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**STRANGE FRUIT: AN EXAMINATION AND COMPARISON
OF THEMES IN THE ANTI-LYNCHING DRAMAS
OF BLACK AND WHITE WOMEN AUTHORS
OF THE EARLY TWENTIETH-CENTURY (1916-1936)**

By

Anna Jo Paul
B.A., Clarion State College, 1969
M.A., Villanova University, 1976

A Dissertation
Submitted to the Faculty of the
College of Arts and Sciences of the University of Louisville
in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements
for The Degree of

Doctor of Philosophy

Department of Humanities
University of Louisville
Louisville, Kentucky

May 2013

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A Dissertation Approved On

April 15, 2013

By the following Dissertation Committee:

Co-Director, Dr. Annette Allen

Co-Director, Dr. Karen Chandler

Professor Neferiti Burton

Dr. Lundeana Thomas

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I knew very little of slavery or lynching in American when I proceeded with this degree. As a firm believer that “everything happens for a reason,” I accepted my advisor’s suggestion to research “chattel slavery.” I am grateful to Dr. Annette Allen, a Co- Director of my Dissertation Committee, for her suggestion. These years of research have opened a world of history related to the African American population that was relatively unknown to me. This journey offered me the opportunity to become familiar with great and humble survivors. I have been honored to study their history, and I am astounded by their courage and tenacity.

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DEDICATION

This dissertation is dedicated to all members of my family
who have in one way or another, traveled the journey with me.

I dedicate this work to the memory of my parents,
Andrew and Anna Montana, who believed that hard work made for success.
You are truly missed!

I dedicate this work as well, to my siblings,
Franci, Mary and Andy and their families, for their
constant support and encouragement these past years.

Most importantly, I dedicate this work to
my loving husband, Barry,
who stood with me at each milestone,
and to my wonderful children,
Andrew, Brooke, Jeremy, Christopher and Quinn
– as well as my “honey boys,” Jacob and Patrick.
This work is dedicated to you with my deepest love and gratitude
for your daily validation and encouragement
which ultimately brought me to my goal.
I will love you all forever.

ABSTRACT

STRANGE FRUIT: AN EXAMINATION and COMPARISON of the THEMES in the ANTI-LYNCHING DRAMAS of BLACK and WHITE WOMEN AUTHORS of the EARLY TWENTIETH CENTURY (1916-1936)

By

Anna Jo Paul

April 15, 2013

Ten lynching dramas are analyzed and compared in this dissertation. In all ten, written by African American and white women authors, between 1916-1936, a combination of eight themes are presented: supremacy, hypocrisy, complicity, resistance, futility of black life, faith, trauma and motherhood. The intent of the analysis of themes is to determine each dramatist's representation of the themes through action, stage directions or elements of characterization. Following the examination of the dramas, a comparison is made between the similarities or differences that are apparent between those written by African American and white women authors. I have chosen to examine both groups of authors because at this time in history, white women joined the ASWPL (Association of Southern Women for the Prevention of Lynching) in an interracial effort to affect change and the curtailment of lynching.

This dissertation offers an over-view of the historical climate of the South from Emancipation to the end of Reconstruction 1863-1877 . It includes a discussion on the

genesis of lynching and the horrors of ritual sacrifice, along with the campaign against lynching that was influential in bringing attention to the phenomenon. The history of Black Theatre and Realistic Literature are also discussed in relation to the anti-lynching campaign that was begun by Ida B. Wells in 1892 and continued through the efforts of Southern white women under the guidance of Jessie Daniel Ames .

The ten anti-lynching plays analyzed and compared in this work reveal the issues that faced both races: the white race confronting its own violence and the African American race resisting the temptation to remain silent about murder on the hanging tree. An estimated five thousand individuals died by the noose following the Civil War and into the mid-twentieth century. During that time, few perpetrators were convicted for their crimes, but hundreds of African American families lost loved ones because of racial prejudice.

The anti-lynching dramas give an historical picture of the phenomenon that became a national embarrassment, and demonstrate how lives were destroyed at “the hands of persons unknown” (Dray, Cover: Title).

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INTRODUCTION

THE PUBLIC DISPLAY OF DEATH

On May 25, 1911, Laura and L.D. Nelson (An African American mother and her fourteen year-old son), were lynched in Okemah, Oklahoma.¹ Laura and her family were taken into custody when the local sheriff investigated the theft of a neighbor's cow. When the white sheriff arrived at the Nelson home, L.D. shot and killed him. Because Laura had given the gun to her son, both were taken to separate jail cells

Figure 1 : The Lynching of Laura Nelson

until a "fair" trial could be scheduled. Mr. Austin Nelson, Laura's husband, admitted that he had stolen the cow only after the animal's remains were found hidden under the hay. Nelson was charged with larceny and served three years in prison, "a move that probably saved his life" (Allen et al. 179).

On May 24, around midnight, a group of men silently broke into the jails where Laura and her son were held.

Figure 2: The Lynching of L.D. Nelson

¹ Figures 1 and 2. Plates 37 and 38. The Lynching of Laura Nelson and her son. May 25, 1911, Okemah, Oklahoma; James Allen et al. *Without Sanctuary: Lynching Photography in America*. Hong Kong: Twin Palms Publishers, 2000. Print.

They were secreted away to an area about six miles from the town. Laura was raped before she and her son were lynched from a steel bridge that crossed the Canadian River. James Allen relates the scene as others remembered it:

The woman's arms were swinging at her side, untied, while about twenty feet away swung the boy with his clothes partly torn off and his hands tied with a saddle string. Sightseers gathered on the bridge the following morning and photographs of the hanging bodies were sold as postcards. No one was ever charged in the murders. (Allen et al. 180)

Figure 3 : Funeral of Emmett Till

Emmett Till² was fourteen years old when he was lynched for allegedly whistling at a white woman in a candy store. He was from Chicago and was visiting his extended family in Mississippi when the murder took place. He was hunted by the husband of the woman before being taken at night from his grandfather's home by a group of white men. The men forced him into a truck and he was never seen alive again. Three days later, his mutilated body was found floating in the river. He was so horribly disfigured, only a ring on his finger identified him as Till. His body had been severely beaten, one eye was gouged out, he was shot, and finally, a heavy fan was tied around his body before he was thrown into the river (Holmes 1).

² Figure 3: Holmes, AAL. "The Murder of Emmett Till," Aug. 1955. (Iconic Photos p.1). 3 / 22 / 13. Web. <http://iconicphotos.wordpress.com/2009/08/26/the-murder-of-emmett-till/>

When his remains were returned to his mother in Chicago, she insisted that the casket remain open. She wanted visitors and photographers to take pictures. She is known for saying, “ I wanted the world to see what they did to my baby” (1). Nearly 50,000 people passed by his casket, and due to the extreme public reaction to the photo, an interest in the Civil Rights Movement gained momentum (1).

The men responsible for Till’s murder were found “not guilty” by a jury of twelve white men. It took only one hour of deliberation to come to their decision. The foreman joked and laughed when he admitted that they would have been faster with their verdict if they hadn’t stopped to get a drink . The men responsible for Till’s murder knew that they couldn’t be tried again for the same crime, and so they sold their stories to *Look Magazine* and admitted their guilt (Holmes 1).

The above lynchings are only two examples of the approximately five thousand such murders that plagued the nation from the late nineteenth century to the middle of the twentieth century (approximately 1880 – 1950). The majority of the victims were African American men, but there were women and children who also met the rope and faggot, as evidenced by the above photographs. The reasons for lynching varied – everything from insulting or arguing with a white person, to stealing, to appearing insubordinate or “uppity,” for being “available” when the lynching mob needed a scapegoat, or simply for being “black.” The most common reason for exorcising the black man was because of his reputation as a beast, a brute, and a rapist who assaulted white women.

Black women, who were positioned outside the protection of the ideology of true womanhood, could clearly see the compromised role of white

women; that is, that lynchings were being carried out on their behalf.

(Perkins, Stephens 5)

In most instances, this was a bogus excuse for the killings, but one that influenced women authors (both black and white) during the late nineteenth century and early twentieth century to join together in a writing campaign against lynching. This campaign began with Ida B. Wells in 1892 with her *Southern Horrors and Other Writings 1892-1900*. In subsequent years, other women authors joined the writing campaign to educate their readers on the existing fears and horrors of lynchings, to convince them that legislation must be passed to bring an end to murder, and to debunk the myth that black men constantly assaulted white women.

Wells was compelled to refute the notion that black men were the brutes that they were made out to be. She presented statistics on lynchings as well as the reasons men were randomly killed. Her research gave proof of the true reasons for the murders:

Lynching was not simply a spontaneous punishment . . . but an act of terror perpetrated against a race of people in order to maintain power and control . . . the ritualized murders were acts of violence and intimidation designed to retard the progress of African Americans in their efforts to participate more fully in social, political, and economic life. (Royster 3)

During the centuries of slavery in America, the African American slave was chattel, available to be sold, borrowed or exchanged, at the discretion of his owner. The slave was stripped of his history, his name, his family, and his culture. He was a beast of burden and a source of profit, but he was never viewed as a human being. The slave had

no rights. He could not be educated, and he could not retaliate against a white man. He was, however, as a source of free and constant labor, viewed as a valuable asset to his master – nothing more.

In January of 1865, by ratifying the Thirteenth Amendment, slavery was abolished. The four million ex-slaves, however, who were at one time valuable property, no longer held that status and were now viewed as political, social and economic threats to the status quo of white domination. Their first steps toward independence, led African Americans on another long journey toward freedom and full citizenship. This journey saw them struggle against the constant repression of the white community until the Civil Rights Movement of the 1960s.

During the years of Reconstruction, African Americans had to make difficult transitions from working as slaves to becoming free workers. Southern planters, however, expected to keep the same control over black labor that they had with slavery. Many former Confederates were resigned to the abolition of slavery, but they were not willing to accept the social or political changes that four million ex-slaves might create. Various forms of discrimination would be implemented by the dominant population to prevent such changes. The white power structure continually blocked paths of African Americans with their machinations of oppression: Black Codes; Fugitive Slave laws; Vagrancy Laws; Forced Convict Labor; Peonage; Disfranchisement; Jim Crow Laws; Employment Discrimination; Violence and Murder – in the form of lynching.

Slowly, as Reconstruction moved forward, the African Americans started to make a modicum of social and economic progress. There were blacks who managed to become

independent farmers. Many received educations and began working as teachers for their own race. African American men and women began small businesses, and even became part of the political scene. The legislation of the Fourteenth and Fifteenth Amendments brought them to citizenship and equality. The success was short-lived, however, and any rights that they acquired during Reconstruction gradually disintegrated. In addition, the white community was determined, at all costs, to keep the African Americans from gaining any significant power, and to keep them as the subservient slaves they once were.

During the period of American history roughly dating from 1880-1940, the nation experienced its most brutal period of racial violence when thousands of black men and women were lynched for various reasons. It was the period of the Nadir of Race Relations. African Americans continued to be treated and considered as second-class citizens, and living under the laws of legal segregation, they were not accepted as equals of the white citizens. They were considered inferior beings with little if any purpose in a white man's world. Following World War I, young black soldiers were returning home only to find their war efforts unappreciated and lynchings a means of ridding the neighborhoods of unwanted residents. It was also the era of foreign immigration and industrialization in the nation. All of these rapid changes and conditions of living added to economic and social problems that led to deadly race riots, resulting in the deaths of both blacks and whites, and soldiers burned alive wearing their uniforms.

In the early part of the century, and after the Great War, the black community began to affirm their own self-consciousness. Black soldiers hoped that their rights would be given to them because of their war sacrifices, but this was not the case. Recognizing their need to fight for their own needs, and with the influence of the Harlem Renaissance

(a.k.a.), The New Negro Movement, the black community became more assertive and determined to gain what was rightfully theirs. The white population saw this aggressive trend as an additional threat to their way of life. The violence between the factions escalated and in the midst of racial riots, terrorism by organizations such as the Ku Klux Klan, and the need to assert their own worth, many blacks retaliated against the whites. When they fought back and demonstrated “overt” resistance, they were lynched. The lynchings were horrific rituals that became more extreme in their brutality as the years progressed. The families of the victims were destroyed by the murders, and suffered psychological and emotional trauma for the remainder of their lives. In the words of Mark Twain years earlier in 1901, the nation became “The United States of Lyncherdom” (Twain 1). His essay was not published until thirteen years after his death due to fear of retaliation.

Lynching became a pervasive topic of discussion as well as a topic for all forms of literature. The writings against lynching were presented in pamphlets, short stories, speeches, letters, novels, and drama – specifically, the Anti-Lynching Dramas written by black and white women authors during the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries.

This dissertation is my attempt to examine and compare eight specific themes in ten of the anti-lynching dramas written between 1916 -1936 by four African American women dramatists and five white women dramatists. Kathy Perkins and Judith Stephens define an anti-lynching play as “ a play in which the threat or occurrence of a lynching, past or present, has major impact on the dramatic action” (4).

I have chosen to discuss the works of both races to determine if there are similarities and / or differences in their presentations of themes, characters' representations and their overall dramatic techniques. Another purpose of this study is to determine if the anti-lynching plays had any dramatic impact on the curtailment of the killings. These dramas are examples of social protest / resistance dramas , folk dramas, and womanist / feminist dramas because they represent the leadership of black women in the anti-lynching campaign, and the cooperation and work of white women toward common goals (Perkins, Stephens 5). These plays served as agents of support and a calling for intervention by the black communities. For all who may have seen or read the plays, (blacks and whites), they presented a realistic picture of African Americans' lives, and the threats under which they constantly had to survive. The dramas were some of the first examples of realistic literature – showing life as it truly existed. While dramatizing the weight of terrorism and death, the plays also demonstrated the “sameness” of the races in terms of living and participating in the daily activities of life.

Many of the African American and white women dramatists who wrote these plays, were not trained in this specific discipline. In spite of their lack of training, they are to be commended for being adventurous and courageous. Being women at this period in time, they had difficulties being recognized as competent authors, and therefore, chances for their works to be appreciated were limited. Women were searching to find their own worth and their own identities. They were on the “cusp” of the women's era and they were finding their needs toward independence to be similar to those of the black community. They ventured into an area that was predominantly a man's domain, and they

were writing about a subject that was both controversial and volatile - a topic that presented indictments against several prominent factions.

Their efforts to make a difference and hopefully affect a change in the status quo were major challenges. By the 1930s, Southern white women, members of the Association of Southern Women for the Prevention of Lynching, under the guidance of Jessie Daniel Ames, joined the campaign. Both organizations recognized the need to help each other in convincing the nation that lynching must be stopped, and that white women were no longer going to be silent about their complicity in prolonging the epidemic.

In order to examine these works, I will focus on “themes” that are apparent in the dramas. These themes include: supremacy, resistance, hypocrisy, futility of black life, faith, complicity, trauma and motherhood. They will be identified, examined, and compared by those characters who represent them in the different plays. The ten dramas have been divided into four groupings that dramatize similar plot lines. I argue that the themes expressed in these works, along with the theatrical components used, are very similar in the writings of both races. Considering that the white women authors started their writing campaign a decade later than the African American dramatists, it is reasonable to assume that lynching’s horrors will be demonstrated in a similar fashion. On the other hand, the differences in race may offer opposing perspectives on the lynching issue. These and other conclusions will be discussed in the final chapter of this study.

The ten anti-lynching dramas to be examined and compared are divided as follows: The first comparison of two plays, is titled, “The Dilemma of the Black

Soldier.” These plays dramatize the story of the black soldier returning home from the war and the experiences he faces in his native country. These include: *Aftermath* (1919) by Mary Burrill, an African American author; and *Black Souls* (1932) by Annie Nathan Meyer, a white woman author.

The second comparison of three plays is titled, “The Protective Mother.” These three dramas introduce three women who make drastic decisions in their lives in order to protect their children from the threat of lynching. These three plays include: *Rachel* (1916) by Angelina Weld Grimké; *Safe* (1929) by Georgia Douglas Johnson both African American dramatists; and *Lawd, Does You Undastan?* (1936) by the white author, Ann Seymour Link.

The third comparison of two dramas follows “The Precarious Position of the Young Black Man.” The plays dramatize the stories of two young, innocent, black men whose lives, and those of their families, are changed because they are black. These plays are, *A Sunday Morning in the South* (1925) by Georgia Douglas Johnson, an African American author, and *The Forfeit* (1925) by Corrie Crandall Howell, a white woman author.

The fourth and final comparison of three anti-lynching dramas is titled, “The Strength and Determination of a Woman” and dramatizes how three women fought against the status quo of white supremacy and the consequences that developed as a result of their actions. These three dramas include: *Nails and Thorns* (1930) by May Miller, an African American author; *The Awakening* (1923) by Mary White Ovington, and *The Noose* (1929) by Tracy Mygatt, both white women authors.

In terms of vocabulary, I have asked an authority for the correct ethnic term to be used in identifying the African American / black characters and authors. I was advised that African American and black may be used interchangeably.

This dissertation is divided into the following seven chapters:

- **Chapter One** is an overview of the historical climate of the South from the Emancipation of the slaves to the end of Post-Reconstruction 1863-1880. It offers details on the plight of the African American following the War, and the struggles of the Nation during Reconstruction and Post-Reconstruction. The chapter also examines disfranchisement, the cult of true womanhood, living under Jim Crow, and the “uplift” organizations of women.
- **Chapter Two** introduces the anti-lynching plays to be compared and the themes to be examined. The chapter also describes the genesis of lynchings and how they became rituals of entertainment. The Nadir of Race Relations and its aftermath are discussed, along with the history of the Ku Klux Klan, the Red Summer of 1919, and the public outcry against the killings.
- **Chapter Three** discusses the early history of Black Theatre, along with the first comparison of plays, “The Dilemma of the Black Soldier” by authors, Mary Burrill (black) and Annie Nathan Meyer (white).
- **Chapter Four** presents comparison number two, “The Protective Mother” by authors, Angelina Weld Grimké, (black), Georgia Douglas Johnson, (black), and Ann Seymour Link, (white).

- **Chapter Five** examines the third comparison, “The Precarious Position of Young, Black Men.” These two dramas are authored by Georgia Douglas Johnson (black), and Corrie Crandall Howell, (white).
- **Chapter Six** presents the fourth and final comparison, “ The Strength and Determination of a Woman.” These three plays include the authors, May Miller (black), Mary White Ovington and Tracy Mygatt, (both white).
- **Chapter Seven** presents general and specific conclusions (showing more similarities than differences) in the representation of themes between the African American Women authors and the White Women authors.
- **Endnotes**, Appendix, References and Synopses follow chapter seven.

CHAPTER ONE:

THE HISTORICAL CLIMATE OF THE SOUTH FROM EMANCIPATION TO THE TIME OF THE ANTI-LYNCHING DRAMAS 1863 - 1900

A detailed familiarity with the historical climate of the South, both before and after the Civil War, provides the context and background to the literary phenomenon of anti-lynching dramas that are the subject of this study. American history provides the necessary backdrop to understand the passion and focus of this phenomenon to the African American dramatic heritage that springs from this time.

The African American slave believed that life would improve once he was free. In 1865, however, when Emancipation became a reality, the vast numbers of freed slaves endured additional issues of racism. From the end of the Civil War, through Reconstruction, Post-Reconstruction, and until the Civil Rights Movement of the 1960s, the campaign to subordinate African Americans continued with systems instituted to replace slavery: the Black Codes, Jim Crow laws, segregation, peonage, forced labor and violence. With violence came murder, specifically, lynching, at the hands of groups such as the Ku Klux Klan, The White Camellia, The Knights of the Rising Sun, and very often, ordinary citizens of the towns (Dray 41). The escalation of violence and lynchings of black men, women, and children initiated a campaign by women authors of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries (most notably, Ida B. Wells) to see an end to the murders. Women authors, black and white, used their dramatic talents to bring attention

to the horrors of lynching in an effort to affect change. They were authors of the anti-lynching plays, a genre of social protest drama that has only recently been identified by Black Theatre historians (Perkins, Stephens 12). While the subject of lynching was common to all of these anti-lynching dramas, an examination and comparison of these plays by black and white women authors identifies other similarities, as well as differences, in terms of their perspectives on lynching. This comparative study is accomplished through the presentation of themes, an analysis of theatrical components and their focus on those themes, and the specifics of characterization that are used by individual authors. In all of these dramas, the authors offer “an important intersection of contemporary social and artistic developments for early twentieth-century theatre in the United States” (8). The atrocities of the lynchings addressed by these dramatists were presented as a realistic “window” to the South’s daily fears of violence. This new literary realism of the nineteenth century was a comprehensive phenomenon, with authors focusing on everyday life, as well as issues and activities of the lower classes as their subjects.

