixties, noted by Johnson as one which “one could not help being caught up in this confusion, the polarization of black and white, young and old, middle class and poor” (*Being* 22), his *Hallmark* card idea of domesticity (idealized version of the beautiful family picture) signifies on unresolved black cultural nationalist ideas of *masculinity*. It is useful at this juncture to revisit Johnson’s distinctions between personal and collective suffering collapsed into the domestic spaces of the householder as a type of “sexual warfare,” (28) where black marriages as well as white marital relationships are dramatized in the Bakhtinian dialogic sense of dispelling assumptions of homogeneity in an intersection between gender difference and racial identity. Moreover, Aida Ahmed Hussen contextualizes those distinctions of suffering by asserting that “Johnson readily and repeatedly draws comparison between the predicaments of (white) women and African Americans (men), suggesting at once the constructedness, the immorality, and disabling effects of gender-based social

stratification” (247). In fact, apart from Andrew and Peggy’s transcending marital union, there is no patriarchal nuclear family unit that stands comfortably within the traditional social conventions of the institution of marriage. For example, Jonathan and Anna Polkinghorne’s marriage is noticeably infused with years of combative scenes of “ minor flare-ups” by Anna towards Jonathan, after that fateful night of her deception, conspired by Jonathan and George that led to Andrew’s conception. In a parody of the nineteenth-century nuclear family, Jonathan’s desire for a discourse of domesticity is dependent upon the instantiation of the power inscribed in his gendered voice of white male patriarchy restoring the ideal situated standard of the American family. Portrayed as such, Jonathan’s male authority on the plantation big-house was reduced to an undistinguished mendicant, forced to sleep in separate rooms, futilely appealing to his wife for forgiveness by going “ to her door night after night, night after night, night after night, and ask[ing] helplessly, “Can we talk about it?”” (8). And similar to professor James W. Coleman’s assessment of Flo Hattfield as “a different kind of white woman, one who has inverted the white-male oppressive hierarchy by putting herself at the top” (641), Johnson also lodges Anna Polkinghorne’s presence as a destabilization of male authority in the home in the satirical sense noted by Frank Palmeri in “Satire in Narrative” (1990), where Palmeri points out how “ narrative satire parodies both the official voice of established beliefs and the discourse of its opponents”(6), where what is at stake is not only the fictive normalizations of the American family , but also foundational family values extending through the *cult of true womanhood* to the nineteen-sixties black nationalist elevation of conservative ideals for *masculine* privilege.

And nowhere does Johnson demonstrate the problematic failings of both black nationalist's versions of *masculinity* and the nineteenth-century conservative *angel in the household* (including the nineteen-fifties ideal of domesticity) ideals of domesticity in terms of *polyphony* or *heteroglossia* than in the caustic relationship between Minty's parents Nate and Addie McKay. For example, although "He never said outright that black women were beneath him," or that providing for his family was low on his list of priorities, but in matters of being regulated to a monogamous relationship with just one woman (namely with his wife Addie), Nate McKay felt that "he was, after all, too blessed to squander himself in hard work or, for that matter, in limiting himself to a single black woman" (103). Coupled with the exaggerated views Nate McKay held of himself as a true ladies man, as he explained to George "he belonged in the company of ladies a little more polished," and that they all were after all, in awe of his libidinous physicality and aristocratic masculine authority since he "was performing an act of extraordinary sacrifice," and that it was rumored that he had begotten some "twenty-five children sprinkled on farms throughout South Carolina" (103), Nate McKay's character *signifies* on one of the subtexts of the black militants of the sixties call for retrieval of black manhood: through the subduing of black women. Johnson knows the polemics of women in nationalist ideological views, as noted by Pauli Murray in describing the nineteen-sixties nationalist movement, "many Black men misinterpreted Black women's qualities of self-reliance and independence by tacitly accepting the patriarchy thesis" (Murray qtd. in Collins 96). Hence, Nate McKay's participating in a discourse of black male superiority achieved at the expense of black women and children is a satire on

leaders like Baraka who at one point were essentially arguing that using his male libido is for whomever he likes as his personal revolution to bring the race forward.