**The Status of Late Nineteenth-Century America: War, Emancipation,
the New Social Order and Reconstruction of the Nation: 1861-1877**

Abraham Lincoln gained the Republican nomination and served as President from 1860 to 1865. During his tenure he led the nation through the Civil War, preserved the Union, enforced the end of slavery, and promoted the passage of the Thirteenth Amendment. But, with Lincoln as the first Republican President, the South’s future was under the eye of a party hostile to the region’s interests. “This was a shift in national power for the Southern states who had continually dominated politics. Rather than accept

minority status in a nation governed by their opponents . . . Southern leaders struck for their region's independence . . . Seven states of the Deep South seceded from the Union" (Foner, *Forever Free*, 33). Initially, Lincoln insisted that his goal was to save the Union and not to abolish slavery. The slaves, however, saw the War as a means to freedom, and they took actions that moved the Nation toward emancipation (33). The various interests of war, slavery, and politics were intertwined.

The end of the Civil War in 1865 enforced the Emancipation Proclamation. However, it was not until December 6, 1865, when the Thirteenth Amendment was ratified, that all four and a half million slaves were freed from bondage. Historians regard the proclamation as a watershed in American life, "for it altered the nature of the Civil War and the course of American history" (Foner, *Forever Free* 51). With the demise of slavery came major changes regarding the nation as a whole. It was the beginning of efforts to "Reconstruct" life even while the War raged on. It was a time of short-lived jubilation and temporary advancement for the black ex-slave, a time of conflict for the South, political upheaval, and an eventual disappointment and continued struggle for the freedman. Reconstruction is a story of tension between expanding the rights of the freedmen and the racism of the nation, as well as the tension that existed between Radical Reconstructionists, who wanted the South to mirror the North, and the Moderates who wanted reconciliation and the end of Reconstruction in the South. (Ayers, "The Civil War" 57) The era of Reconstruction was politically volatile:

It was a time when Americans, black and white, would come to terms with the war's legacy, and decide whether they would build an interracial democracy on the ashes of the Old South. (Foner, *Forever Free* 3)

The political, social and economic landscapes of Southern life would be transformed, the place of blacks in America would be debated and altered, and the definitions of “citizens” and “freedom” would be re-evaluated (Foner, *Reconstruction* 3). Lives of those in both the North and the South would be changed as many questions, dilemmas and needed solutions faced the country: On what terms should the Southern states be reunited with the Union? Who would establish these terms? What system of labor should replace slavery? What should be the place of blacks in the political and social life of the South? (Foner, Mahoney 15).

Reconstruction was not so much a period of time as it was the “beginning of an extended, historical process, and the adjustment of American society to the end of slavery” (Foner, *Forever Free* 51). It was a turbulent and chaotic post-bellum era. Reconstruction came in phases, with Presidential Reconstruction (1863-66) being the first and controlled initially by Abraham Lincoln and ultimately, Andrew Johnson. Their hopes were for a speedy reuniting of the country. Lincoln’s main concern was the preservation of the states, and while he was not an advocate of immediate emancipation, he was willing to compromise with the South to save the Union. He admitted that he “hated slavery,” yet he did hold many of the prejudices of the time. Lincoln did not favor the black vote or their ability to hold office, even though he recognized that slavery violated the essential premises of life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness.

The plans of both Lincoln and Johnson were opposed by the Radical Republicans who gained power in 1866, and who controlled Radical Reconstruction (1867 -77). They emphasized civil rights and voting rights for the Freedmen, and their prominent leaders were Thaddeus Stevens and Charles Sumner (Foner, *Reconstruction* 229-30). This new

party believed in the free labor system utilized in the North and the “incompatibility of a free society and a slave society” (Foner, *Forever Free* 31).

The impact of the Emancipation of slaves, and the complex issues of Reconstruction, spoke to the importance of slavery in the South, as well as to the growth of American development. Eric Foner, in *Reconstruction, America's Unfinished Revolution*, explained slavery's position as “indispensable” to American economic life. Slavery grew rapidly toward the West as new settlements developed where production of cotton fueled the early Industrial Revolution. In the South, slavery gave power to a regional ruling class and helped to shape the agrarian economy, race relations, politics, religion and law. In the North, where slavery had been abolished after the Revolution, abolitionists began their protest movement to end the institution in the South. Slavery was a human problem with a valuable price tag that divided the nation:

A planter's most valuable assets were his slaves – an 18 year-old bought for \$650 in 1845 could be sold five years later for \$1,000 and for nearly \$2,000 just before the Civil War . . . if hard times came, slaves were an owner's most readily realizable cash asset and in the interest of personal survival, he was sometimes obligated to auction some off. (Everett 108-112)

The reality of Southern plantation life before the Civil War must be appreciated in order to recognize the full scope of the devastation that resulted from it. The plantation was the center of life for owners and offered wealth, status, power, and security. Each plantation reflected what the ideal of Southern life should be. The preservation of this

lifestyle was crucial to those masters who owned plantations, the free slave labor they controlled, and their status as a new-world aristocracy. The debates over secession and the resulting war physically ravaged the land, as well as divided factions of all political, economic, and social persuasions. War was for the planters, a defense of their lives and land, while for the slaves, it was an escape from bondage (Roark 36). The war “disrupted and transformed lives, relationships, and values; it crushed old institutions and created new ones; it produced economic catastrophe and political impotence; and it introduced into every home the miseries of destruction and death” (36).

As the Union Army moved into the South, slaves headed for Union lines and abandoned plantations and life-long bondage. The disintegration of slavery was apparent. Lincoln’s administration had rejected black volunteers prior to 1863, but as the war continued and white manpower was exhausted, it was evident that black manpower was necessary. This move alone, the enlistment of black slaves (nearly 186,000 by the War’s end), brought energy and hope for freedom (Foner, Mahoney19). Slaves understood that the Union Army’s close proximity to their land altered the balance of power between them and their masters. They recognized that freedom was possibly available to them. Entire families – men, women and children (contrabands of war) abandoned the plantations to “ . . . incur any dangers in their pursuit of freedom” (Foner, *Forever Free* 43). Slaves had a systematic network of information concerning the news of the War, and they were eager for their new lives. This rapid collapse of slavery moved Lincoln toward emancipation.

Nearly a year after the Emancipation Proclamation was decreed, Lincoln announced his plan for Reconstruction. He offered a conciliatory plan realizing that he

could not restore the “old Union, or allow the South to return with its prewar institutions and leadership intact” (Foner, Mahoney 21). In December of 1863, Lincoln suggested his Ten Percent Plan: “. . . he offered a pardon to all supporters of the Confederacy, except high-ranking officials, who took an oath of loyalty and pledged to accept the end of slavery” (21). It was necessary to have ten percent of each state’s prewar voters take the oath before they could establish a state government and apply for re-admission to the Union. Lincoln expected new state constitutions to prohibit slavery, and Southern leaders were given a free hand in governing. The privileges of voting and office-holding were exclusively for whites, denying the freedmen any significant role in the political arena. According to Kennedo however, “Lincoln’s policy was designed to arrive at a speedy recovery of the Union, and it virtually ignored freedmen and would have handed the South, along with vulnerable blacks, over to . . . white supremacy . . .” (20).

The Radical Republicans favored equal civil and political rights for all freedmen. They felt Reconstruction could not succeed without black suffrage, and they feared that without the vote, slaves could once again fall under the thumb of their former owners (Foner, Mahoney 23). They saw Lincoln’s plan as too lenient, and therefore, in 1864, they put forth the Wade-Davis Bill, which made it more difficult for a state to be readmitted to the Union. “The bill required a majority of white male Southerners to pledge support for the Union before Reconstruction could begin in any state, and guaranteed equality before the law, but not suffrage for blacks. The bill also disfranchised a number of Confederates” (Foner, *Forever Free* 63). The Wade-Davis Bill would have made it difficult for the states to comply or be readmitted. Lincoln vetoed the bill and neither plan was put into effect (Kenedo 20).

In spite of the differences between Lincoln and the Radicals, he recognized the value of varying opinions. He cooperated with the Radicals so that on December 18, 1865, their work together saw Congress ratify the Thirteenth Amendment, which abolished slavery in the nation, including the border states. Following the passing of the amendment, and after months of debate over its provisions, Congress also passed a bill for establishing the Bureau of Refugees, Freedmen, and Abandoned Lands in 1865 (a.k.a. The Freedmen's Bureau). This temporary agency was established to protect the rights of the freedmen. The various agents who worked with the freedmen provided medical care and educational opportunities and assisted them in contract and labor issues. (Foner, Mahoney 23). The Bureau was to be the liaison for the African Americans in their passage from slavery to freedom. Between the years of 1865 and 1869, the Bureau issued rations, built and staffed forty-six hospitals, improved the health of the sick and poverty stricken, built schools, and aided the black community in their employment and contract dealings (Franklin, Moss 257-58). Contracted labor proved to be a complicated and difficult issue to resolve, and the question of fair wages was constantly debated. The Bureau was often restricted in its efforts to provide adequate assistance where contracts were concerned (Novak 10).

In addition, the bureau was to offer food, clothing and fuel to needy freedmen and to see to all of their concerns in the South (Foner, *Reconstruction* 69). The Bureau was laden with numerous responsibilities and yet, it was considered a temporary institution. It was limited to one year and worked without a substantial budget. Dorothy and Carl Schneider in *Slavery in America* admit that "it was a wonder that the Bureau was able to accomplish anything" (357). By this point in time, the agency was subject to President

Johnson, who believed in slavery and the inferiority of the African American. He undermined the agency and did all he could to hinder the work of their operation. Because of the Bureau's lack of funds and support they had to improvise in order "to feed the hungry, house the homeless, care for the old and the sick, find jobs for millions, reunite families, protect and defend freed people legally and physically, and educate them" (357). As time progressed, deprived of power, money and strength, the best the agency could do was to serve as mediators and aid in building schools when possible. In spite of restrictions, the Bureau would eventually arrive at an extension of time and finances. It greatly contributed to the lives of the ex-slaves and the poor whites.

During the years 1864 and 1865, as the war was coming to an end, many of the ex-slaves experimented with their newly-found freedom. Black leaders held meetings and demonstrations to demand their "full equal rights – suffrage, equality before the law and total abolition" (Foner, *Forever Free* 66). Freedmen took new names and traveled away from the plantations. Schools, churches, Army posts and Freedmen's Bureau offices were built to support the ex-slaves. Freedmen of all ages and sizes attended classes to gain the educations they had been denied. Families reunited, marriages were legalized, churches and new communities were created without fear of family separation. In certain cases, those children who were orphaned or sold from their parents, were adopted by others in the communities. The freedmen were realizing a true sense of autonomy and hoping for full citizenship for the future (84).

Even though Lincoln did not have a comprehensive plan for Reconstruction, he was aware of the African American public sentiment, and he believed that they should have the rights of all humans. Having witnessed the numbers of black male soldiers who

fought for their freedom, he acknowledged that they deserved the right to vote. Lincoln also believed that voting rights should be given to educated and intelligent poor whites and blacks. It was the first time that a President had endorsed any political rights for black citizens (Foner, *Forever Free* 66). Lincoln's ability to see growth, offer compromise and change for the better, were to his credit as a fair and compassionate leader. There are historians who believe that Lincoln had long been at odds with the Radical Republicans, who might have treated him as they did Andrew Johnson, had he not been willing to compromise (Foner, *Reconstruction* 2).

On April 15, 1865, Andrew Johnson was inaugurated and with no coherent plan for Reconstruction, he took the reins of the nation and vowed to continue with Lincoln's plan. One can only speculate on what might have happened had Lincoln lived and continued to see the process of Reconstruction to completion. His "plan," while not totally formulated at first, might have evolved over time with good results. His death came too soon (Foner, *Forever Free* 66).

Andrew Johnson appeared to be well-qualified for the Presidency, having moved through the political ranks over the years. However, in spite of his lengthy career, he had very few accomplishments to his credit. Lincoln had wit and sensitivity to others; Johnson was a self-absorbed, lonely man who confided in no one. He demonstrated an intolerance for the views of others, and an inability to compromise (Foner, *Reconstruction* 177). Johnson had supported emancipation during the war, but he held racist views. A self-proclaimed spokesman for the poor white farmers of the South, he condemned the old planter aristocracy, but believed "African-Americans had no role to play in Reconstruction" (Foner, *Forever Free* 109). In May of 1865, Johnson announced

his plan for recovery which he said was Lincoln's, but was truly his own. After Lincoln's assassination, Johnson changed from the Radical to the moderate camp:

He offered a pardon, including restoration of property rights except for slaves, to all of the Southern whites except Confederate leaders and wealthy planters (who subsequently received individual pardons); appointed provisional governors for the ex-Confederate states; and outlined steps whereby new state governments would be created. Apart from the requirements that they abolish slavery, repudiate secession, and abrogate the Confederate debt—all inescapable consequences of the South's defeat—these governments were given a free hand in managing their affairs. (Foner, *Forever Free* 79)

Johnson's plan was criticized for its lack of attention to the former slaves and during the subsequent elections, members of the Southern elite were brought again to power. Congress was concerned that like Lincoln's plan, Johnson's was too lenient and gave power back to the former Southern leaders (Foner, *Forever Free*). Throughout Johnson's term, he and the Congress battled for their individual, political, agendas concerning the African American and his rights. Eventually, Congress weakened Johnson's power and even brought him to the brink of impeachment (Schneider, Schneider 352).

Historians agree that the struggle to dominate national politics between the political factions shaped the history of the nation, and led to the defeat of both in gaining peace between the races. There was a Civil War between 1861-1865 but there was

another conflict between 1865-1877 with bitterness and hatred in the political ranks. Peace could not be achieved in this contentious environment (Franklin, Moss 273-77). By 1869, Congress had enacted the Thirteenth, Fourteenth and Fifteen Amendments offering civil rights gains to the former slaves. However, even with these measures finally won, the African Americans did not realize full citizenship. White supremacy continued to loom large and force the black community to live as second – class citizens. Southern whites did all they could to keep the ex-slave subjugated.

**Profound Changes Follow the War:
Racism, Poverty, and Hunger – So this is Freedom?**

The changes unleashed by the war were profound. The problem of determining the place that African Americans should occupy in America was the most difficult of the racial problems. “The Negro population of four and a half million who had been free... doubled by the end of the century. Their number was too large for either deportation or reservation to be a practical solution” (R. Logan 3). In addition, since the majority of the Civil War had been fought on Southern soil, leaving the region impoverished, “The uncompensated emancipation of the slaves added to the humiliation, bitterness and impoverishment of the former slave holders . . . a closely-knit ruling class” (4). In the North, there was expanded industrialization that saw a gain of economic superiority over the South. All of this created an additional spirit of division within the country. The architects of Reconstruction had no concrete plans for improving the economic and social plight of the freed slaves. The truth existed that even those who hated slavery would not believe that generations of captivity would one day see slaves and slave holders living as equals (Ayers, “American Civil War” 55). Logan admits that “The concept of equal

rights for the African slave was non-existent up to this point, since he was looked upon as inferior and unassimilable (sic)": (6). Ayers noted the plight of the freedmen:

The destruction of slavery, a major moral accomplishment of the U.S. Army, of Abraham Lincoln, and of the enslaved people themselves, would be overshadowed by the injustice and poverty that followed in the rapidly changing South, a mockery of American claims of moral leadership in the world. Black Southerners would struggle largely on their own for the next one hundred years. (Ayers, "American Civil War" 57)

Key Political Problems

Significant political problems began even before President Lincoln took office. He recognized that the country was in danger of unraveling, and he feared that more states would secede from the Union. The abolitionists in the North were trying to convince the administration that the time for action on behalf of slaves was at hand. The Southern planters were trying to retain their supremacy and their slave labor force, which was vital to their agrarian economy. Lincoln was cautious and knew that "he could not maintain peace forever without surrendering the authority of the federal government in the South" (Franklin, Moss 221). Lincoln was decisive at Fort Sumter and even though he did not wish for war, the country was set on that path. Lincoln would spend his political years trying to gain emancipation and reunite the Union. At the same time he would work to navigate the politics and personalities of the Radical Republicans in Congress .

Other political issues that were constant concerns included: determining the correct plan for permitting the States to re-enter the Union, determining what should be

done with four million out-of-work ex-slaves who, for the majority, had few public skills and were uneducated, and additional concerns of population growth due to the influx of European immigrants. These political problems also became major economic and social problems for both the North and the South in terms of housing, supplies, staples and employment (Franklin, Moss 258).

The political scene was a convoluted one. The two groups that represented the political center of the post-bellum South were the Southern “scalawags” and the Northern immigrants, the “carpetbaggers.” The scalawags favored total political empowerment for the former slaves and were supporters of Union policy. They represented farmers, businessmen, and prominent men of the area, who wished to see the Republican South advance. The carpetbagger minority tended to side with the Radical Republicans, and came to the South for economic opportunity. There were those, however, who were genuinely interested in the rights of the African Americans and in the rebuilding of the South. In any case, both groups were “vilified by southerners as outside troublemakers, and only a few managed to settle there permanently” (Schneider, Schneider 347). They added to the already chaotic political environment.

The problem of retaining freedom for the ex-slave was, and until the 1960s, remained a serious and difficult one. Racism had long been a part of the American life in spite of the Constitution and the Declaration of Independence. During the Reconstruction period, laws were created and passed to guarantee the rights of African Americans: Civil Rights Acts of 1866 and 1875, the Thirteenth, Fourteenth, and Fifteenth Amendments, as well as others that were often ignored. On the heels of those Amendments and laws came Black Codes, and Jim Crow. At each point of celebration for the ex-slave came a time of

disappointment. The period following emancipation was unique in a special way: The slaves had never been equals – sharing space and eventually presiding as officers next to a white man. Before the war, Southern planters didn't worry about paying to have their work completed. After the war, however, daily life that Southerners were used to was shattered and everyone was basically starting over – but with new rules and new positions. The government had its work to do. The sheer numbers of those for whom the government became responsible was astounding. “The most stupendous act of sequestration in the history of Anglo-Saxon jurisprudence,” as Charles and Mary Beard explained in their text, *The Rise of American Civilization* (Foner, *Reconstruction* 2-3). There was a sense of “government immaturity” during these early years, and no issue that faced the Nation was easily resolved. In the most practiced of political venues, this dilemma would have been enormous (Franklin, Moss 247). The black community (and those whites who understood their plight) fought for centuries to see the African Americans free. African Americans became pro-active, and were greatly responsible for their own emancipation, uplift and success. Much of what they accomplished in terms of gaining rights, they helped to establish.

Social Concerns Continue to Plague the Nation

The social problems of the Reconstruction were equally numerous. Probably the first and most disconcerting was the question of, what to do with four million people? Lincoln had always considered colonization as a possible solution to the massive numbers of ex-slaves. His plan, however, was not accepted on the basis that it appeared racist and unkind (Foner, *Reconstruction* 6). When the Union Army was in need of manpower, blacks were eventually given permission to enlist. This served as a liberating

force for nearly 186,000 men who fought or worked in the military ranks. This action also served as a catalyst for the future when black men could become leaders for their communities. With the Southern land devastated, with shelter and rations in short supply, black and white men, women, and children suffered greatly once they left the plantations (Franklin, Moss 248). There were those who remained on the farms, but even with the safety of a familiar “home,” there was no assurance that the invading forces wouldn’t burn the homes, take the food, or worse. With men away in the war, many women and children were left alone (or with elderly slaves) to tend the farms and plantations. Once the government established the Freedmen’s Bureau, help was available for the African Americans and others in need.

An additional social problem was the legacy of hate that existed between the races. The new living arrangements with blacks and whites coming together worked for many and yet, those in the South who considered blacks as “threatening” were not convinced that the two groups could live together. “This was the paradox of the post-Civil War South — recognition of freed slaves as full humans appeared to most white southerners not as an extension of liberty but as a violation of it . . . ” (Blackmon 41). Groups of friends and families participated in various organizations that offered advice and assistance to the newly emancipated slaves. Examples of these included: The National Negro Labor Union, The Freedmen’s Bureau, and the Black Churches that provided religion and education. In 1865, black organizers held self-help conventions in Tennessee, Mississippi, and Alabama calling for intervention in situations where discrimination was demonstrated. This process of support-groups has been an invaluable vehicle for community building even to this day. But much of this was done by blacks,

themselves. When black leaders were finally elected into various professional or political committees, they served as spokespersons for their own people. After Reconstruction, the government (up to a point) continued to provide measures for safety and protection of rights until the early twentieth century when violence increased, and protection by authorities of the law ceased (Franklin, Moss 254).

Segregation, subordination and discrimination of the blacks were pervasive. “Virtually, from the moment the Civil War ended, the search began for legal means of subordinating the black population . . . ” (Foner, *Reconstruction* 198). Ordinances were adopted “limiting black movement, imposing penalties for vagrancy, restricting abilities to rent or own property” and much more (198). It wasn’t until the mid-1950s and 1960s with the Civil Rights Movement that this would change. A combination of other social issues that faced the nation after and during Reconstruction included: the loss of a generation of men during the war, the search for relatives and reuniting families, and the constant fear of rebellion by the black community (198).

The Shattered Economy

The economic problems facing the nation touched everyone. With the great physical devastation of the Southern lands, the abandoned areas needed replenishing. Crops and animals had been taken, homes burned, plantations destroyed, and with massive numbers of freedmen, there were serious implications for the economic structure of the South. There was want of food and clothing, thousands of displaced persons without shelter, and no official authority to cope with emergencies. Chaos and disorder were everywhere (Franklin, Moss 253). The Homestead Act of 1866 was enacted to move large populations from congested areas into public lands regardless of race. Forty

acres and a mule were expected once they arrived. While the “mule” was questionable, the settlers did move to Alabama, Mississippi, Louisiana and Arkansas where the environment was conducive to beginning a new life (Foner, *Reconstruction* 246). Those freedmen who did not move would continue to work the fields with a minor semblance of independence.

The government eventually returned lands to their owners in the South with the agreement that they would remain loyal to the Union. Their dilemma, however, was trying to operate their large farms with no help. The slaves were gone, and in many cases, the ex-slaves who were in need of food and shelter, (and with advice from the Freedmen’s Bureau), signed labor contracts to work as sharecroppers. The freedmen were able to lease individual plots of land in exchange for a percentage of the yearly yield. Blacks preferred this type of work because it gave them a sense of independence. Sharecroppers did have relief from the former “gang” system in the plantations. The “gang” operation was the most common system of labor used by the plantation owners. The field - hands were divided into groups, directed by drivers who would work them at a pressured pace for long hours. The purpose of this system was to force every member of the group to continue working until everyone was discharged for the day. Eventually, however, high debts, due to maintenance costs in sharecropping, bound the freedmen to the land, and they were left with little or nothing to show for their labors (Stampp 54).

The “croppers” borrowed from the landlord and were required to pay their debts with high interest rates included. At harvest time, they found that their share of the crop was not sufficient to pay their debt. Until the debt was paid, they were unable to leave. To leave was to commit a crime (Strickland, Reich 224). Blacks were exploited by this

system and were dependents of the landlord just as they had been to their former masters. In addition, the Codes made it difficult for the ex-slave to find new employment, and the enticement laws prohibited anyone from employing him (Novak 19). There were sharecroppers who became successful renters and were free from white supervision, but this was more the exception than the rule. The African Americans, in an effort to support themselves and their families, often had no choice but to “cast their lot with their former masters and assist them in restoring economic stability in the rural South” (Franklin, Moss 259). Now that they were free, they could choose to work or not to work, but when they did agree to a contract, they expected fair salaries and reasonable working hours. Too often, contracts were disregarded, wages were denied, and bogus allegations against the worker would force him to work in conditions that were not much better than when he had been in bondage.

The economic dynamic of Northern industrialization was quickly moving into the South. Even though the South lost the War, in a sense it eventually would gain a new life. During Reconstruction, the financial infrastructure of the South was in ruins, but the economic changes that industrialism brought to the area helped it to grow and expand. Along with this expansion, however, there were increasing racial tensions in locations where both races were employed. In an effort to control the races, segregation was necessary (Litwack 233).

When the Southern states were embroiled in combat, their economic progress was stifled, and growth in virtually every aspect of daily life stopped. There were few banks available for Southerners and little investments in the region. The advances in technology, (steel mills, railroads, mass production of commodities) had by-passed the

Confederate states while quickly transforming other sections of the nation. This same technology would bring the South out of the devastation and help advance growth. It was critical that the South find a way to engage in the industrial revolution and enter the fast pace of a new age. “The new order of things was the result of the triumph of industrialism over the agrarian way of life” (Franklin, Moss 246-47).

Economic and personal independence for the ex-slave was identified by his owning land. Blacks were convinced that freedom came with the opportunity for “forty acres and a mule.” Many blacks considered that their past years of service entitled them to at least a portion of the plantation lands. There were blacks who managed to seize farms by squatting on depleted land, but few freedmen were able to maintain control of any land they might acquire in this manner. “The majority of blacks emerged from slavery lacking the ability to purchase land even at the depressed prices of early Reconstruction, and confronting a white community united in the refusal to advance credit or sell them property” (Foner, *Reconstruction* 106 – 108).

In terms of earning a livelihood, the African Americans realized that the abolition of slavery didn’t eliminate the need for work. “We used to support ourselves and our masters too when we were slaves and I reckon we can take care of ourselves now” (Foner, *Reconstruction* 103). African Americans realized that work was critical to their independence, but they expected fair wages for their labors. They also wanted to be in control of the conditions of their labor, develop their economic autonomy, and be free from white control. Unfortunately, many former slaves found themselves forced to work again in the fields they desperately tried to avoid. This subject will be discussed further in the following sections of this study.

What is Gained is Lost

The era of Reconstruction (1863-1877) witnessed the first steps of advancement for the ex-slave, but equality was not fully realized. Freedom was given contradictory interpretations – those of the whites and those of the blacks. Freedom permitted Blacks to take social initiatives to reestablish ties with family members, travel without passes, change their names, and hold meetings and religious services without white surveillance. More importantly, they received an education without fear of reprisal (Foner, *Reconstruction* 79). For the freedmen, education was their means to a better life. “The creation of tax-supported public school systems in every state of the South stood as one of Reconstruction’s most enduring accomplishments” (Foner, *Forever Free* 162).

The passing of the Thirteenth, Fourteenth and Fifteenth Amendments, gave the African Americans a new position in society and for the African American male, the right to vote and participate in the political arena. The black community was to be protected by these new laws, but not everything that was promised was guaranteed. Assaults raged against blacks who owned property or business, and political battles between the different factions continued:

White merchants, employers, and landlords used their economic clout for political advantage, denying blacks credit, firing them, and evicting them. Democrats made electoral gains, and Republicans compromised their beliefs and practices to stay in power . . . Because blacks had to vote for Republicans to protect their own interests, they had only limited influence within that party . . . a situation personally damaging in that most southern

Republican politicians, white and black, depended on their offices for their livelihood. (Schneider, Schneider 353)

The Black Codes and Contract Labor

. . . the general interest both of the white man and of the negroes requires that he should be kept as near to the condition of slavery as possible, and as far from the condition of the white man as is practicable . . . negroes must be made to work, or else cotton and rice must cease to be raised for export. Edmund Rhett, 1865¹

When the Civil War destroyed the slave economy of the Confederacy, the Southern agrarian community quickly tried to determine a legal means of subordinating the black population. The rationale of the old system was not abandoned as far as the former slave owners were concerned. Their response to this situation was to retain an approximation of slavery. The Black Codes of 1865 and 1866 were formulated with this specific end in mind (Novak 1).

As the African Americans tried to establish a movement toward self-reliance, the reaction of the Southerners was the establishment of limits on the freedmen's abilities through the Black Codes. The Black Codes (a.k.a. The Negro Codes) differentiated from state to state but were politically imposed to keep the ex-slave subjugated. These restrictions were similar to the Slave Codes of the 1830s–1860s, but were revised following emancipation. As the Southern states pursued readmission to the Union, they gave limited second-class civil rights to the freedmen. The codes were an attempt to control the freedmen and to ensure they did not claim social equality.

Along with denying the African Americans equality before the law and their political rights, the codes required blacks to sign yearly labor contracts which led to the establishment of black peonage². Federal authorities were adamant in their efforts to keep the freemen working on the plantations. "The state would enforce labor agreements and plantation discipline, punish those who refused to contract, and prevent whites from competing among themselves for black workers...their whole thought and time will be given to plans for getting things back as near to slavery as possible" (Foner, *Reconstruction* 199). Because circumstances between localities and workers differed, it was determined that no fair wage scale could be established. Once again, the freedmen were at the mercy of their former employers (Novak 9-10). The Black Codes were slavery but with a different name:

The original codes favored by the Southern legislatures were an astonishing affront to emancipation and dealt with vagrancy, apprenticeship, labor contracts, migration, civil and legal rights. In all cases, there was a plain and indisputable attempt on the part of the southern states to make Negroes slaves in everything but name. They were given certain civil rights: the right to hold property, to sue and be sued. The family relations for the first time were legally recognized. Negroes were no longer real estate. (Du Bois 167)

The Black Codes were identified in some areas as a means of "protection" for blacks. Because the South was unwilling to give justice to the African American, the political powers instituted the Codes under the guise of caring for the welfare of those who were unable to care for themselves. Paternalism persisted in the Code and secured

widespread endorsement. Williamson indicates this in his research: “The Negroes are as improvident as children, and require the guardian protection of someone almost as much as they do” (73). The Black Codes were, in fact, designed to take advantage of the African American. For years the Black Codes were unchecked in the South and became excessively controlling in the lives of blacks. Southerners insisted that these codes were not re-enslavement, but a means of bringing “order out of chaos” (Packard 44).

Even with the various states having differences in their restrictions, there were commonalities in the codes: Vagrancy and apprenticeship laws were precarious at best. In order to find suitable employment, African Americans had to search for better positions. This required their leaving farms and plantations. However, the ex-slave was not permitted to move about within a state or move from one state to another without permission or bond payments. If the freedmen were found traveling and unemployed, they would be accused of vagrancy, jailed or possibly sold into slavery.

Apprenticeship of black children who were separated, orphaned, or whose parents were not able to care for them was another means of returning the black community to slavery. Many of the children were apprenticed to their former masters (Strickland, Reich 211). Blacks could serve as witnesses in court, but only in cases of other blacks. Too often, their testimonies held no ground against that of a white man. Blacks were able to rent land, but were barred from occupations other than farming or service. If they chose to do otherwise, they were required to pay heavy fines. The law required blacks to sign labor contracts and were expected to work long and hard hours. Blacks who broke these contracts were punished or sold. “The Negro’s access to land was hindered and limited; his right to work was curtailed; his right of self-defense was taken away...his employment

was virtually reduced to contract labor with penal servitude as a punishment for leaving his job” (Du Bois 167). The South had looked back to slavery with these codes. W.E.B. Du Bois, in *Black Reconstruction* identified the dominant thought of the South:

There came to the presidential chair . . . a man who was Southern born; with him came inconceivable fears that the North proposed to make these Negroes really free; to give them a sufficient status even for voting, to give them the right to hold office; that there was even a possibility that these slaves might out-vote their former masters; that they might even aspire to marry white women and mingle their blood with the blood of their masters . . . It was fantastic. It called for revolt. (180)

Those African Americans who refused or failed to agree to the contract work were considered vagrants and were jailed. From this position, another form of cheap labor was created—convict labor, where men worked in slave mines, factories, or municipal projects. This forced labor continued through World War II and these measures were enforced by a biased, political system in which Blacks had no voice. The dramatic measures taken against African Americans’ freedom indicated the white Southerners’ determination to ensure white supremacy and to save the old labor regime (Foner, *Forever Free* 96).

Convict Labor

The title of “vagrant” was defined by several different scenarios: Vagrants were those black workers who were found without employment. Vagrants were those who broke any of the established codes, or who failed to honor labor contracts. Vagrants were

whites who associated with blacks as equals or those who insulted their landlords (Strickland, Reich 212). Ex-slaves and poor whites who were convicted of vagrancy were fined and/or put in jail. When fines were unable to be paid, they might be “hired out to any person who will, for the shortest period of service, pay said fine” (212). If this proposition was not accepted, the “vagrant” was most often imprisoned and faced another labor system, convict labor.

The leasing of convict labor began during Reconstruction. The penitentiaries had been destroyed during the war and the Southern military needed a means of control. Initially, convict labor was seen as a short-term solution until new penitentiaries were built. The lack of proper financing for labor became a major issue and it was not until the early 1870s that convict leasing would turn a profit. Cheap labor was needed when the Southern states began to build the railroads and to improve their infrastructure. Investors recognized the potential of the South and the availability of the inexpensive convict lease system:

By the end of the 1880s, at least ten thousand black men were slaving in forced labor mines, fields, and work camps in the formerly Confederate states Black labor was a lucrative enterprise, and critical to the industrialists and entrepreneurial farmers amassing capital and land.
(Blackmon 90)

The need to control the ex-slaves who were without work, without homes and without food saw another change in their laws. The “pig-law” was passed in Georgia in 1875 which raised “the penalty for hog-stealing from that of a misdemeanor to that of a

felony” (Novak 32). A law in Mississippi made it a felony to steal anything in excess of ten dollars. Needless to say, for the millions of African Americans without the basics of life, stealing became common. Within months, both states saw a major increase in the black male convict population (32). This form of “chain-gang” labor continued into the twentieth century.

Industrial convict labor was notorious for putting black men in jail on trumped - up charges with the warden’s charging the convict a large bail. When the convict was unable to pay the fine, he would be forced into an industrial position for a period of time – or until he was able to pay his fee. Convict labor was also used in mines and cotton fields. By the end of Reconstruction, the former Confederate states (except Virginia) had adopted the practice of leasing black convicts. All of this proved that slavery had not been eradicated but instead, had been endorsed by states’ governments (Blackmon 51). These means of forced labor served as a way to get the South’s rural area back on its feet, but unfortunately, it caused freedmen to engage in another form of slavery. “The transformation of slaves into free laborers and equal citizens was the most dramatic example of social, political and economic changes unleashed by the Civil War and Emancipation” (Foner, *Reconstruction*, xxii).

The economic problems of the African American were grim. It was easier to assimilate them into the social and political arenas than into the economic one. The responsibilities of the penal institutions were now those of the companies leasing the laborers. After payment to the state, the companies had complete control of the convicts. Convict leasing practices mirrored those of slavery:

Guards were empowered to chain prisoners, shoot those attempting to flee, torture any who wouldn't submit, and whip the disobedient – naked or clothed – almost without limit. Over eight decades, almost never were there penalties to any acquirer of these slaves for their mistreatment or deaths. (Blackmon 56)

There was no fear of a labor strike and if any of the convicts died, they were replaced. The convicts were overworked and the death rate was high. They lived in deplorable surroundings, and were treated poorly under brutal management. In spite of this, the “state makes a large profit from the convict labor” (Novak 33).

Black Codes, peonage, lack of trustworthy employers, denial of fair wages, vagrancy laws, and convict labor were constant economic problems that plagued the African American beyond Reconstruction. “Perhaps the greatest failure of Reconstruction of the South was economic. At the end of the period, both white and black workers were suffering from want and privation” (Franklin, Moss 264). The workers found themselves unable to break the chains of slavery even years after emancipation, but there were others who managed to find prosperity.

There Were Success Stories

Despite the disappointments of labor for the former slave, there were success stories in this period. With help from the Freedmen's Bureau, black families were able to settle in areas where there were public lands – Alabama, Missouri, Mississippi and Florida. Others were able to purchase land when good-paying jobs were found in Western

sections of the country. Land ownership among blacks expanded throughout the Reconstruction era even though there were laws established to prevent it.

Skilled black craftsmen outnumbered white craftsmen in certain areas holding positions as shipbuilders, stonemasons, pilots, teachers and cabinetmakers. Black colleges were founded. Black churches and women's organizations offered avenues for "uplift" of the race. Black organized labor saw its beginnings, and manufacturing businesses were created when whites would not hire black workers. Black political activity gained momentum with the Reconstruction Act of 1867. "Under this law, former Confederate leaders lost the right to vote, and blacks were given the vote" (Strickland, Reich 227-232). African Americans participated in writing law, ran for office, and were elected to local and state government positions. Even with these successes, blacks were the minority in most of the states, but by the 1870s, Southern states elected black members to Congress. Radical Reconstruction promoted economic recovery, eventually repealed the Black Codes, protected the farmers from being seized for debt and revised the tax system.

None of the successes of the blacks set well with Southerners who still saw the African Americans as slaves and as inferiors. They intended to continue to restrict the growing influence of the black community, and violence was a viable option. "The attitudes among Southern whites that a resubjugation (sic) of African Americans was an acceptable – even essential element of solving the 'Negro question' couldn't have been more explicit" (Blackmon 53).

The End of Reconstruction Leads to Disfranchisement

The African Americans' dreams of freedom included the right to be educated and the right to vote. Both were seen as part of the definition of full citizenship. (Neither black nor white women could yet vote, however). But with the large numbers of black male voters who could potentially change the face of politics, Southern politicians considered it essential that their votes be eliminated. Disfranchisement was just a matter of time.

Republican rule ended in 1876 and by the next year (1877) Southerners controlled the governments of all Southern states and Reconstruction had ended. "Home rule"³ was once again in power. In their continued efforts to subjugate the African American, this new political power used a legal system of segregation (Jim Crow Laws) and violence against blacks to force them out of politics, as well as participation in any realm of the white citizens' lives (Strickland, Reich 243):

In this era of 'home rule,' which culminated in the 1890s with Black disenfranchisement, southern Democrats seized control of state and local governments, sapped black voting power, and restored white supremacy. . . . They presented themselves as reasonable New Democrats, or 'Redeemers,' who . . . were moving toward the political center . . . they used whatever tactics came to hand, from repeal of Republican-passed laws to castration, rape, torture, arson, and murder. (Schneider, Schneider 354)

Violence was an undeniable means of keeping blacks politically impotent, and in countless communities they were not permitted, under penalties of severe reprisals, to show their faces in town on election day (Franklin, Moss 282). In a word, violence was “pedagogical.” Those freedmen who continued to fight their oppressors, encountered lessons in violence to hinder them. African Americans who refused to be intimidated faced deliberate, thoughtful barriers to voting. Polls were moved from blacks’ living areas requiring them to walk or ride long distances. Often times the polls were closed, roads were blocked, or transportation was unavailable to them. Voting hours were often changed, balloting processes were complicated, and for those who could not pay the imposed poll tax requirements, they were disqualified as voters. The regulations were deliberate actions to disfranchise blacks and poor white voters (Franklin, Moss 283). In addition, the fear of random lynching was constant and it served to inform the black masses that they were over stepping their bounds.

In 1894, the Populist (People’s) party worked to help the blacks retain their voting rights. This political faction advocated political equality for everyone and joined with members of the former Republican organization. Together they were able to adjust voting processes for the African Americans. Needless to say, the white Conservatives were distressed that they were unable to stop the influence of the African Americans who were intent on exercising their voting rights (Franklin, Moss 285). The days of freedom for the ex-slaves were dissolving. White citizens resented the blacks, and were afraid that they would be ruled by the very people they had once owned and mastered. Most were in agreement that the blacks should be disfranchised and it was decided that the Mississippi Convention of 1890 would be called for the express purpose of disfranchising blacks

(Franklin, Moss 287). From that point on, the gains that had been earned (ability to work for salaries, to own property, to participate in the political arena etc...) during Reconstruction gradually disintegrated.