Moreover, Charles Johnson, for instance in *Oxherding Tale* (1982) presents a comic satiric scene with the satiric underpinnings of both the African American *trickster* tradition (African American humor has an established rich tradition in American society that dates back from the plantation *trickster* tales, to the turn-of-the-century blackface minstrelsy, to our contemporary novels and sitcoms<sup>47</sup>) and Bakhtin's *dialogic* that foregrounds the *picaresque*, where in order to avoid detection and elude capture Andrew Hawkins, *Oxherding's* protagonist invents a false identity. While Andrew and Reb, (also known as the Coffinmaker) an Allmuseri craftsman (who eventually serves as Andrew's mentor of sorts) are both banished to the "mines" from Flo Hatfield's plantation *Leviathan*, in a parody of a picaresque<sup>48</sup> revision of the slave narrative, they are on the run and interrogated by a "toll gate guard of a public turnpike," who has been alerted to beware of two runaway slaves. Coming upon the young white male gate guard, and under the weight of direct interrogation, Andrew self-fashions himself a new family tree: "grandson" of exceptional "Revolutionary War" hero "Edwin Harris," patriarch of a

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<sup>47</sup> Cornel West in "Subversive Joy And Revolutionary Patience In Black Christianity" links "The radically comic character of Afro-American life—the pervasive sense of play, laughter and ingenious humor of blacks—flows primarily from the profound Afro-American Christian preoccupation with the tragedy in the struggle for freedom and the freedom in a tragic predicament. This comic release is the black groan made gay" (439).

<sup>48</sup> Literary convention where a rogue wanders through the countryside and takes advantage of the gullible people he meets. A classic example would be Miguel De Cervantes's *Don Quixote* (1605).

family with a history of substantive financial means acquired through “American shipping,” that subsequently had been squandered prior to his generation bequeathing to him only “one loyal servant (Reb).” Ironically, Andrew informs the guard that he doesn’t have any identity papers because they were stolen with “what money I had, and horses” by two escaped slaves (who are, of course, Reb and Andrew) (109). After being resoundingly deceived by the whole charade, the guard delivers a stereotypical racist diatribe: “...in his opinion all Negroes were two-faced liars and thieves, lazy without the wit of a toadstool,” as the final ironic insult, to which Andrew concurred completely, but of course, with an implied wink and a nod to the reader (110). What this passage underscores, on the one hand is the neo-slave narrators facility for loosely adopting the conventions of the antebellum slave narrative; while on the other, crafting a situation in the satiric tradition contained by subversive humor that paradoxically provides the double image of the “other” often concealing something very political and perhaps hostile that the direct audience didn’t quite know was striking at the power structure, yet uncovering rhetorical conventions that transcend disciplinary boundaries. Or, in other words, as pointed out by Dustin Griffin, to put it bluntly “[a]nybody can call names, but it requires skill to make a malefactor die sweetly,”<sup>49</sup> or even a form of subversive interaction that is fluid and flexible that’s inseparable from Dr. King’s nonviolent resistance. There is also a stress on Bakhtin’s *heteroglosia* of speech defined by the social diversity of speech in this passage where the speaker Andrew takes on the social voices of a wide variety of cultural identities circumscribed by racist patriarchal capitalist constraints. As Andrew enters into the *dialogics* of identity he attempts to systematically strip the language of the ruling

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<sup>49</sup> Dustin Griffin. *Satire: A Critical Reintroduction* (1994).

class down of its worth by appropriating its original context by “reinventing” the terms through moves that Bakhtin in “Discourse on the Novel” formulate as “authoritative” and “internally persuasive.”