The movement for complete disfranchisement came after the agrarian revolt of 1896. The general consensus was “Negro rule” must be stopped. Disfranchisement was not an easy process, due to the laws – especially the Fifteenth Amendment, that stood in the way. The black voter was kept from voting by force, intimidation, and the belief that he had no future in politics. The white community enlisted new barriers to prevent blacks from exercising their rights. Suffrage amendments were written by individual states that imposed taxes. The inability of many blacks to pay those taxes excluded them as voters. Others were excluded if they were convicted of crimes or were unable to read. Again the nation saw the “domination of blacks by white officials, white police, rigid laws and ordinances made by the white man” (Du Bois 695-96). Between 1895-1910, blacks had been effectively and systematically disfranchised by constitutional provisions in the different states. The South claimed that the “disfranchisement of blacks was a constructive act of statesmanship” (Franklin, Moss 288):

Disfranchisement produced instant changes in the composition of the electorate. In Louisiana, as late as 1896, there were 130,000 registered black voters; eight years later, the number had been reduced to 1,342. Residential literacy and tax requirements had almost depleted the electorate. By 1910, black men were disfranchised in almost every southern state. (Litwack 225)

Living Under Jim Crow

Racial segregation was not a new phenomenon. With the existence of slavery, the blacks were controlled and knew their place in society. There was no need for separation of the races. The Black Codes and a few segregation laws passed by Congress did not last through Reconstruction. What ultimately replaced those codes and laws was a system of “exclusion and discrimination” known as Jim Crow, and it was strictly practiced in both the North and the South (Litwack 229).

By 1830, when “official” slavery had finally ended in the North — the land of hope and freedom for blacks, nearly 150,000 African Americans lived there. The demise of legal slavery in the North, however, did not offer the freedom and justice it promised. Northern white citizens were not enamored with the possibility of more blacks moving up from the South and expecting to share their “Canaan.” There had to be an arrangement for keeping African Americans respectful and in their rightful place. Northern citizens indicated that there had to be “legal” (*de jure*) and “extralegal” (intimidation) measures created to maintain white supremacy. By this time “the truly strange career of Jim Crow had already begun” (Harding 117). Jim Crow was such a daily, rigid, accepted way of existence, that the white and black communities played their roles, and followed their specific “etiquettes” almost as occupations in their lives. The African American walked to the back of the bus; the whites sat up front. The blacks stepped aside when a white adult walked beside them. Each group knew what was expected of the other and this continued well into the twentieth century.

The origin of the term Jim Crow lies in the minstrel shows of the nineteenth – century. Minstrel shows were popular stage performances consisting of white song-and-

dance performers imitating African Americans. One of the most famous entertainers was Thomas “Daddy” Rice, whose dance suggested a dancing crow. His character was ultimately named Jim Crow, but how his character came to be synonymous with racial segregation and discrimination is not known. The minstrel show eventually lost popularity, but the name survived to be identified as “the legal, quasi-legal, or customary practice of disfranchising, physically segregating, barring, and discriminating against black Americans” until the Civil Rights Movement of the 1960s (Packard 14-15).

Jim Crow laws began in the antebellum North, not in the post-Reconstruction South. The laws began there simply because the North was the first settled area of the country. This was a region of the country without a social, economic or political system for control or exploitation of the black population. As a substitute for slavery, this varied, widespread system of discrimination, segregation, and repression developed. The rules of the system were different from state to state, but in all areas, the purposes were the same—keep the black man down, and keep him separated from the white population (Harding 118). In the 1890s whites saw the behavior of young “uppity” blacks as a growing threat to the customs of the times. As a result, over the next two decades, white Southerners would impose this newest system of subjugation. Between 1890 and 1915, Jim Crow laws would become mandated. It was the intention of the whites to see the new generation of blacks (those who had advanced politically, socially or economically), recognize their place and arrive at proper racial etiquette (Litwack 230).

Legally, African Americans were quasi-free people. They had no secure rights. Under laws of restraint and repression, they were denied access to land, lost economic opportunities, and lived in fear of white hatred. They were forced into menial positions,

and then terminated again when dire economic conditions developed. White laborers guarded their jobs against blacks at all times. In many places, there were no opportunities for black children to attend schools, even though their parents were expected to pay taxes. In the majority of Northern states, blacks were denied the right to vote (Harding 118).

Deceptive slave catchers and kidnappers were an ever-present threat to the precarious freedom of the African American. When the opportunity presented itself, kidnappers could snatch blacks back into slavery – even those who had never been slaves. Violence by angry mobs was prevalent with their attacks on black neighborhoods, and many residents were either killed or forced to leave their homes (118). Even though slavery had ended in the North, supremacy, exploitation, violence and fear were firmly in place. Threats continued, blacks were shunned at every turn, and murder became brutal and incomprehensible (Harding 118 – 119). Segregation did not offer the blacks an equal share in the pursuit of a good life. Segregation was a reminder (and a lesson) for them to recognize their inferiority:

The segregation of races was revived, laws against intermarriage were adopted . . . Once the Supreme Court in 1883 outlawed the Civil Rights Acts of 1875, blacks were banned from white hotels, barber shops, restaurants and theaters. By 1885, most Southern states had separate schools, and in 1896, the Supreme Court upheld segregation in its ‘separate but equal’ doctrine set forth in *Plessy v. Ferguson* (1896). (Franklin, Moss 290)

The “separate but equal” statement was not a reality. In many cases, the treatment and accommodations were inferior to those provided for white Americans. The blacks were determined to improve their positions in society, and to secure privileges that were equal to those of the white population. But their abilities to move upward were hampered by Jim Crow. Historian Leon Litwack, in *Trouble in Mind* admitted that the black man knew his place: “He knows how far he can go, and where he must stop” (230).

Segregation more so than disfranchisement, was linked to fears of social equality. Whites did not want to share any close proximity with blacks. In the work places or in private homes, the condition remained as that of master and slave. But in public, especially on street cars or trains where white and blacks met as equals, paid as equals, and where the whites were no longer masters, the situation was not tolerated. Jim Crow laws were thorough. It was segregation by law which separated the races in every situation where whites and blacks might be together: hospitals, workplaces, churches, prisons, public transportation, restaurants, restrooms, water fountains and even public parks. Movie theaters were popular, and Jim Crow demanded separate ticket windows as well as separate seating in the balcony – “nigger heaven.” The signs “White Only” and “Colored” were part of the Nation’s landscape (Litwack 233).

There were few exceptions to the laws, but they were established if necessary. In the event of an emergency, black firemen, black repairmen, or black assistants were permitted to work with white laborers. Blacks were permitted to own and drive automobiles, but were often restricted to public roads and they were not permitted to park in particular areas. Even the sidewalks were regulated as it was customary for blacks to step aside and allow the whites to pass with ample space (Litwack 235).

Segregated residential areas were also the norm. It became difficult for blacks to move into certain areas due to the restrictions placed upon them. “Whether by custom or ordinance, the newer , most rapidly growing cities tended to be the most segregated . . . by the mid-1890s . . . racially exclusive sections characterized Atlanta, Richmond, and Montgomery” (235). For all African Americans, regardless of age or position, Jim Crow was a daily reminder of his second-class citizen status, and a confirmation of his inferiority . The era of Jim Crow – roughly 1880s to 1964 was a low point in the history of the Black community, and it wasn’t until 1954 that school segregation was declared unconstitutional by the Supreme Court in the seminal case of *Brown v. Board of Education*. All of the remaining Jim Crow laws were overruled by the Civil Rights Act of 1964 and the Voting Rights Act of 1965. The NAACP managed to dismantle legal segregation after years of struggles. White Southerners called it Black Monday, the day when the Court handed down its decision (Hale 288).

With this new scenario, Southern whites gained momentum in their efforts to rid the country of the black population. Violence increased, riots were reported in major cities, and the already fragile rights of the African Americans diminished further. Late into the nineteenth century and the mid- twentieth century, while the African Americans continued to struggle, they were facing a period of the worst violence to date. The period is known as the *Nadir of Race Relations* in the America.

Violence Against African Americans

The South was intent on convincing the African Americans of their political and economic impotency, as well as to diminish their self-esteem and their social ambitions. “The idea of social equality was abhorrent, so weighted with fears of racial impurity and

degeneration, that the very suggestion of such equality had to be rigorously rejected and punished” (Litwack 218). It is not surprising then to recognize that from the earliest days of slavery until the Civil Rights movement of the 1960s, the South was determined to fight against the black community. Any advancement by the African American was eventually hampered with legal or extra-legal forces of repression. Every effort made to protect the lives and rights of the black population caused additional tensions between the races. When legal options of subordination failed to achieve their goal, Southern whites resorted to vigilante justice. One of the first white groups (and probably the most well-known) to be organized was the Ku Klux Klan in Pulaski, Tennessee, in 1866. This was a self-governed, local, vigilante group who called Confederate veterans to assist them in carrying out their terrorist acts. In just a few years following the Civil War, the Klan undermined the Republican southern government that blacks had elected into office (Waldrep, *Confront Lynching* 6).

The Klan operated well before the end of the nineteenth century. Newspapers failed to report all of their activities even though they were brutal and constant. If the newspapers had reported every killing in those years following the Civil War, they probably wouldn’t have been able to describe the fear, the mutilation, or the mob responses in an accurate manner (Waldrep, *Confront Lynching* 6-7). Anyone could be lynched and for any number of trumped-up charges. Most often, the victims were ex-slaves with whites as the perpetrators. The initial attacks were local assaults and murders for simple acts such as walking on the same side of the street as a white woman, or sending children to school (Foner, Mahoney 119). The violence became more pervasive when more vigilante groups became organized such as The White League of Louisiana

and The Knights of the White Camelias. The groups, especially the Klan, patrolled parts of the South terrorizing both black and white communities. Those who tried to defy them were injured, maimed, whipped and hanged. One of the major reasons for their violence was to convince the blacks they had no business in the voting booth. Their large balloting numbers could turn the tide at the polls and prevent the opportunity for the whites to gain political power. Between 1865 and 1877, the South saw another Civil War – one filled with hatred and death again (Franklin, Moss 277).

Even with the laws being passed that prosecuted the vigilante groups, little or nothing was done to them, and nothing was done to protect those victims who were no match for the threats and actions put upon them. Violence in the South increased, racial conflicts became increasingly more brutal, and between the end of Reconstruction and 1968, nearly 5,000 African Americans were lynched in the South (Foner, Mahoney 135). This may be a conservative number considering that records of the murders were not always accurate. As mentioned earlier, this period was named *The Nadir of American Race Relations* by historian Rayford Logan: “Racism was deemed to be worse than in any other post-bellum period. African Americans lost many civil rights gains made during Reconstruction.

Anti-black violence, lynchings, segregation, legal racial discrimination, and expressions of white supremacy increased” (“Netting America” 1). Luther Holbert and his wife were subjected to mob brutality for allegedly killing his white employer in 1904. Nearly a thousand people stood by and watched as they were tortured, mutilated and murdered:

... they were tied to trees and while the funeral pyres were being prepared they were forced to suffer the most fiendish tortures. The blacks were forced to hold out their hands while one finger at a time was chopped off. The fingers were distributed as souvenirs. The ears of the murderers were cut off. Holbert was beaten severely, his skull was fractured and one of his eyes, knocked out with a stick, hung by a shred from the socket. . . . The most excruciating form of punishment consisted in the use of a large corkscrew in the hands of the man and woman, in the arms, legs and body, and then pulled out, the spirals tearing out big pieces of raw, quivering flesh every time it was withdrawn. (Litwack 289)

Litwack continues with the narrative by indicating that Holbert had quarreled with his employer before the actual murder, but his wife was innocent. Two other black men, mistaken for Holbert, had already been slain by a posse (289). This is a single incident of the extreme violence that was meted out during the period of the *Nadir*. More information on lynching will be addressed in chapter two of this dissertation.

**Women's Place in the Nineteenth Century:
The Cult of True Womanhood was Dying**

Beginning as early as 1848 with the Seneca Falls Convention on Women's Rights, the organized struggle for female equality and autonomy was gaining momentum. Nineteenth-century women activists had learned . . . important lessons . . . They discovered striking similarities between chattel slavery and women's oppression. (Royster 19)

In the midst of the nation's rapid changes and cultural activities in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, women of both races were moving toward "the woman's era" – a time when women questioned their position and place in the world, and used their own initiatives to change their status and acquire personal power. Both white and African American women wanted to broaden their life experiences and find new identities. They acquired educations, worked in the public sector, demanded voting rights, founded voluntary associations, and developed agendas for reform – not just in their lives, but also for others who required assistance. They fought to be recognized as intelligent and capable members of their communities. They gathered their talents and used their own energies for public projects which they considered to be extensions of their domestic responsibilities, and they called themselves "public housekeepers." Women became trailblazers by engaging in new frontiers that altered the former definition of what it was to be a woman. "Her physical frailty belied her moral fortitude...she proved to be remarkably resilient" (Sims 1-3). In previous decades, women lived under the thumb of the patriarchal society that forced them to be held "hostage" in the male-dominated world.⁴ Women were expected to abide by certain virtues that defined their proper place. Without these virtues, a woman was condemned, but with them, she was guaranteed happiness :

Marriage could guarantee a woman financial security, or it could reduce her to poverty. A single woman's property rights began to erode when she became engaged. . . . After marriage, the husband's dominance was absolute . . . all the property she brought to the marriage, except for her clothing, belonged to her spouse . . . women could not vote or hold office .

. . ladies could not practice medicine or law . . . they bore the burdens of running large households . . . they supervised slaves . . . and lower-class whites. . . . They were at one and the same time powerful and powerless. (Sims 7-8)

This ideology of “The Cult of True Womanhood,” or “the cult of domesticity,” asserted that womanly virtue included piety, purity, submissiveness and domesticity” (Welter1). Absence of these attributes demonstrated that a woman failed to fulfill her role as wife and mother. Wifhood and motherhood were the “purpose of a woman’s being; the home was the sphere of all a woman’s actions” (Carby 26).

This ideology, while not followed to the letter, applied mostly to white women of a certain class. Southern white girls hoped to be ladies, but only those with status could arrive at being “ladies.” There was no opportunity for the African American woman to achieve this goal. African American women were still living under the stigma of slavery and continued to be viewed as inferior. Historian John Blassingame in his book, *The Slave Community*, described the position of the black woman in slavery: “A slave woman . . . could be ‘neither pure nor virtuous’ . . . existing in circumstances of sexual subordination, women were literally forced to offer themselves willingly to their masters” (173). The African American woman who may have had aspirations of bettering herself was consequently battling for more than her equal rights. She was fighting for recognition and equality with her counterparts. The white community celebrated the love that bound a mother to her offspring, and entrusted their young to the black mammies. Slave mothers, who were considered unfit and incapable of loving in the same fashion, were separated from their children with few concerns for their welfare offered by their masters (Sims 6).

While the white woman was viewed as soft, delicate and helpless, the black woman was seen as “the mule” the creature that had great strength and worked in the fields. Purity, modesty and beauty were valued in white women, but black women were not represented in the same way. They lacked the physical attributes of the dominant race and they were accused of overt sexuality (Carby 27). “The emphasis upon women’s purity, submissiveness and natural fragility was the antithesis of the reality of most black women’s lives during slavery and for many years thereafter” (L. Perkins, “ The Impact of the Cult of True Womanhood” 183). In order to overcome their obstacles, African American women came together in organizations (like their white counterparts) and worked in conjunction with African American newspapers and magazines, spoke out in public of the injustices that they and their race endured, and recognized that their own success was dependent on “uplifting” each other (183). As time progressed, both races of women came together on behalf of their mutual agendas. The lynching of blacks in the South led to an interracial cooperation of “protest” writing by women (black and white) through the anti-lynching dramas of this period.

The Importance of Education and Organizations for “Uplift”

Women of both races recognized that to be properly prepared for the new responsibilities of the women’s era, they needed a proper education. They fought to make education for women and girls of all ages a priority. Many of the original organizations began as literary societies or reading circles. Members met in individual homes and in churches to discuss literature and current events. Education of women had previously been in the realm of the domestic sphere. Needlepoint, painting and music dominated the curriculum of a female’s education. The ideology of the “cult of domesticity” was being

challenged by women who wanted a stronger, more productive and meaningful life. Women were able to attend high schools and colleges where they studied history, literature, science and the fine arts (L. Perkins, "The Impact of the True Cult of Womanhood" 184).

Both races favored programs that empowered others to be able to earn a living. They supported vocational training and encouraged young women to prepare to be teachers. Even with segregation laws separating the two races, white women and African American women managed to demonstrate their ability to excel in their studies and to become influential in their homes and communities. In several instances, the women of both races worked in tandem to earn the rights they deserved. The "power of the people" became the power of "femininity" working toward common goals. The efforts of all organized and educated women were a source of empowerment for women of future generations. "Women's faith in the power of education was as great as their faith in femininity" (Sims 104 – 105).

It was for the purpose of "uplifting their own race" that African American women wished to be formally educated. Those who were able to receive an education began schools for their race in order to provide them with opportunities for personal improvement (L. Perkins, "The Impact of the True Cult of Womanhood" 185). By Post-Reconstruction women were college-educated and entering professions in significant numbers. The Freedmen's Bureau and northern missionaries aided in the establishment of schools following the Civil War. Various other women's schools began prior to the War, but few opened their doors to African American students. "The lone exception was

Oberlin College, which received notoriety in 1833 when it decided to admit both women and blacks on an equal basis with white men” (L. Perkins 185- 86).

The numerous voluntary organizations that were initiated by white and black women during the nineteenth century and early twentieth century (1880-1930) made a legendary impact on society. White women used their status as ladies “to justify” their future aspirations and black women fought to be recognized as ladies in their continual struggle for racial equality. Groups such as the Woman’s Christian Temperance Union, the Colonial Dames, the Daughters of the American Revolution, the Equal Suffrage Association (a.k.a. The League of Women Voters), The Federation of Women’s Clubs, Woman’s Missionary Society, The Order of the Eastern Star, and The International Order of the Good Samaritans, as well as numerous others , worked to improve the lives of the needy, as well as to improve their communities and their states (Franklin, Moss 316). Many states such as North Carolina boasted of their ladies’ organizations and the accomplishments they made even before women got the vote:

Responding to the demands of organized women and their male allies, city councils, county commissions, and the state legislature initiated new programs to benefit children, the elderly, and the poor; increased appropriations for education; enacted legislation to protect public health; and revamped the prison system to emphasize rehabilitation. (Sims 3)

It was through the strength and initiatives of women, their organizations, and their causes, that new projects became a reality, and many social wrongs were corrected and changed. Such was the case with the lynchings of blacks during the period following the

Civil War. Ida B. Wells (1862 -1931) was an African American journalist, public speaker, and community activist during the Post-Reconstruction era. Born a slave, she and her family earned respect as “forward-looking” citizens. Her parents instilled in her a strong sense of community responsibility and activism. Her personal experience with the lynching of friends in 1892 led her to initiate an anti-lynching campaign. She, along with other anti-lynching activists, Mary Church Terrell, Mary Burnett Talbert, Anna Julia Cooper, and Jessie Ames Daniels, (to name a few) played major roles in making the nation aware of the atrocities that were taking place, and by doing so, hoped to affect a change. The various organizations they formed were committed to bringing an end to the injustices of lynching (Royster 24-25).

With this background, the stage is now set to analyze, appreciate and understand the role that women dramatists made in this American experience and struggle.

CHAPTER TWO

THE DRAMA OF LYNCHING

This is what opened my eyes to what lynching really was. An excuse to get rid of Negroes who were acquiring wealth and property and thus keep the race terrorized and 'keep the nigger down.' (Ida B. Wells, *Southern Horrors* . . . (1892)⁵

The Written Word and the Phenomenon of Lynching

The history that surrounded the lynchings of thousands of men and women during the Nadir, prompted numerous authors to use their literature to combat the epidemic. The brutality of the lynching incidents were a national dilemma and became a literary phenomenon – especially between the years of 1886-1940. Those authors who opposed the murders used the written word to “protest” the unjust killings, the bogus excuses for condemnation, and the lack of protection needed by the black population. “Protest” literature was not new to readers. The majority of African American literature written to date gave accounts of the trials of black life from slavery forward, and included several genres: poems, novels, speeches, letters, news articles and dramas – in the form of the anti-lynching plays. These dramas, written by blacks and whites, (men and women), presented a realistic portrait of African Americans and the various circumstances they endured when confronted with lynching.

There are approximately one hundred extant anti-lynching dramas, but for the purpose of this work, I have chosen ten of the earliest examples from the years 1916–1936. The majority of the dramas are short one-acts while several are extended, full-length works. The dramas were rarely performed, but in those instances where they were viewed by an audience, they were presented in schools, churches, or even the homes of the black communities. They were most often used as “readings” when performance was not an option, and the plot revolved around “middle-class and common folk families experiencing life and death, hope and despair . . .” as lynching was at the center of their story (Brown-Guillory 4). The majority of the chosen works are included in the anthology, edited by Kathy A. Perkins and Judith L. Stephens, *STRANGE FRUIT, Plays of Lynching by American Women*.

The plays were included under the umbrella of a larger writing campaign, The Campaign Against Lynching, that was initiated by Ida B. Wells-Barnett in 1887, and continued as an interracial project with women writers through the efforts of Jessie Daniel Ames in 1930, and The Association of Southern Women for the Prevention of Lynching (ASWPL). These brave women led others to participate in an effort to have the violence ended and legislation enacted.

The courage of women authors at this point in time cannot be diminished. Women’s social position was that of second-class citizens who recognized their lives were similar to that of slaves in bondage, and they hoped to find their personal identities even while their voices were silenced. Women were on the verge of the “women’s era” and their writing of “protest” literature – especially the controversial subject of lynching – demonstrated their great courage and determination to see it ended. Their writings were

purposeful but each author offered an individual, thoughtful perspective on the subject. The women dramatists wanted to arouse the imaginations of the audiences “to achieve an automatic response to the action – to arouse empathy . . . which continues in a very personal way in the minds and feelings of viewers” (Hodge 70-71). They believed that through their art, they were aiding a cause and using their talents for the good of their race.

Even with the short works that are examined in this dissertation, themes are apparent and meaningful. It was Jean-Paul Sartre who said, “the theatre is the world compressed, and with meaning” (Hodge 49). With Sartre’s thought in mind, Francis Hodge in *Play Directing* added: “. . . plays are artificial devices for reassuring man, for giving him strength, perception, even wisdom . . . all plays, no matter how poor, have inherent meanings” (49). These women dramatists used the anti-lynching theatre as an agency of information, support, and change.

Most of the chosen authors wrote during the Harlem Renaissance period when “breaking down racial barriers through accomplishments in art and literature were complementary philosophies” (Stephens 9). Though most of these African American women dramatists lived in various sections of the country, many of them were friends and acquaintances. The dramatists of the Harlem Renaissance were friends of W.E.B. Du Bois, Alain Locke and Montgomery T. Gregory who supported their “native dramas about the black experience” (4). For these supporters, presenting life as realistically as possible was important and dramas were expected to teach, to eliminate stereotypes, and to change the status quo (2). Writing protest plays (as well as other protest literature) was a weapon used by the African American community to bring serious attention to their

condition. Pauline Hopkins, in her novel, *Contending Forces* (1899), posed this question to her readers: “Of what use is fiction to the colored race at the present crisis in its history?” (qtd. in Carby 121). Their stories were not fiction, they were reality. Since the writing of the earliest slave narratives, the writings of the African American community have been about their life experiences and their history.

Ten Anti-Lynching Dramas to Consider

Title	Author	Race	Date
<i>Aftermath</i>	Mary Burrill	African American	1919
<i>Black Souls</i>	Annie Nathan Meyer	White	1932
<i>Rachel</i>	Angelina Weld Grimké	African American	1916
<i>Safe</i>	Georgia Douglas Johnson	African American	1929
<i>Lawd, Does You Undahstan?</i>	Ann Seymour Link	White	1936
<i>A Sunday Morning in the South</i>	Georgia Douglas Johnson;	African American	1925
<i>The Forfeit</i>	Corrie Crandall Howell	White	1925
<i>Nails and Thorns</i>	May Miller	African American	1930
<i>The Awakening</i>	Mary White Ovington	White	1923
<i>The Noose</i>	Tracy Mygatt	White	1929

Characteristics of the Anti-Lynching Dramas

Judith Stephens in her introduction to the anthology, *STRANGE FRUIT*, defines a lynching drama as, “a play in which the threat or occurrence of a lynching, past or present, has a major impact on the dramatic action” (3). Stephens continues to identify this American genre as social protest and folk drama with early realism that offers no resolution or closure (8). The anti-lynching drama is a form of womanist/feminist drama

referring to the collaboration of black women's leadership in the anti-lynching campaign, and the white women's aide toward this common goal (5). The contribution of these works to the American theatre and specifically, to the history of Black Theatre, has not been fully realized and understood. Many of the original dramas have been lost or exist in partial form. Others were never published or staged due to political or social concerns of the times, or because women authors faced difficulty in having their writings published.

The works of black women playwrights were not readily accepted due to the racial and sexual barriers put upon them (Perkins, *Black Female Playwrights*, 16). Women (black and white) were struggling to break away from the stringent life-styles of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. White women were campaigning to gain the vote as well as their own identity. While they were fighting to gain freedom from patriarchal repression, black women were still trying to be seen as human beings, women with abilities – not the slaves of past generations. “ In order to gain a public voice as orators or published writers, black women had to confront the dominant domestic ideologies and literary conventions of womanhood which excluded them from the definition ‘woman’” (Carby 6).

The genre of the anti-lynching drama appealed to black women writers because they believed that their unique perspective on mob violence could be expressed realistically. The dramatists usually set the action in a simple home where women care for the family. The mob assaults the family, kills the man of the house, and the family is cast into an emotional and financial crisis. The action continues with the aftermath of the lynching and its residual effects on the matriarch and those left behind. The woman may not witness the actual lynching, but she may encounter mental torture when she imagines

the burning pyre or hears the screams of the dying victim. The constant threat of such a death is terrorism to the extreme, with the victim's family left to adjust to loss and insecurity (McCaskill, Gebhard 21).

The Ten Anti-lynching Dramas and Their Groupings

There are four groupings of ten plays in this dissertation. Because many of the eight themes to be examined are presented to some degree in all of the works, the dramas have been divided by subject matter rather than themes. The first group of two plays revolves around the story line of the returning black soldier at the end of World War I. The two dramas to be examined are *Aftermath* (1919), by Mary Burrill, an African American author; and *Black Souls* (1932), by Annie Nathan Meyer, a white author.

The second grouping includes three plays that dramatize the decisions that three mothers make concerning their lives and those of their children when faced with lynchings. These anti-lynching dramas include: *Safe* (1929), by African American author, Georgia Douglas Johnson; *Lawd, Does You Undahstan?* (1936), by the white author, Ann Seymour Link; and *Rachel* (1916), by Angelina Weld Grimké, an African American author.

Section three dramatizes the precarious positions of two young black men and how their lives, and the lives of their families, are impacted by lynching. These two dramas include: *A Sunday Morning in the South* (1925), by African American author, Georgia Douglas Johnson; and *The Forfeit* (1925), by the white author, Corrie Crandall Howell.

The final grouping recognizes the character of the strong woman who stands against violence and lynching, and the complications that she meets in her efforts to do so. These three dramas include: *Nails and Thorns* (1930), by African American author, May Miller; *The Awakening* (1923), by the white author, Mary White Ovington; and *The Noose* (1929), by Tracy Mygatt, also a white author.

Prevailing Themes in the Lives of African Americans Confronted With Lynching

The themes that I will examine include: white supremacy, hypocrisy, complicity, resistance, futility of black life, faith, trauma, and motherhood. They will be examined using Aristotle's theory in the *Poetics*, keeping in mind the given circumstances that are presented by the individual dramatists. The purpose of this study is to determine how a specific theme is dramatized /expressed in a given drama and to determine how its use compares with other dramas of different authors . Ultimately, the conclusion will present the similarities and/or differences between the works of African American women authors and the white women authors. The nature of the audience for whom these works were written will be considered, as well as whether or not the audience dynamics changed over the years. Reviews and critiques of the plays (if available) will be discussed as a source of additional historic information. Because of the short length of the majority of these works, all themes are not evident in each drama, and theatrical components may or may not be utilized by the authors.

White supremacy is synonymous with the "assumption of privilege" which can be defined as white citizens who believe that they are deserving of certain rights that blacks are denied. Slavery and its legacy existed at the very roots of white supremacy and white supremacy meant an unwillingness to yield power or offer equality to blacks who were

deemed inferior. White supremacy served whites' self-interest and blacks' constant submission. Bondage, human property, denial of rights, separation of family, punishment, Black Codes, peonage, forced labor, segregation, mutilation and ritualized murder – all resulted from centuries of white dominance. The lynching episodes of each drama expose this belief of privilege and serve as criticism of the ideology that one race was entitled over another. In several of the dramas, white supremacy is coupled with the theme of hypocrisy.

The Oxford American Dictionary defines Hypocrisy as “the assumption of moral standards to which one’s own behavior does not conform; pretense”(386). This theme is specifically presented through the characters or institutions who voice religious or political beliefs or principles but clearly do not practice them. Hypocrisy is expressed through actions, dialogue, or a character’s historical past, all of which are given circumstances offered by the author.

Complicity involves a partnership or alliance in an act or crime. Those characters who willingly aid in the lynching of a victim – either by active participation, by association, or by refusal to acknowledge the murders, may be viewed as complicit in the acts. The characters that represent the theme of complicity will be identified by their attitudes, actions and dialogue, and their act of complicity will be determined. The oppression of African Americans is seen in the characters who are complicit in the apprehension and taking of innocent lives in these dramas. The other characters who fight the oppression offer “resistance” to the status quo. Resistance is defined as “refusal to comply; the ability to withstand adverse conditions; or the impeding or stopping effect exerted by one material thing on another” (*Oxford Dictionary* 682). In terms of this study,

resistance will be examined as subversive or overt acts within life that were carried –out by African Americans against oppression. Throughout the history of slavery and its aftermath, stories abound of those who in one way or another “resisted” their bondage, their punishment, and their repression. The first slaves to travel the Middle Passage, rather than submit to the harsh treatments of the crews, saw death as a form of resistance and freedom by diving overboard.

Men and women on the plantations, when recognizing their lives of hard labor and punishment were permanent, made valiant efforts of “resistance” by escaping through the Underground Railroad. Mothers who bore baby boys, when learning that an innocent young man was targeted and killed, resorted to infanticide as a form of “resistance and safety” for their own children. For the mother, it was better to have the child die at birth, than to have him, and the family, endure the mutilations and burnings of the hanging tree. Resistance was a part of the reality of slavery, but overt resistance against the mob was always a dangerous tactic.

The women authors created honest scenes of homes with loving families, led by educated and conscientious adults who exhibited personal integrity. Through these dramas, writers gave their audiences the real picture of the lives of African Americans in an effort to show that the races were very much the same. The dramas also offered racial affirmation to their people, and became acts of resistance in themselves. They served to denounce the negative stereotype of the idle and lazy inferiors African Americans were often portrayed to be.

Several of the dramas present the theme of “futility of black life,” especially for black men. Recognizing their inability to fight for themselves under any circumstances, they see life, and their given circumstances, as hopeless. Futility is expressed by situations and/or characters where there is no opportunity for a reversal of a particular situation. If a character is unable to resolve a problem, he becomes resigned to an outcome of death. In several of the anti-lynching dramas, individuals and family members face this dilemma where nothing can be done to help a potential lynching victim. To resist the mob’s intent would exacerbate the situation and potentially endanger other family members who wish to save the accused. This helpless position was evidenced in the anguish many families endured as they watched their loved ones led away. Not only was the accused lynched and unprotected, the family was also figuratively “lynched” by constantly suffering the guilt and trauma of helplessness.

The African American population, especially the elderly, found religion to be a means of comfort in difficult times. The theme of faith in God (or lack thereof) is a predominant theme in many of the anti-lynching dramas. The characters and their attitudes, specific settings, music and dialogue are contributing components for the expression of faith and religion. Belief in a higher power was important to the African American plantation culture where religion became a means of community building and solace. The slave’s release from bondage and the hope of reaching the Promised Land, were dependent on God’s mercy. In later years, as the African American population became more independent, mobile, and educated, the Baptist and Methodist denominations were significant influences on their uplift programs in regard to economic, social and political endeavors. In the event of an emergency or a traumatic event such as

a lynching, African Americans continued to call on God for strength. It was most often the mother – figure who encouraged others to pray and ask for His help.

The theme of motherhood is predominant in the majority of these anti-lynching dramas. The mother's dialogue, attitude and "embodied practices" – a term coined by Koritha Mitchell, will expose her true personality and strength. She is the character around whom a majority of the action revolves. The "embodied practices" of theatre will help to identify the personality of all characters especially, the mother. Mitchell defines "the embodied practices" of theatre:

Any bodily act that conveys meaning . . . this term is deliberately broad, building on Performance Studies, which emphasizes the centrality of performance in how human beings make culture and live their lives. Embodied practices can include speaking or singing, grimacing or gesturing, hugging or hitting, reading a script dramatically or performing in full costume . . . they reconstitute themselves, transmitting communal memories, histories, and values from one group / generation to the next.

(5)

In many black families, the matriarch is the caregiver and the head of the family. It is she who teaches the children and perhaps works from the home to earn a living. It is she who instills the moral values in the young people, and encourages them to work and succeed in a world that does not offer them great respect. The mother is steadfast and true, and in many cases has a strength that would rival any Goliath. But her strength is not just that of the physical nature, it is an inner strength that lives through years of hatred

and pain, suffering and death, tears and occasional joy. She is the bearer of history and secrets, and her wealth of knowledge comes not from books on a shelf, but from living a full life. The beauty of the mother and the theme of motherhood, because the dramatists were mothers, friends, sisters, aunts – provides a unique and sympathetic perspective on the anguish that a mother experiences when any member of her family is injured. How she survives when a child is taken from her by the hangman's noose is studied in the works of both black and white authors.

Joy Degruy Leary, in her book, *Post Traumatic Slave Syndrome, America's Legacy of Enduring Injury and Healing*, contends that "while some of what we learn we learn through direct instruction, the bulk of our learning takes place vicariously, by watching others"(123). Application of Leary's quote to certain characters manifests trauma in these anti-lynching plays just as it did in the decades of slavery and oppression. Even before the arrests and the lynchings, trauma was alive and well. African Americans, during the years following Emancipation, when they were no longer valuable commodities, lived in constant fear of physical violence and death. Dr. Joy D. Leary estimated that "between 1866 and 1955 more than 10,000 African American men, women and children had been lynched; many thousands more had been murdered by other means (medical experimentation by the Public Health System); and untold numbers of women had been brutalized and raped"(99). In addition, lynchings were a daily occurrence when the mere suggestion of a wrong-doing could incite a mob. African Americans had to find communities where they were not in jeopardy on a continual basis, but this also proved to be difficult and traumatic. The authors of these dramas wanted to show how the brutal

and senseless murders caused lasting psychological issues in family members as well as communities as a whole.

An Examination of the Components of Drama According to Aristotle's POETICS and the Given Circumstances of the Characters

Aristotle in *Poetics* identified *Tragedy* (drama) and its component parts:

. . . it is as an imitation of an action that is serious, complete, and of a certain magnitude . . . and every tragedy must have six parts, which parts determine its quality – namely, plot, character, diction, thought, spectacle, song. . . Tragedy . . . is an imitation of life. (11-12)

These components continue to be valid when examining any theatrical event today. Aristotle's elements will be examined in the ten dramas in relation to their support and enhancement of the themes (*thoughts, ideas*) that are presented by individual authors. It should be noted that not all components are discussed in each of the plays. Only those components that are relevant to the thematic messages will be included. The plot structure (*dynamics/complications/major conflict*), which is simple and similar in most of these one-act plays will be discussed briefly. In certain dramas, the *climax* will be identified with regard to its impact on the given themes. The major complications in these works revolve around the specific issues of a lynching, and they will be examined as to their relationship to specific characters' motivations, attitudes or dialogue. It is important to examine the *complications* – to determine how each works to develop the plot and create an emotional response. Additional elements of the plot that may impact the main idea such as *exposition, foreshadowing, discovery or reversal*, may or may not be present in the works, but will be cited if relevant to the examined themes.

The characters of each work are determined and created by the playwright's written language (*diction*), the character's history, his psychological motivations, his attitudes, his values and his interactions with others (Sporre 72). The principal characters - the protagonist and the antagonist, will be discussed in terms of their specific roles in the dramas and how they experience, support, exhibit and/or react to any of the given themes. The individual authors have created characters who will respond to situations depending on their specific given circumstances. These circumstances include: the time and place of the drama, the societal climate of the period, the economic status of the individuals and their community, as well as the educational and political positions of the characters.

Several objectives of this study are to compare and contrast the characters' personalities and to explore the ways characters convey themes. Another objective is to determine which authors offer the most realistic portrayals of the characters, their situations, and the outcomes of their decisions. The criteria for determining the most realistic portrayals include: stories that are from daily life without idealization; characters who are believable and from lower or middle classes; characters who are products of social and environmental factors; characters who experience problems or challenges that are appropriate for the culture in which they live; and language and actions that honestly reflect their social and economic positions (Bucher, Manning 1).

I will discuss the characters' given circumstances and the interplay between situations and characters' motivations. My analysis of character will include dialogue and attention to their specific actions. The characters' reactions to complications and circumstances drive the plot forward, ultimately arriving at a conclusion.

The two components of *spectacle* and *music* will be discussed in relation to their enhancement of the themes. The majority of the plays are set in simple home environments (as was suitable for small venues). This was a deliberate effort on the part of the earlier authors to create archival evidence that African Americans existed “who behaved in these family-centered ways”(Mitchell 14). The authors also realized that the “juxtaposition of the brutal public act of lynching with the private intimate atmosphere of the home setting creates a theatre of jarring contrasts and incongruity . . . ” (Perkins, Stephens 9). Later plays of the genre moved out and away from the home setting.

Other forms of spectacle – properties and costumes, if /or when relevant, will be discussed. Only a few of the eleven dramas used music which was a means of “creating an atmosphere that produced an emotional response, and served as a form of communal belonging” (14).

The anti-lynching dramas create a violent reality of African American life for the audiences (both black and white) who read them, heard them, or in some cases, watched them in performance. According to Kathy Perkins and Judith Stephens, the plays “incorporate the ideas of literary social protest, folk drama, and stage realism . . . and they represent a distinctly American experience shaped by the African American struggle for survival and the simultaneous existence of interracial conflict and cooperation that has characterized black/white relations throughout American history.” Perkins and Stephens also consider the plays as “interracial womanist/feminist drama” because they are written by women of both races who address an area of American culture that has not been well-explored - the ideology of white supremacy. This ideology is demonstrated through the

killing of black men in these dramas – all of which is connected to the experiences of women – black and white (4-8).

Freedom and Death are Synonymous

The barbaric ritual of lynching in America was not just a Southern phenomenon. It was a part of America's untold, violent history that in recent years has become an unfolding subject of interest. To deny the existence of this brutal violence would be to deny the existence of slavery or the consequences of emancipation in this nation. The former slaves, emancipated and granted citizenship, were denied their full and rightful place in society until the Civil Rights Movement of the 1960s. After Emancipation, and well into the twentieth century, they were held in various systems of "semi-slavery" by the machinations of Southern supremacy. At every turn, when the African American tried to combat the restrictions continually put upon him, he met with additional blockades to his rights. The South was not willing to have the former slaves share their positions or gain control of their way of life.

The emancipation of the African American created an unprecedented new world for the country. According to the Fourteenth and Fifteenth Amendments of the Constitution, the four million ex-slaves became equals of their former masters. They were citizens with rights and opportunities never before experienced. They were entitled to be educated, to travel, to reunite with their families, to live where they chose, to earn a living, and to participate in the political arena. "Emancipation in America demanded civil equality and the right to vote" (Foner, *Reconstruction* 75). The South was not inclined to permit such drastic changes to its social order. Regardless of the new status of the African

American, the Southerners were determined to see their way of life continue. To do so, they resorted to intimidation and murder in order to maintain control (R. Logan 9).