Peter Buitenhuis, in a critical analysis of a group of essays on literary theory and Canadian literature defines *dialogue* in accordance to *heteroglossia*: both are linguistic responses to a social and cultural breakdown and parodies of the dominant ideology, hierarchy and ethnocentrism.<sup>50</sup> Whereas Andrew in recasting himself as a “slave owning” direct descendent of “Edwin Harris” a decorated “hero” of the “Revolutionary War,” enters into a discourse that is authoritative and patriarchal in a meaningful criterion within the dialectical interplay of subversive deception that fulfills Buitenhuis’s estimation of Bakhtin’s *dialogue* as a linguistic responses to social and cultural breakdown in a model that is primarily adversarial. In other words, what is characteristic about Andrew’s dialog is that it is reflective of not only Buitenhuis’s paradigm of *dialogue* as it relates to *heteroglossia* in that his language copes with established denial of the intelligence, ability, and diversity of people of color through an act of inversion, illustrated by how the plurality of the slave’s (Andrew’s) inner dialogue allies with a system through parody designed for his destruction, incorporating a new narrative response that is a form of interrogation. Or, in the words of Valerie Smith from “Loopholes of Retreat” in a different context, “[b]y mythologizing rugged individuality, physical strength, and geographical mobility, the narratives enshrine cultural definitions

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<sup>50</sup> Peter Buitenhuis. “Present Imperative: New Directions in Canadian Literary Theory.” Rev. of *Future Indicative: Literary Theory and Canadian Literature*, ed. John Moss. *College English* 50.8 (1988): 927-30.

of masculinity,” (217) of the dominant culture, and thus allows Andrew to concretely transcend the mundane limitations placed upon him by that same culture through *heteroglossia*.

Further, Johnson in this passage illustrates how the neo-slave narrators subversive power expressed through satire, transcends traditional boundaries in its critiquing social practices in a manner to use the terms of Linda Hutcheon in *Poetics of Postmodernism* that is analogous to postmodern fictions capacity for problematizing historical knowledge, by, first entertaining a “contradictory phenomenon,” to the point of *reductum ad absurdum* in the instance of the fear of blackness being inescapable to the point where racial politics clouds ones own personal judgment, and, second, through the satirist traditional ground of irony—Andrew a black runaway slave, posing as a white slave owner, parodies the discursive practices of white supremacy in affect by instigating a series of ranting and ravings in the discursive community of supremacy as a form of mockery using *degenerative* satiric language that “subverts the very concepts it challenges.”<sup>51</sup>

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<sup>51</sup> Linda Hutcheon, *A Poetics of Postmodernism: History, Theory, Fiction*, 3.

## CHAPTER XIII

### CONCLUSION

#### THE HEURISTICS OF DOMESTICITY, SATIRE AND BLACK MASCULINITY

The African satirical voice, historically served as a lynchpin in the cultural tradition of speaking the otherwise unspeakable, shaped in and by the African village in responding to communal conflict in the village. In America, that African satirical voice, equipped with requisite articulation of the absurdity and long-suffering under the weight and crucible of African-American slavery and Jim Crowism, as initiated by the slaves themselves, became situated as a subversive channel for resistance through a variety of permutations: ranging from minstrelsy to stand-up comedy to African-American literature. While acknowledging the influence of the Greek satiric model of *Menippus* on the African-American satiric tradition, the focus of this paper was two fold: assemble the neo-slave narratives (with their respective interests in addressing the enduring social consequences of slavery) of Octavia Butler's *Kindred*, and Charles Johnson's *Oxherding Tale*, along with Bakhtin's *dialogics* theory to excavate the Black Arts Movement's patriarchal rhetoric of the nineteen-sixties influence on both authors.



The Black Power Movement's influence on Butler and Johnson left them both with skepticism coming out of the sixties over the movement's ideology of there being only "one way" to accomplish its goal of social uplift. A key assumption of this nationalist ideology was rooted in *domesticity* as an extension of the nineteenth-century doctrine of the ideal of the *patriarchal* family formation: a derivative from the English sense of urgency in preserving the "father" at the head of the English *nuclear* family, sanctioned under the *Victorian* social objectives of respectability. As an American cultural product of the nineteenth-century, in what was labeled "the cult of domesticity," *domestic* values became the dominant type of family discourse in which *masculine* values contingent on patriarchal ambitions were used as socializing agents for African American families; a point which was underscored by stereotypical images of African American women as *Mammies* as a carryover from slavery in the post-Reconstruction period to *Matriarchs* in the post-civil rights eras. In both instances, the failure of the African-American family to fit into the pre-fabricated mold of the purported *normal* Westernized family paradigm rested at the feet of the emasculated African American male for failure to exercise his *patriarchal* authority in the home over the black woman.