Southern planters came away from the Civil War physically, emotionally and psychologically devastated. The conflict between former masters attempting to gather a labor force, and the freedmen trying to adjust to their new status, created tensions that ultimately ended in violence. The old codes of conduct and the former social order no longer existed (Foner, *Reconstruction* 121), and this drastic change in the system “was marked by an epidemic of violence that lasted throughout the post-Civil War era and into the early decades of the twentieth century” (Gunning 7). It was a period between 1890 and 1940 named *The Nadir of American Race Relations* by historian Rayford Logan: “Racism was deemed to be worse than in any other post-bellum period. African Americans lost many civil rights gains made during Reconstruction. Anti-black violence, lynchings, segregation, legal racial discrimination, and expressions of white supremacy increased” (“Netting America” 1). With the end of Reconstruction in 1877, blacks were reduced to the status of second-class citizens. Lynching became a palpable terror due to the hatred and fear of the former slaves’ potential retribution over ex-slave owners and white citizens in general. In addition, the white majority was concerned that their political environment would be lost to the large number of African Americans who were now able to cast their votes and seek political office. In their effort to retain political power, the white faction of the South legally disfranchised the majority of African American voters between 1890 and 1907 as lynchings rose to an all-time high (Loewen, *Lies My Teacher Told Me*, 162).

The African American, an ex-slave, and now a citizen with equal rights, became diminished in terms of commodity. He no longer was property, and therefore, he had no value. As a slave he was kept subservient, but he was a valuable asset to his master. With freedom, however, he became a target for terror and death. The African American was of little use and an unwanted threat to the status quo.

The upward mobility of the black community threatened the ideology of white supremacy. Blacks were lynched because they were competition in the economics and politics of the South (Harris 7). Lynching was a means of ridding the land of these “citizens” who believed they had a right to live with, and in, the same manner as their former masters. Literature of the era identified the fears of the white population:

. . . men feared emasculation, dispossession, and disenfranchisement. As the objects of these fears, the black male body under the ‘discipline’ of lynching became a familiar image in the American turn-of-the-century imagination through novels, photographs, and newspaper descriptions . . . which dramatically referenced a public spectacle that white supremacists took as a sign of a racial threat subdued, but that anti-lynching activists regarded as proof of white supremacy’s wanton bloodletting. (Gunning 77)

The Nadir of Race Relations

The turbulent period of the Nadir saw the restriction of black civil and economic rights when racism was the most extreme, and lynchings became increasingly brutal. African Americans (especially men) were harassed, mutilated, and their bodies charred at

the hands of mobs. Citizens of individual communities, as well as the Ku Klux Klan dens, used terrorism against blacks and poor whites. At the turn of the century, the United States emerged as “a world power” with increased responsibilities and interests in other parts of the world. As a result, attentions were diverted from the domestic concerns of the African Americans (R. Logan 52). Radical Republicans sided with Democrats in the late 1870s dominating the Southern governments and restoring white power. The determination to keep the Blacks subservient was not initiated in this era, only exacerbated. The practice of subversion was born in slavery, while the ideology of white domination continued to be deep and relentless.

During the Nadir, the animosity toward the African Americans was pervasive enough to invade the offices of the nation’s capital. The black population found few friends in Washington to aid them in their struggles. From 1913 to 1921, Woodrow Wilson as President, was an outspoken white supremacist, who used his position as chief executive to segregate the country. He segregated the Navy, which had not previously been segregated, and he appointed southern white leaders to positions previously held by African Americans. He closed the Democratic Party to African Americans for nearly two decades, and several of his policies remained intact until the 1950s (Loewen, *Sundown Towns: A Hidden Dimension of American Racism* 41).

The administration of Franklin D. Roosevelt was greatly influenced by the white southerners until 1938. The president never encouraged any anti-lynching bills, housing became more segregated, – and Sundown Towns were built that explicitly refused residency to African Americans. To Roosevelt’s credit, he did institute The Fair Employment Practices Committee, and his economic programs were open to all

Americans without regard to race. By 1940, there was slight and temporary improvement in race relations due to these new initiatives (Loewen, *Sundown Towns : A Hidden Dimension of American Racism* 43).

The Nadir saw segregation become extreme. The Supreme Court “made lifeless” the Fourteenth and Fifteenth Amendments in 1896 by declaring *de jure* (by law) racial segregation in the case of *Plessy v. Ferguson* (Loewen, *Sundown Towns: A Hidden Dimension of American Racism* 33). This decision specified that “facilities for all would be separate but equal” but in reality, there never was an “equal” for facilities when two races were separated. When one race was unable to associate with another, “it was deprived of its equality to be treated like all other citizens . . . and the rationale of segregation implies that the oppressed are a pariah people” (Loewen, *Lies My Teacher Told Me* 163). As time progressed, the African American was being returned to a life similar to the days of oppression and second-class citizenship:

This policy resulted in Negro disfranchisement, social, educational and employment discrimination, and peonage. Deprived of their civil and human rights, Blacks were reduced to a status of quasi-slavery or ‘second-class’ citizenship. A tense atmosphere of racial hatred, ignorance and fear bred lawless mass violence, murder and lynching. (Gibson 1)

To prevent the Black community from achieving further advancement, lynching continued as a method of social control and a means of maintaining the caste system in the South. The Civil War, Reconstruction, and Post-Reconstruction periods were intimately woven. With the drastic changes that were developing in the nation, it was a

time of extreme chaos, and so much of what ultimately developed from this turbulent era has become a part of the fabric of the country.

The Genesis of Lynch Law

In his book, *At the Hands of Persons Unknown*, Philip Dray discusses the origin of the term, “*lynch law*.” He identifies two beliefs that resulted from the Revolutionary War that became a part of history: “*localism*” a belief that problems of a specific region should be resolved by its residents, and “*instrumentalism*” the belief that nothing is off-limits and anyone can do anything - including enforcing the law (20). Dray sees these beliefs as the origin of the law that was named for Charles Lynch, a Justice of the Peace from Virginia, in the late 1700s (21). Lynch, a patriot during the Revolution, established an informal court in his region in order to deal with local crime issues. Because of the great traveling distances between established courts, and the long periods of time that lapsed for proper due process, Lynch’s court satisfied the immediate needs. Those who were brought before Lynch were punished by “tar-and-feathering, beatings, and floggings” (Dray 21). His informal court was considered fair and expeditious and from this venue, the name for “summary justice”⁶ (a.k.a. *vigilantism*) was coined (21). Lynch’s name came to be associated with this type of justice by word of mouth when those in Virginia, who were aware of Lynch’s reputation, began to move to other regions of the country.

Eventually, in the nineteenth century, *lynch law* came to refer mainly to unlawful sentencing to death (Royster 9). Lynching became an accepted means of justice especially as the nation expanded into the frontier. The harsh conditions of the new territories called for swift punishment for those “cattle rustlers, thieves and desperados in

the South and the Old West” from the 1880s and onward. Mob violence grew and expressed America’s contempt for racial, ethnic, and cultural groups who were living in or immigrating to the country. African Americans, Native Indians, Latinos, Jews, Asians and European immigrants became victims of mob discrimination and violence. Lynching was not a crime committed exclusively against blacks. Mob activities became a means of asserting white dominance over various ethnic groups (Zangrando 1-2).

Lynch Law also became associated with a group known as “Regulators” during the early nineteenth century. These were informal bands of citizens in North Carolina, Kentucky, and Indiana who traveled in sparsely populated areas and punished common criminals. Vigilantism took on many forms depending on geographical regions and particular crime situations. Several towns had their own “vigilance committees” made up of residents who monitored and intervened when needed. In other areas, several groups of “vigilantes” worked together for a period of time until a threat to their locale was removed. The actions of these groups who came together and dispersed when their objective was met, represented what scholars of mob violence call “instant vigilantism” (Dray 21-22). It was considered a necessary type of justice until formal courts were established in various parts of the nation. Eventually, lynching became synonymous with brutal and pervasive violence of blacks in the South. The practice of severe punishment and the increasing incidents of lynching followed Reconstruction. The period between 1880 and 1940 saw segregation, sharecropping, political strife, industrialization, and lynching as part of Southern life and central to increased mob activity in that region (Dray 13-14).

Statistics on the numbers of lynchings in America have varied. As early as 1856, records were kept by two journals: William Lloyd Garrison's *Liberator* and *Nile's Register*.

For any number of reasons, records are unavailable prior to 1882. In that same year, the *Chicago Tribune* began to account for lynchings that were identified in the news. In 1892, Tuskegee Institute began a systematic account of lynchings. The first scientific study was made by Professor James Elbert Cutler of Yale University. His *Lynch-Law* was published in 1905 and documented the years from 1882 through 1903 (White 228). His work was followed by The National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP) in 1912. It is assumed that many lynchings were never accounted for in the South, and as a result, there are errors and inaccuracies in the available information (Gibson 2). Additional reasons for these variances are due to questions and debates of scholars as to what actually constituted a lynching, the distinct possibility that many "stealthy lynchings" were never reported, and inaccurate record-keeping occurred. "Between the years 1882 and 1951, 4,730 people were lynched in the United States; 3,437 Negro and 1,293 white. The largest number of lynchings occurred in 1892. Of the 230 persons lynched that year, 161 were Negroes and 69 whites" (Gibson 2).

Lynching as a Ritual

Southern trees bear a strange fruit.

Blood on the leaves and blood at the root.

Black body swingin' in the Southern breeze.

Strange fruit hanging from the poplar trees.

(Perkins, Stephens 17)⁷

The epidemic of lynching by the mob became a spectacle and a ritual. Its characteristics were established to intimidate and to “teach” blacks that they were overstepping their bounds.

Dr. Barbara Lewis, in her dissertation, *Public Death: Lynching Drama in the Years of its Genesis 1858-1919*, speaks to this point: “The purpose of lynching is didactic. It is intended to rivet the attention and announce supremacy. Lynching enacts an absence of power for the traditional victims of lynching, and a presence of power for those who have a history of lynching” (7). Lynchings shared common ritual elements even though the levels of violence would vary. It was a practice of extra-legal justice conducted by individuals who would take the law into their own hands. The lynchings evolved into a series of events that became a standard practice with the offense being anything from a serious crime, to a suggestion of wrong doing, or simply for being “black.” The suspect’s guilt was determined by the mob who served as judge, jury and executioner (Zangrando 1).

The ritual of “spectacle lynchings” usually began with news of a crime having been committed and a mob searching and apprehending the alleged suspect. The alleged

culprit would be found, accused, and sentenced. As a beginning, the accused would be tortured and mutilated, before being shot, hanged, or both. Ritual lynchings demonstrated brutal suffering and torture: burning at the stake; maiming; dismemberment; and castration. Once the accused expired, the body parts would be passed to those spectators who wished to have souvenirs of the spectacle. "The gruesome details carried out in the public square made for powerful entertainment," (Madison 14), and the groups who attended these events considered them as such. When the times and dates of these voyeuristic spectacles were advertised by newspapers, they were witnessed by large groups of men, women and children, carrying baskets of food and lawn chairs. The events became festive "picnic-style" occasions. For the most popular lynchings, "excursion" trains or buses delivered spectators to the locations, or parents asked that their children be excused from school in order to experience the hanging. Entire families attended and even posed for pictures with the charred remains of the alleged suspect (Madison 14). The lynching became a community event for those white citizens who participated in the atrocities. In most, if not all of these spectacles, a final characteristic of the ritual remained – the perpetrators of these events were never accused of any crime.

There were, of course, those whites who disagreed with the lynchings, but for fear of the same fate for themselves or their families, they remained silent and became complicit in the murders. In the majority of reported lynchings, those courts or officials chosen to investigate the particular circumstances concluded that the black victims had met their deaths "at the hands of persons unknown" (Allen 20). Lynching was a combination of racism, sadism, and diversion - a methodical form of mutilation used to terrorize, control, and entertain:

Investigators frequently found no easily ascertainable reason for a lynching, except perhaps white emotional and recreational starvation. For some, 'nigger killing' had become a sport, like any other amusement or diversion, and its popularity prompted a black newspaper in 1911 to call it 'The National Pastime.' (Allen 26)

The spectacle lynchings that evolved between the 1890s and 1940 were presented in detail by many newspapers and the reporters who had been witnesses to them. As the newspaper coverage of individual lynchings increased, so too did the mobs, each waiting to experience the innovative methods of torture that might be adopted by subsequent lynch mobs (Hale 206). For some who read the news, they gave little thought or care to the murders. According to Walter White, the executive secretary of the NAACP in 1916, "Not all approved, but they looked on because they had never seen anything of the kind. No hand was raised to stop the movement, no word spoken to halt the progress of those who carried the Negro to his death" (220).

Blacks (as well as other groups) lived in constant fear that their very existence would serve as a reason for their being lynched. While black men were the greatest number of victims in the Southern lynchings, there were women and children who also died at the hands of mobs:

After learning of the lynching of her husband, Mary Turner—in her eighth month of pregnancy—vowed to find those responsible, swear out warrants against them, and have them punished in the courts. For making such a threat, a mob of several hundred men and women determined to 'teach her

a lesson.' After tying her ankles together, they hung her from a tree, head downward. Dowsing her clothes with gasoline, they burned them from her body. While she was still alive, someone used a knife . . . to cut open the woman's abdomen. The infant fell from her womb to the ground and cried briefly, whereupon a member of this Valdosta, Georgia, mob crushed the baby's head beneath his heel. (Allen 14)

White Supremacy and the Fight to Retain Power

By the late 1800s, despite a strong opposition by whites, many blacks began to show signs of resourcefulness and success. With the early help of the Freedmen's Bureau, there were those who earned an education, gained small holdings of land, and received paid wages. For those blacks who were free before the Civil War, many had already become skilled workers: businessmen, merchants, contractors, engineers, teachers, and shipbuilders. As a result of the Reconstruction Act of 1867, Black political activity increased. Under this law, former white Confederate leaders were denied the right to vote, while black men were given the vote, and elected their own people as officials in government (Strickland, Reich 226-29). With the Democratic Party trying to regain power in the South, the idea that blacks might one day usurp their position was unthinkable. Racial equality was considered an insult to the South as the black community challenged white authority. Tensions between the factions increased causing race riots that resulted in lootings, burnings and murders of black and white citizens (Dray 162-63).

Biased newspaper articles describing the incidents, fueled the anger and prejudice of the whites, and escalated the terror experienced by the African Americans. White

Southerners were concerned about blacks' voting rights, the welfare of their families and properties, and they believed that white women and children were not safe while black men roamed free. This concern became a fearsome accusation (if not certain death to many black men) during the subsequent years of lynching violence (Dray 163).

The black community considered their ability to participate in the politics of the nation as an essential prerogative. Their activities to organize and achieve this goal began in 1865 with a purposeful series of "meetings, parades, and petitions demanding civil equality and the suffrage as indispensable corollaries of emancipation" (Foner, *Reconstruction* 110). The number of free blacks who were prominent leaders in these early groups set a pattern of strength and determination for others. They were silenced, however, by the wave of violence against them and their ultimate disfranchisement in Southern states. The North and the Republican Party stopped protecting the freedmen and the reign of terror against the blacks intensified (Strickland, Reich 243). Violence persisted to confirm the white Supremacy of the South:

The pervasiveness of violence reflected whites' determination to define in their own way the meaning of freedom and their determined resistance to blacks' efforts to establish their autonomy, whether in matters of family, church, labor or personal demeanor. (Foner, *Reconstruction* 120)

From 1890-1908, every Southern and border state "legally" disfranchised the majority of African American voters. As a result, lynchings were at their highest as freedmen attempted to cast their ballots in spite of the constant and contrived obstacles

before them. Officials used abrupt changes to the voting requirements to prohibit the blacks from the ballot (Loewen, *Lies My Teacher Told Me* 161- 62).

In 1877, the North turned away from the African American's plight – perhaps due to their own concerns and interests during the industrial age, or merely from fatigue of the war and the battles of racism. At any rate, “Once Northerners did nothing to stop what came to be called the ‘Mississippi Plan’ – that state’s 1890 Compromise that ‘legally’ (but in defiance of the Fourteenth and Fifteenth Amendments) removed African Americans from citizenship – they became complicit with it”(Loewen, *Lies My Teacher Told Me* 163).

The Ku Klux Klan and Kindred Organizations

The reign of terror that covered large parts of the South between 1868 and 1871 is difficult to comprehend. Radical Reconstruction brought advantages to the blacks as well as deliberate terrorism, fear, suffering and death. By 1870, the Ku Klux Klan and similar, secret organizations: the Knights of the White Camellia; the White Brotherhood; the Pale Faces; and the Rifle Clubs of South Carolina; (to name a few), were operating in all Southern states (Franklin, Moss 275). The Ku Klux Klan remained active for decades while the smaller, secondary “dens” were absorbed into the Klan. These “dens” were loosely organized and without defined leadership in many cases, but their purposes and common tactics were solid and speak to the impact they had during Reconstruction (Foner, *Reconstruction* 425).

Research indicates that the Ku Klux Klan was initially a social organization. It seems more realistic to believe that this initial “den” had a racist agenda for their group.

The charter members had, after all, lived in an age when the poor treatment of blacks was accepted, and their organization was another means of continuing the practice . The charter members of the first “den” were six former Confederate soldiers who met and decided to start a club. (Chalmers 8). They chose the name *Kuklos*, a Greek word that means “circle.” Since they didn’t find this name to be mysterious enough they decided upon “*Ku Klux*” and eventually added the final “*Klan*” which also meant “circle.” Thus, the alliterative name, *Ku Klux Klan*, (*Circle-Circle*) offered a sense of mystery (to accompany their costumes) and a suggestion of rattling bones of ghosts who roamed in the night. Their members took oaths, developed rules, created secret rites and rituals (handshakes, codes, hazings), gave titles to their prominent leaders (Grand Cyclops, Grand Magi), met in secret, rode silently in the night, and dressed in robes and masks to hide their identity⁸ (Chalmers 9). All of this was implemented to terrorize and assault innocent citizens. These secret organizations, under different names, but with a common purpose, terrorized, intimidated, mutilated, and killed as a “self-appointed police organization” (9). They played upon the fears and superstitions of every community. W.E.B. Du Bois discusses the style of operations of the Klan in *Black Reconstruction in America*:

. . . there came again in the South the domination of the secret order, which systematized the effort to subordinate the Negro. The method of force which hides itself in secrecy is a method as old as humanity. The kind of thing that men are afraid or ashamed to do openly . . . they accomplish secretly, masked, and at night . . . it need hesitate at no outrage

of maiming or murder; it shields itself in mob mind . . . It harnesses the mob. (677-678)

“The Klan (a.k.a. *The Invisible Empire of the South*) was a military force serving the interests of the Democratic party, the planter class, and all those who desired the restoration of white supremacy” (Foner, *Reconstruction* 425). It was a group espousing white dominance, and its purposes were political. The group “ tried to reverse the changes taking over the South during Reconstruction: to destroy the Republican Party’s infrastructure, to undermine the Reconstruction state, to reestablish the black labor force, and to restore racial subordination in every aspect of Southern life” (426). When Congress passed the Reconstruction Act of 1867, the South was divided into military districts. It was intended that new governments would eventually be established there. Congress gave the voting rights to the blacks and required that they (the blacks) be permitted to vote for the new state governments. This plan to unseat the white governments of the South, while giving the vote to blacks, caused increased anger and political uproar. It was at this time that the Ku Klux Klan became popular with those whites who had been defeated (Waldrep, *Judge Lynch* 69).

The success of the Klan came from its claims of white unity, and denial of any affiliation with politics. Politics conjured a sense of division and uncertainty, and they insisted that “there was no politics in it.” Solidarity attributed to lynching varied, but it did exist in numerous Southern localities. The Klan dominated white public opinion to such a degree that courts “did not dare act against them” (Waldrep, *Judge Lynch* 69-70).

The Klans made claims that they were not involved in politics, but there were continual acts of violence against blacks for their political activities. In parts of the South where Black Republicans were holding political office, they found their lives (and those of their families) threatened or punishments exacted by these night riders. Numerous local black leaders were forced to abandon their homes, or stood by and watched as members of their families were beaten or murdered.

Despite the obstacles before them, freedmen cast their ballots for the first time in the election of 1867. Recognizing the Klan's terrorist tactics to prevent their voting, the freedmen continued to queue at the voting polls. As previously mentioned in Chapter One, Southerners eventually established rules and regulations that rendered the black voters ineligible (payment of taxes, moving the polling stations, literacy tests etc.). Because of their political affiliations, blacks were targeted for summary vengeance at every turn by these vigilante groups. It was confirmed that influential members of these dens were prominent citizens of the very communities they terrorized. In most instances, the vigilantes were never convicted of any crimes because no one would act against them for fear of reprisal:

A man might as well go and dig his grave as to go to Blountsville and apply against a Ku-Klux or try to warrant him . . . foes of the Klan worried that the Klan would burn them out of their homes. (Waldrep, *African Americans Confront Lynching* 70)

The Klan patrolled roads and black communities and used violence to force the blacks to remain in their homes. The Klan professed that it would strike only the

“immoral deviants” of their communities and it stood to represent the security of good and decent white citizens. However, various dens of the Klan regularly seized blacks and hanged them for all to see, but not before riddling the bodies of the victims with bullets. Occasionally they would hang a sign on the body indicating his or her alleged crime – arsonist, murderer, rapist (Waldrep, *African Americans Confront Lynching* 73).

The KKK believed that the Nation was founded by a white race and for the white race. Furthermore, according to the Klan, the Declaration of Independence and the Constitution did not refer to peoples of other races. The Klan’s atrocities and influence in the South became pervasive. By the time President Grant was in office, it was apparent that the lives of all citizens, black and white were in jeopardy, and the states’ local governments were not providing the needed intervention against the violence. Reports from the military, letters to Congress, and eye witness stories, considered the outrage and fear of citizens who faced the wrath of the Klan.

The Federal Government’s hands were tied. Under the laws of the Constitution, federal troops were not permitted to intercede in the state governments unless authorities specifically asked for their assistance. The President, recognizing the extreme situation, signed the Civil Rights Act of 1871, better known as the Ku Klux Klan Act. This law enforced the Fourteenth Amendment ratified in 1868, and “made it a federal offense to interfere with an individual’s right to vote, hold office, serve on a jury, or enjoy equal protection of the law.” The act made the actions and intimidating tactics of the Klan illegal, and in extreme situations, permitted the federal government to intervene in states’ crises. Those accused of committing such crimes would be tried in a federal court, not in local or state courts. The Democrats in the South considered this new law as a threat to

their individual freedoms (Foner, *Reconstruction America's Unfinished Revolution* 455) , but the nation now realized that something had to be done to protect the black population.

Between May and December 1871, the Justice Department gathered considerable information about the activities of the Klan in the Southern states. Trials were held to bring Klan members to justice to end the violence. The results found thousands of Klansmen fleeing to Canada to avoid the law, while hundreds of others were arrested and jailed. Some members were granted immunity or light sentences for their testimonies, and there were those who pleaded innocence or ignorance. In the fall of 1872, President Grant pardoned those Klansmen still serving sentences in an effort to restore peace to the South (Foner, *Reconstruction America's Unfinished Revolution* 455-458).

The Klan is Reborn

The 1905 best-selling novel, *The Clansman*, by Thomas Dixon, and the 1915 silent movie, *The Birth of a Nation* produced by D.W. Griffith, brought national attention and a “rebirth” to the Ku Klux Klan in the early decade of the twentieth century. Dixon’s novel portrayed the Klan as a fraternal organization which “stressed 100 per cent Americanism and the supremacy of the Caucasian race” (Chalmers 30). Besides the African Americans, the Klan targeted Catholics, Jews, immigrants, liberals and labor unions, night clubs, unfair business practices, and bootlegging in their latest assaults (33). Klan membership increased to five million in the 1920s and continued its terrorism into the mid-twentieth century. Its record of murders includes a list of names and stories that became familiar to those of the baby-boom generation: Medgar Evers; the murder of three young civil rights workers; and a white civil rights worker named Viola Liuzzo (Chalmers 397 – 400).

Crimes and Accusations are Awarded the Rope and Faggot

. . . the white South feared more than Negro dishonesty, ignorance and incompetency - Negro honesty, knowledge, and efficiency . . .

W.E.B. Du Bois (qtd. in White 97)

The ability to participate in the political arena was not the only “crime” that awarded the African American the rope and faggot. The allegations for which blacks were lynched were numerous and often slight. Several reasons for being lynched included: charges of miscegenation, testifying against a white man, being too prosperous for a Negro, talking back to a white person, suspicion of inciting riots, and murder (White 98). In addition, the economic success of many African Americans was both a blessing and a curse. The black community made great efforts toward building churches and schools. They acquired educations, bought businesses, became skilled laborers, and professionals in education and law. While their efforts for arriving at a better life were constant, the Black community’s achievements continued to threaten the white majority. The deep-seeded hatred toward the blacks and the fear of becoming subordinate to the African Americans, served as motivation for whites to continue their assault on them. “Ku Kluxry is the Southern poor white’s answer to the progress of the emerging Negro, once his equal and now threatening to become his superior” (White 11).

Even with the handicaps and restrictions put upon them, many Blacks continued their upward mobility and their personal “uplift.” Walter White explains their agrarian success in *Rope and Faggot*: “At the close of the Civil War, Negroes operated twenty thousand farms; by 1922 the number had grown to upwards of one million . . . This

progress of a supposedly inferior race was one of the most fruitful sources of mob violence . . . toward the close of the nineteenth century” (105).

The charge of rape against white women by black men was the most common of accusations that earned a brutal lynching. Numerous scholars on the subject of lynching have discussed this specific accusation with serious doubts as to its validity. When the possibility of rape by a black man was suggested, “immediate retribution was the only means of disciplining the accused black man” (Gunning 5). After Reconstruction, the excuse of the black rapist and the need for summary justice was useful for white Americans trying to come to grips with post-war chaos, emancipation, labor unrest, European immigration, and rapid industrialization. The nation was quickly becoming multi-ethnic and Southern white supremacy continued to be challenged. The African American and other immigrants were viewed as interlopers in the white man’s society. Southern whites struggled with the realization that they were no longer masters, while the North dealt with the migration of thousands of blacks to its cities. In the midst of the rapid, national, changes taking place at the end of the nineteenth century, white Americans considered themselves under siege by the millions of ex-slaves and immigrants who were now residents living among them. Violence, specifically lynching, became self-defensive with white men vowing to protect their women (6).

Sundown Towns: “Visible Residue” of the Nadir

James W. Loewen, in *Sundown Towns: A Hidden Dimension of American Racism*, offers a comprehensive study of racism that has rarely been examined and hardly discussed – The Sundown Towns. He explores the rise of these residential areas during

the years of the Nadir 1890-1940, when racism and segregation were part of the nation's culture. In our country today, many of the existing white neighborhoods and suburbs are the results of those years of extreme discrimination. Cities such as Anna, Illinois; Darien, Connecticut; and Cedar Key, Florida, offer a few examples of all-white towns established during the Nadir. White citizens used whatever restrictive ammunition they had – the law, harassment, riots and even murder – to prevent Blacks and other minority groups from establishing residency in their neighborhoods. Even though restrictions were put in place to eliminate the vote for African Americans in the North, they never actually lost the vote. They did, however, lose the right to establish residency in towns and counties in many sections of the country because of their ancestry (6-8).

After 1890, Jim Crow segregation advanced in the North and was already well-established in the South. The “separate but equal” policy infected all public accommodations and deepened the roots of oppression in many sections of the country. The city of Boston, where abolitionists once worked on behalf of the African American, where blacks and whites lived in tandem, and where liberty and one's civil rights were paramount, ultimately saw segregation cause the deterioration of its race relations. In the years leading up to the Civil War, (1840s and 1850s) the state of Massachusetts became a center of social progressivism and abolitionist activity, where opposition to slavery increased, and the Transcendentalism movement emphasized the natural world with the importance of emotion to humanity. By 1837 Massachusetts had 145 different antislavery societies operating on behalf of the African American population. Massachusetts, which had been at the root of the first Great Awakening, and had been called the “cradle of Freedom,” was also the first state to have a constitution that declared universal rights.

The constitution, drafted by John Adams was ratified in 1780 (“Abolitionism in the United States” 4). However, the legal segregation of Jim Crow Laws (1896 - 1954) saw the two races divided even in this state that espoused the earliest beliefs in freedom and human rights. “A few years ago no hotel or restaurant in Boston refused Negro guests; now several hotels, restaurants . . . will not serve Negroes . . . ” (Loewen, *Sundown Towns: A Hidden Dimension of American Racism* 34).

Prior to the Nadir, blacks were employed in numerous well-respected occupations such as - carpenters, masons, even postal carriers. After 1890, however, the North and the South eliminated blacks from these and other positions. The economic, social, and political opportunities for blacks eroded rapidly, but the South remained open to employment for African Americans – if the positions were specifically inferior and wouldn’t pose a threat to their own white citizens. If blacks were willing to serve as cooks, drivers, or nurse maids, they might find employment. By 1900, white Americans (especially in the North) had neither tolerance nor concern for the African American. The consensus of most whites was that blacks were their own “worst enemies.” Because they didn’t work hard enough, they weren’t able to think as well as whites, and they lacked ambition to succeed, they didn’t deserve equal citizenship. If blacks didn’t deserve to be citizens, they didn’t need to live in white neighborhoods. Segregation and exclusion increased, while Sundown towns multiplied (Loewen, 38).

Loewen continues by adding that the rationale for blaming the black community for their own problems developed at the turn of the twentieth century with Social Darwinism. This convenient theory evolved into eugenics which stated that “they can’t be helped because the fault lies in their genes” (40). In addition, IQ and aptitude tests

emerged and were used to verify cognitive aptitudes. Studies and theories by physical anthropologists concerning the cognitive abilities of African Americans, claimed that they were intellectually inferior to the white population (40-41). With this national mentality stereotyping the African Americans, the cards were stacked against them. It was incumbent upon those leaders of their race to continue their fight against oppression and prove their own worth. They continued to work toward equality through education and uplift organizations.

It was during the Nadir that Anti-Semitism increased, the Ku Klux Klan was reborn with increased violence, and the Great Depression drove the African American deeper into poverty. Menial employment opportunities for Blacks were denied or they were replaced by white employees when jobs became scarce. Loewen, in *Sundown Towns: A Hidden Dimension of American Racism*, points to the Sociologists, Willis Weatherford and Charles Johnson, concerning the struggle for jobs in 1934: "Menial public service jobs such as street-cleaning and garbage collecting, to which 'no self-respecting white man' would stoop a decade ago, are rapidly becoming exclusively white men's jobs" (42). Positions in sports (baseball, football, and horse racing), all of which had African Americans as some of their greatest competitors, now eliminated them from participation. Labor Unions gained strength during the decades of the 1930s and 1940s, and while they had traditionally been white unions, they became even more resistant to the African Americans. As a result of their treatment, blacks organized unions of their own, one of the first being, the Associated Colored Employees of America. The ideology of white supremacy was extreme during the Nadir, and Loewen states that it "increasingly pervaded the American culture . . . more even than during slavery" (44).

Considering that discrimination and Jim Crow were institutions in both the North and South, his comment is valid. Blacks, like other ethnic groups, were forced into their own residential areas, a move that Loewen calls , “The Great Retreat.” Today the country lives with the results – sundown towns and suburbs – “the most visible residue on the American landscape of the nightmare called the Nadir” 1968 (43-44). These towns and suburbs continued to be developed through 1968 (50).

The Great Migration, and The Red Summer of 1919

. . . We sing: This country of ours, despite all its better souls have done and dreamed, it is yet a shameful land. It lynches . . . It disfranchises its own citizens . . . It encourages ignorance . . . It steals from us . . . It insults us . . . We return. We return from fighting. We return fighting . . . Crisis,
May 1919. (Franklin, Moss 384)

Between 1915 and 1930, approximately 1,000,000 African Americans started to move North in large numbers. This ultimately became known as the “Great Migration” (Loewen, *Sundown Towns: A Hidden Dimension of American Racism* 8). Because of the increased racism in the country at this time, white Northerners viewed the mass influx of African Americans as a serious threat. Loewen quotes from an editorial from Beloit, Wisconsin, concerning what he called a “problem”:

The Negro problem has moved north . . . Within a few years, experts predict the Negro population of the North will be tripled. It’s your problem, or it will be when the Negro moves next door . . . With the black tide setting north, the southern Negro, formerly a docile tool, is demanding

better pay, better food, and better treatment . . . It's a national problem now, instead of a sectional problem. And it has to be solved. (58)

Various reasons prompted the migrations of blacks to the North and the West: violence and injustice in the South, lack of opportunities and civil rights, disfranchisement, segregation and the threat of lynching – all prompted the moves to the North and the search for a better life (Franklin, Moss 376). African Americans were able to find industrial employment as a means of helping the war effort, and approximately 300,000 black soldiers joined the fighting troops. It was their hope that being active in their country's war effort, they might one day experience a positive change in their status at home. This hope was shattered during the summer of 1919, a name given by James Weldon Johnson as the "Red Summer," when the most brutal period of interracial disturbances would strike the nation (Franklin, Moss 380-85). From mid-summer to the end of that year, there were twenty-five violent riots in various cities. They were proof of the fragile race relations that plagued the country.

Migrations to the North continued and urban centers became over crowded. Lack of affordable housing and entrenched segregation deepened the wounds of racism. Employment became less plentiful, and competition for the basics of life strained relations between the races. Riots ensued in all parts of the country where whites and blacks made an effort to live and work together. With the interference of organizations, such as the Ku Klux Klan, blacks were continually forced into submission. Homes and businesses were destroyed, fires and looting devastated towns and cities, and numerous blacks and whites were killed. Riots took place in Washington, Knoxville, Omaha, and one of the worst was experienced in Chicago. For thirteen days, Chicago lived in a

lawless state – even with the militia standing by. By the end of the fighting, thirty-eight people had been killed, (15 whites and 23 blacks), and 537 injured (388). Riots continued until the end of that year. Blacks were determined to fight and defend themselves. “The increasing urbanization of blacks, with its accompanying stimulation of self-respect and racial cohesiveness, had much to do with the resistance that they offered to their would be oppressors” (389). Claude McKay, one of the great poets of the era, is quoted by John Hope Franklin and Alfred Moss. His poem expressed the feelings of his race:

If we must die, let it not be like hogs .

If we must die, O let us nobly die (389)

The “Red Summer” proved to be months of mass lynchings. The white population argued that they could not control their actions in light of the “misconduct” of blacks in their areas. The African Americans were encouraged by the advocacy of the NAACP, but the white community saw the organization as a source of interference. In several cities, the organization was banned from their jurisdiction. This action often precipitated its own form of racial brutality. The following is an example of such an incident in Texas during the summer of 1919:

In August, John R. Shillady, head of the NAACP, traveled to Texas to implore the governor of that state not to outlaw his organization. Governor William P. Hobby refused to meet with Shillady, but County Judge Dave J. Pickle did – as the head of a mob that beat the NAACP leader severely . . . Hobby defended Pickle and the members of the mob, blaming Shillady for his own beating . . . Shillady, the last white man to lead the NAACP,

never recovered psychologically from the beating. (Waldrep, *African Americans Confronting Lynching* (72-73).

During 1919 American troops returned from the war. It was a period of triumph for the nation and for those who returned victorious. However, for the African American soldiers who had hoped for a new life and a change in the country's position on racism, their period of jubilation was short-lived. The majority of Americans wanted to put the war behind them and return to peace and prosperity. The industries of the country were anxious to rejuvenate their businesses, and politicians looked to the future with positive prospects for the country. Black leaders as well were expecting to arrive at a new "basis for democratic living" in the United States. However, the white population had already determined that there was no place for the black soldier. Whites had no intention of recognizing black persons' citizenship even with their participation in the war (Franklin, Moss 384). As previously mentioned, the Ku Klux Klan was revived in 1915 with the release of the movie, *The Birth of a Nation*. The racism exposed in the movie propelled the Klan into increased brutality against the African American and other ethnic groups. The power and influence of the Klan was significant, so much so, that those in political office could expect to be defeated if they were not on good terms with the Klan. "Its assumption of a semiofficial role, in taking the law into its own hands and in luring public servants into its membership, stimulated the lawlessness and violence that characterized the postwar period in the United States" (Franklin, Moss 384). It became a common sight to see black soldiers lynched in their uniforms. The Klan's wrath saw seventy blacks lynched the first year following the war. "Of these seventy, fourteen men were burned publicly, eleven of whom were burned alive" (385).

The African Americans continued in their resistance to the status quo in a collaborative and determined fashion. The gains they would ultimately achieve would be due to their relentless efforts to secure their civil rights. What they achieved, they were responsible for earning. Their resistance was directed through desire, determination, and diligence, and their hope was full citizenship under the law. The NAACP, along with the national Equal Rights League, adopted resolutions indicating their concern over the status of black Americans. The NAACP established a program to combat bigotry and injustice while initiating its campaign against lynching (the origins of which were begun by Ida B. Wells in previous years). That same year saw the association take steps toward the creation of anti-lynching legislation. Finally, in 1921, James Weldon Johnson, the secretary of the association, succeeded in seeing Rep. L.C. Dyer of Missouri introduce an anti-lynching bill in the House. Immediately, Representatives from the South began their work to defeat the bill, and ultimately, it was abandoned. Numerous other bills were introduced over the years, including the Costigan-Wagner Bill of 1935 and the Wagner-Gavagan Bill of 1940, but they

THE SHAME OF AMERICA

Do you know that the United States is
the Only Land on Earth where human
beings are BURNED AT THE STAKE?

**In Four Years, 1918-1921, Twenty-Eight People Were Publicly
BURNED BY AMERICAN MOBS**

3436 People Lynched 1889 to 1922

For What Crime Have We Notified Government and Inflicted the Death Penalty?

<small>The Worst Crime</small>	<small>The Victim</small>	<small>Why Have We Not Done Better?</small>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Rape 2. Murder 3. Theft 4. Burglary 5. Drunkenness 6. Vagrancy 7. Obnoxiousness 8. Other 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Negro 2. White 3. Black 4. Brown 5. Yellow 6. Red 7. Other 8. Other 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> 1. No money out of mind the white has to lose 2. Being a member of a mob is no crime 3. Being a member of the Ku Klux Klan is no crime 4. Being a member of the "White Man's League" is no crime 5. Being a member of the "United Klans of America" is no crime 6. Being a member of the "United Klans of America" is no crime 7. Being a member of the "United Klans of America" is no crime 8. Being a member of the "United Klans of America" is no crime

Is Rape the "Cause" of Lynching?
Of 28 persons lynched in 1918-1921, only 10 were charged with rape. The rest were charged with other crimes.

28 WOMEN HAVE BEEN LYNCHED IN THE UNITED STATES
AND THE LYNCHERS GO UNPUNISHED

THE REMEDY

The Dyer Anti-Lynching Bill is Now Before the United States Senate

<p><small>The Dyer Anti-Lynching Bill was passed by the House on January 18, 1922, by a vote of 150 to 100.</small></p> <p><small>The bill provides for the punishment of anyone who aids or abets in a lynching, or who is a member of a mob, or who is a member of a group, or who is a member of a club, or who is a member of a society, or who is a member of an organization, or who is a member of a union, or who is a member of a guild, or who is a member of a fraternity, or who is a member of a lodge, or who is a member of a chapter, or who is a member of a branch, or who is a member of a division, or who is a member of a district, or who is a member of a territory, or who is a member of a province, or who is a member of a kingdom, or who is a member of an empire, or who is a member of a nation, or who is a member of a world.</small></p> <p><small>The bill provides for the punishment of anyone who aids or abets in a lynching, or who is a member of a mob, or who is a member of a group, or who is a member of a club, or who is a member of a society, or who is a member of an organization, or who is a member of a union, or who is a member of a guild, or who is a member of a fraternity, or who is a member of a lodge, or who is a member of a chapter, or who is a member of a branch, or who is a member of a division, or who is a member of a district, or who is a member of a territory, or who is a member of a province, or who is a member of a kingdom, or who is a member of an empire, or who is a member of a nation, or who is a member of a world.</small></p>	<p><small>The Senate has not yet passed the bill. It is now before the Senate.</small></p> <p><small>The bill provides for the punishment of anyone who aids or abets in a lynching, or who is a member of a mob, or who is a member of a group, or who is a member of a club, or who is a member of a society, or who is a member of an organization, or who is a member of a union, or who is a member of a guild, or who is a member of a fraternity, or who is a member of a lodge, or who is a member of a chapter, or who is a member of a branch, or who is a member of a division, or who is a member of a district, or who is a member of a territory, or who is a member of a province, or who is a member of a kingdom, or who is a member of an empire, or who is a member of a nation, or who is a member of a world.</small></p> <p><small>The bill provides for the punishment of anyone who aids or abets in a lynching, or who is a member of a mob, or who is a member of a group, or who is a member of a club, or who is a member of a society, or who is a member of an organization, or who is a member of a union, or who is a member of a guild, or who is a member of a fraternity, or who is a member of a lodge, or who is a member of a chapter, or who is a member of a branch, or who is a member of a division, or who is a member of a district, or who is a member of a territory, or who is a member of a province, or who is a member of a kingdom, or who is a member of an empire, or who is a member of a nation, or who is a member of a world.</small></p>
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The bill provides for the punishment of anyone who aids or abets in a lynching, or who is a member of a mob, or who is a member of a group, or who is a member of a club, or who is a member of a society, or who is a member of an organization, or who is a member of a union, or who is a member of a guild, or who is a member of a fraternity, or who is a member of a lodge, or who is a member of a chapter, or who is a member of a branch, or who is a member of a division, or who is a member of a district, or who is a member of a territory, or who is a member of a province, or who is a member of a kingdom, or who is a member of an empire, or who is a member of a nation, or who is a member of a world.