The *Moynihan Report* of the sixties, represented a rigidly univocal text that gestured towards acknowledgment of what Toni Morrison in *Playing in the Dark* deemed as the power of written discourse inscribed with binary oppositional "images of blinding whiteness [that] seem to function as both antidote for and meditation on the shadow that is companion to this whiteness"—blackness (33), offered the latest installment of the social discourse of *family* referent, claimed that a pathological condition persisted in the

African-American community represented by the disproportionate number of single families with female authority. Although, reclamation of black manhood as a prescription for and reaction to the *Matriarch* image of the *Moynihan Report* was not the exclusive motivation behind black nationalist's co-opting of the discourse of the family, (white-supremacist attacks against black intelligence, beauty, and character capacity were a few others), the report only heightened preexisting tensions in some black men whom were already suspicious of black women as co-conspirators with white men, attributed to their economic advancements within mainstream American society. While Butler and Johnson both are on record as recognizing the creative impact that Black Power militant intellectuals like a Amiri Baraka's cultural and ethical imperatives had on their early careers, in their *signifying* on the Black Nationalist discourse of the sixties through *Kindred* and *Oxherding* both illustrate a critique of the patriarchal and pernicious racial schemas that were rather self-serving and replicated thru generations of the black community. Along with calling attention to the satiric elements embedded in the texts, though admittedly with Butler deciphering the satiric content required more nuance and teasing out for the intricacies of the social discourse she's holding up for display, the satiric perspective is found in that they both appear to be indicating, ventriloquizing, and satirizing other discourses under Bakhtin's theoretical approach, and using the antebellum neo-slave narrative as a way to have a debate that seems to recapture ground in the representation of the plantation tradition that is inextricably interlocked alongside the domestic space of the home. For example, by employing the vehicle of time-travel, in particular Butler in *Kindred* is suggesting that in coming to terms with the historical moment of nineteenth-century slavery and reinterpreting it from the perspective of an

African American woman in the twentieth-century, through familial dialogue corresponding between the past and the present exposes the essentialist notions that still haunt *domestic* relationships. By extension, though not as obviously satiric, Butler is taking a rather (what I termed earlier as a *sly*) satiric critical assessment of the notion of domestic progress of all American families irrespective of ethnic background.

Aligned with Butler in her intervention on the issues of race, black *masculinity* and *domesticity* raised during the late sixties, Johnson's philosophical sensibilities allied with more recognizable modes of satirical mockery offers readers critical portrayals of the *nuclear* family ideals under *patriarchal* authority. Whereas the alleged sanctity of the domestic space between men and women (irrespective of race) consigned to the institution of marriage becomes a site of comic discourse on the surface, a provocative awareness of the shortcomings of *patriarchy* and black *masculinity* were also being acknowledged as nothing short of social constructs.

Ultimately, both Johnson and Butler, then, critique the received idea of the white *patriarchal* family as the marker, or as Dr. Henry Louis Gates, Jr. would argue the "transcendent signified," towards which the black family should emulate as not only a racially coded discourse in the name of white supremacy, but also, in reaction to the legacy of slavery, an integral component of the nationalist's notion of racial essentialism and black heterosexual familial ideals. Actually, the dominant American tradition of the trope of the family and its *domestic* ideal, under the paradox of *democracy* has always been a part of the African American experience from slavery to the present. In this sense,

Butler and Johnson's infusing the discussion with *satire* and Bakhtin's theory of many voices foregrounded in the novel expose the rigidly *patriarchal* model of family life as problematic for all families that are determined to narrowly comply with Westernized civilization's static discourse of the *patriarchal* family.

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