THE DYER ANTI-LYNCHING BILL IS NOW BEFORE THE SENATE
TELEGRAPH YOUR SENATORS TODAY YOU WANT IT ENACTED

If you need to telegraph your senators, write to the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People, 1275 Broadway, New York City.

NATIONAL ASSOCIATION FOR THE ADVANCEMENT OF COLORED PEOPLE
1275 BROADWAY, NEW YORK CITY

THIS ADVERTISEMENT IS PAID FOR IN PART BY THE ANTI-LYNCHING CRUSADE.

"The Shame of America" NAACP ad in support of
DYER Anti-Lynching Bill. amistadresource.org.

too, were defeated.

The NAACP investigated the lynching crimes and published the findings in *The Thirty Years of Lynching in the United States, 1889-1918*. The book served to inform the public of the horrors being experienced by the African Americans and the circumstances surrounding them (Franklin, Moss 393). Newspaper articles, pamphlets, letters and articles were written by members of the NAACP as well as other groups against the violence. There were individuals who stood against the brutality and publicly acknowledged that it had to stop. In most cases, they couldn't prevent mob violence, but they could use the media to express their opposition. One of the most influential attempts to show support for the anti-lynching campaign took place in November, 1922, when the NAACP, the Anti-Lynching Crusaders, and the Commission on Interracial Cooperation (CIC) united to raise funds for newspaper ads so that "not a single person who reads the daily newspapers shall be ignorant of the fact that we are the only country that burns human beings at the stake" (Dray 270). The messages of their ads read: "A Million Women United to Suppress Lynching" and "To Your Knees and Don't Stop Praying" were made possible by the funds that were collected and used in eight major newspapers, including *The New York Times*, the *Washington Star*, the *Chicago Daily News*, and *The Atlanta Constitution*. The ad, retrieved from the NAACP website, is posted on page above and delivers this message to its readers:

**Do you know that the United States is the Only Land on
Earth where human beings are BURNED AT THE STAKE?**

Confronting Crimes in the Red Summer

Besides the NAACP, there were other organizations formed in 1919 to protest lynching as well as other crimes against African Americans. The Commission on Interracial Cooperation worked primarily in the South where it established educational programs concerning race relations. It did not attack the segregation issue, but it did speak against discrimination. The organization had a monthly publication where it proposed equal participation in welfare programs, equal justice under the law, the abolition of lynching and the vote for all. Despite their efforts, the Commission and the NAACP failed in their attempts to reach the masses. African Americans on the lower socio-economic levels did not recognize these organizations as speaking specifically to them. Instead, these African Americans turned to another voice who offered a sense of pride and hope in the person of Marcus Garvey and the Universal Negro Improvement Association (UNIA). His popularity was his appeal to “race pride” an ideology that so few African Americans had at this time. He asked all members of his race to “exalt in all things black; he insisted that black stood for strength and beauty, not inferiority. He asserted that Africans had a noble past, and he declared that American blacks should be proud of their ancestry” (Franklin, Moss 395). He rallied his followers and became a passionate voice for a new, separatist, Back-to-Africa movement. Despite his popularity, he was considered to be too radical. He was ultimately jailed for mail fraud and plans for his fellow African Americans were lost (396-97).

The Nadir and the Red Summer were defined by extreme unrest, but also defined by a determined and persistent black resistance to assaults by white racists. During the Nadir, however, after decades of oppression, he “was willing to inflict as well as suffer

causalities” (Shapiro 150). The blood spilled during the Nadir and the Red Summer was that of both blacks and whites who met in racial conflict.

Ida B. Wells-Barnett and the Anti-Lynching Campaign

Ida B. Wells-Barnett (1862-1931) was an anti-lynching crusader during the age of Radical Reconstruction. She wore the hats of a journalist, a school teacher, a suffragist and a women’s rights advocate. Her history and her anti-lynching campaign will be examined in a following section of this paper, but it is important to note that she was instrumental in bringing attention to the atrocities of lynching – especially with regard to the theory that black men were naturally driven to rape white women. She did this through her journalistic attacks on Southern injustices and by exposing the fraudulent “reasons” for lynching (Baker 2). In her *Southern Horrors and Other Writings*, she details the statistics on lynchings that occurred – many of which contradict the “rape” accusation and the stereotype of the black man as “the black beast” (Gunning 8). Wells maintained that the rationale for lynching black men was an excuse to conceal “a racist agenda and to keep power in the hands of southern white men.” She continued by arguing that in certain cases, white women were not being violated but were willing partners in liaisons between African American men and white women. She also points to the fact that white men had been free to assault black women since slavery – and without retaliation. The white rapists had no fear of being lynched by blacks for their assaults. The African American was denied the license to do so (Royster 29-31). Other women activists joined Wells in her campaign against lynching. Each hoped to bring attention to the lynching atrocities – especially to those citizens in the North, and to affect an end to the constant violence.

Courageous men, women and dedicated organizations played important roles in the anti-lynching campaign that existed roughly between 1890 and 1940. It was a concerted effort on behalf of the African Americans to end the mob violence – particularly the summary execution of individuals accused of crimes (Bruce 1). The early work of the campaign was initiated by Ida B. Wells-Barnett in Memphis in 1892 with the lynching of three black businessmen (friends of hers) whose successes had angered their white competitors. The bodies of her friends, Thomas Moss, Calvin McDowell, and Wil Stewart were found shot to pieces in a field north of the city, “by hands unknown” (Royster 2). Wells had abhorred lynching, but this specific incident – the killing of innocent, law-abiding citizens, brought her to the realization that lynching was an “act of terror perpetrated against a race of people in order to maintain power and control” (3). As a journalist, and co-owner of the newspaper, *Free Speech*, she wrote editorials that denounced the murders and found herself threatened and her newspaper destroyed. Unable to continue her campaign in the South, she began working for the *New York Age*. Her writings encouraged citizens of Memphis to migrate North since they had no protection in their Southern homes. Her influence was significant in that a substantial number of African Americans settled in the West.

Wells’ work was courageous, for it came at the time of Post-Reconstruction when violence against African Americans was escalating, and she placed her own safety in jeopardy by being an outspoken, black female. Women of this period were questioning and redefining their lives (Royster 3-4). Being a black woman and an advocate for civil and women’s rights, she gave a public voice to the injustices that she witnessed. She was known for having sued the Chesapeake, Ohio and Southwest Railroad when she was

removed from a train for taking the incorrect seat. She initially won the suit, but it was appealed and the decision was overturned. She saw this action as another means of political and social control by the white power elite, and she was determined to fight in the interest of her race (Royster 17). Her campaign against lynching and Jim Crow laws would establish her as a pioneer in this effort.

In her anti-lynching pamphlets, *Southern Horrors: Lynch Law in All Its Phases* (1892), *A Red Record: Tabulated Statistics and Alleged Causes of Lynchings in the United States, 1892-1893-1894* (1895), and *A Mob Rule in New Orleans: Robert Charles and His Fight to the Death* (1900), Wells defended herself against charges that she exaggerated the crimes that were committed. In truth, she had acquired white citizens' descriptive accounts of brutal and violent lynchings against black males for their alleged crimes – especially the rape of white women (Gunning 8). Wells collaborated with numerous organizations in her campaign. Two of the earliest included: National Association for Colored Women (NACW), and the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP) – an organization she helped found. Their intentions were to secure anti-lynching legislation and to bring an end to the senseless murders. Wells' activism was significant in placing lynching on the national agenda (Royster 26).

Other black women writers became active in Wells' campaign – Angelina Weld Grimké, Georgia Douglas Johnson, Mary Church Terrell and Anna Julia Cooper. Several of their works will be discussed in this dissertation. By the late 1920s, an increasing number of white women authors also contributed to the movement. Concerned for the brutality of lynching, and “resenting the white southern defense of lynching based on the

protection of white womanhood,” white women authors worked to educate the country on the evils of summary justice and to bring it to an end through their dramatic art.(Bruce 9).

The diverse network of Wells, African American activists, and white women collaborators, who came together in this cause, made a significant impact on the nation by “forcing and insisting” that the atrocities of lynching had to be addressed. By the 1940s lynchings, while not yet outlawed, were at least on the decline. Even with this slight improvement in the status quo, the agony and trauma of lynching would be long-lasting.

Wells recognized the traumatic effects of lynching on those who experienced it. The family members of the lynching victims suffered along with the condemned. Families would be traumatized by the fear of the possibility of their loved-ones being accused of a crime and taken by the mob, knowing that most often, the charges against them were false and little could be done to save them. Wells informed her audiences of their responsibilities and how to end the murders: “The Negro must act for himself . . . to stamp out that last relic of barbarism and slavery” (Royster 72). Wells continued by adding: “ . . . governors of states, newspapers, senators, representatives and bishops of churches have been compelled to take cognizance of the prevalence of this crime and to speak in one way or another . . . against this barbarism in the United States” (Royster 132).

Organized Opposition to Lynching

Various organizations were formed during this period that also had an impact on the lynching issue. Many of them were under the direction of women who were gaining

prominence in their own right. Frances Ellen Watkins Harper, in a speech delivered to the 1893 Congress of Representative Women, encouraged women to exert their influence on behalf of their race and their gender. One of the most influential was Jessie Daniel Ames, founder of the Association of Southern Women for the Prevention of Lynching, who was dedicated to revealing the true reasons behind the lynchings of her race (Packard 140). Mary Church Terrell, an advocate for race advancement, formed The National Federation of Colored Women. This organization spoke on behalf of women's suffrage, African American Women's position in society, and the atrocities of violence and racism in the country (Wright 293). Mary Burnett Talbert organized the Anti-Lynching Crusaders, "a group that draws from a broadly based network of African American women community activists" (Royster 211). This integrated group protested for years against the racial violence in conjunction with the NAACP.

There were others – activists, performers, and authors of various media who contributed their works to the cause: As previously mentioned, in 1939, Billie Holiday sang of "The Strange Fruit" that hung from a tree and dropped blood on the roots beneath it (Perkins, Stephens ix). In 1943, choreographer, Pearl Primus, adapted a ballet to the same music. Alain Locke, a prominent figure of the Harlem Renaissance, encouraged African American visual artists to document life experiences in paint (Locke xii).

Public Outcry and Lynching

In addition to the anti-lynching plays written at this time, articles, books and poetry were published that spoke specifically to the issue of lynching. Walter White, essayist, novelist and nonfiction writer, found fame in the New Negro Movement of the

1920s through his efforts in advocating the passing of the Gavan bill against lynching. As a man able to pass for white, he studied the ideology of supremacy and reported his findings to the public. His essay, "*I Investigate Lynchings*" records several incidents of brutal lynchings and the responses of those who participated in the murders. His novel, *The Fire in the Flint* (1924), tells the story of a young medical student whose dreams of helping others are destroyed when he is lynched (P. Hill 841).

In his 1892 article for *The American Review*, "Lynch Law in the South," Frederick Douglass denounced lynching as a form of race hatred while Charles Chestnutt, another respected author of this time, described lynching as a sickness borne of white supremacy in *The Marrow of Tradition* (1901) (Rice 27).

Poetry was used in the anti-lynching campaign through the works of black poets such as Paul Laurence Dunbar whose poem, "The Haunted Oak" (1903), is based on a story of a tree that partially dies and narrates the story of the lynching. Claude McKay's "The Lynching" (1922), examines the complicity of whites who see lynching as a daily event (Rice 13-21). Many other black poets such as Countee Cullen, Gwendolyn Brooks, and Margaret Walker shared their poetic talents to protest the senseless violence. Not everyone who deplored these killings was African American. In 1937, Abel Meeropol, (pseudonym, Lewis Allen), a Jewish school teacher from New York, wrote the poem, "Strange Fruit" after seeing a picture of a Southern lynching. He had it published in the Marxist journal, *New Masses* in 1939, and the famous verses eventually became a song. The song subsequently influenced an original ballet and a 1944 novel by Lillian Smith ("Strange Fruit" 1).

Ralph Ginzburg (1929-2006), a freelance journalist for Reuters, devotes his entire work, *100 Years of Lynchings* to graphic newspaper accounts of racial atrocities. The authentic press accounts of specific lynchings extend into the 1960s and are compiled from a range of newspapers. Several examples of these papers, large and small, as well as black and white include: *The New York Herald*, *The Cleveland Gazette*, *The Galveston News* and *The St. Paul Pioneer Press* (92-93).

With the publications of newspapers and journals, photography made a picture worth a thousand words. Photography became a big business and captured the reality of the terrorism. Postcards of candid shots of torture sold as souvenirs to the public along with posed portraits of the lynch party (Rice 5). “By 1908, the sending of cards had become so repugnant, that the U.S. Postmaster General banned the cards from being mailed” (Allen, James et al. 195). In *Without Sanctuary*, a book of lynching postcards collected by James Allen, Pulitzer Prize-winning historian Leon F. Litwack wrote:

The photographs stretch our credulity, even numb our minds and senses to the full extent of the horror, but they must be examined if we are to understand how normal men and women could live with, participate in, and defend such atrocities. . . .The men and women who tortured, dismembered, and murdered in this fashion understood perfectly well what they were doing and thought of themselves as perfectly normal human beings. (Allen, James et al. 34)

Current lynching photography and the artistry of sculptures, oil paintings, chalk or other media of lynching were meant “to draw the viewers in, to engage them, and to serve

as an issue that would promote collective identity” (Kirschke 109). Nothing could be as powerful as the visual storytelling of the lynchings and Du Bois, in *Crisis*, wanted the art and photos to become political tools that would call attention to the problem (112).

There were other genres of literature also devoted to the eradication of lynching – novels, short stories, and essays. Jean Toomer’s *Cane* (1923), presents a three-part collection of poems, tales and sketches that explores the racial violence (including lynching) that spurs the northward migration (Rice 227). James Weldon Johnson’s *The Autobiography of an Ex-Colored Man* (1927), examines the life of a man who passes for white after witnessing a lynching. One of the earliest novels was that of William Wells Brown, whose *CLOTEL* (1853), depicts the burning of a black slave. The short story, “Beyond the Limit” (1903), by white writer Alice French (a.k.a. Octave Thanet), describes the aftermath of a lynching in a Southern town, while Mark Twain’s “The United States of Lyncherdom” states that “whites lynch because they fear their neighbors’ disapproval” (Rice 19-20).

In 1914 Angelina Weld Grimké had already written her play *Rachel* to address racial violence. When W.E.B. Du Bois called for more black-authored plays, African American women playwrights responded – especially with lynching being a major topic until mid-century (Perkins, *Black Female Playwrights* 9). It should be noted that black and white playwrights (men and women) contributed to the anti-lynching campaign with drama. Judith Stephens and Kathy Perkins identify a list of seventeen black women, nine white women, twenty-two black men and ten white men authors in the appendix of the *Strange Fruit Anthology* (412-416). Some of the greatest black educators, artists and civil rights activists are included in that list of playwrights who intended their work to offer

education and change: Mary Church Terrell, Anna J. Cooper, May Miller, Zora Neale Hurston, Langston Hughes, and Mary White Ovington (Perkins, *Black Female Playwrights* 14).

Realism in 19th Century Literature

Realism in literature developed during the late nineteenth century, a period of progress in industrialization, imperialism and colonialism. It was a time of rapid growth in technology and competition for national economic supremacy. The use of steam power, coal and iron saw the creation of the railroad which afforded rapid travel and expansion. The telegraph, the telephone, the camera and electricity brought the world into a progressive century (Fiero, Vol. 5,73). It was in this environment that women's rights were being debated, and the Great Migrations from the South to the North were occurring in an attempt to escape Southern violence, and to arrive at a better life. Foreign Immigration was expanding in the country. With it came overcrowding and environmental misery, compounded by social and economic woes for those who labored and yet experienced poverty. Industrialization "changed the nature and character of human work, altered relationships between human beings, and affected the natural environment" (Fiero, Vol. 5,77). Gloria Fiero describes the attention of the nineteenth century authors on contemporary life:

In an age that pitted the progressive effects of industrial capitalism against the realities of poverty and inequality, social criticism was inevitable. From about 1800, writers pointed to these conditions and described them with unembellished objectivity. This . . . attention to contemporary life

and experience was the basis for the style known as literary realism. (82-83)

Literary realism was a global phenomenon with authors focusing on everyday life and activities with lower class members of society as subjects. Such authors included: Charles Dickens, Elizabeth Gaskell and Mary Ann Evans (a.k.a. George Eliot) in England, Gustave Flaubert in France, Leo Tolstoy and Fedor Dostoevsky in Russia, and Kate Chopin in America. Each examined and criticized the hardships and injustices of life that were part of their social systems. Also in America, African American authors such as Frederick Douglass and Harriet Jacobs penned slave narratives that presented the harsh realities of the brutal slave system in which they lived (Matthews, Platt 564-565).

It was only a matter of time until the African American dramatists would decide to move away from the stereotypical characters that had been – up to this time - presented on the stage. It was necessary to develop their own definition of true African American theatre and show their authentic lives. They wished to present the plight of the African American realistically. While many white playwrights wrote about the black community, “many of their portrayals of black people were degrading, or at best unconvincing because they reproduced the old negative stereotypes such as the lazy buffoon or razor-toting criminal, or the care-taking mammy . . . ” (Stephens 9). The black women playwrights that will be discussed in this dissertation “wrote about all classes of black people in an attempt to create authentic portraits of black life” (13). James V. Hatch, a Theatre scholar, described these plays of the New Negro Renaissance as “theatre that could speak to and for African Americans . . . drama that embraced more than entertainment” (12). While the act of lynching was not portrayed on the stage, it was

meant to provoke an empathy for the accused as well as for those left to deal with the brutality and loss of a loved one. The dramatization was also expected to impact the audience in such a way as to convince them to act on behalf of the black community to affect a change and bring an end to the murders. The plays demonstrated that the lives of the black community were the same as those of the white community. Blacks were humans with feelings. They loved and cared for their families just as the white population. It was unfair that black men were being killed in such brutal fashion. Lynching had to stop because it demonstrated the powerlessness of the African Americans who could be murdered for any reason and at any time.

The Harlem Renaissance and “The New Negro”

The resilience of the African Americans in their own “uplift” was evident in the early twentieth century with the activities of the Harlem Renaissance. Scholars agree that the 1920s was a period of unprecedented creativity in the arts for blacks – especially in the area of Harlem in New York City. Historians disagree, however, as to the exact date of its beginning or end. It is recognized to have spanned from 1919 until approximately the mid-1930s. Some scholars set the ending date well into the 1940s. This artistic period saw a volume of writings and an abundance of creative media that demonstrated a “renaissance of fertile cultural activity for African Americans” (Gates, McKay 929). “In poetry, fiction, drama, and the essay, as in music, dance, painting, and sculpture, African Americans worked not only with a new sense of a confidence and purpose, but also with a sense of achievement never before experienced by so many black artists . . . ” (929). Under the umbrella of the NAACP, the movement of the 1920s was launched to break the stereotype that existed with regard to the “inferior” African American. *The Crisis*

magazine, edited by W.E.B. Du Bois, served as the vehicle for distribution of new black literary works. Du Bois made *Crisis* one of the most influential journals on social and political thought during this period, while his work with the NAACP helped to see improvement in race relations. By 1920, the organization had acquired several court victories which validated this group's persistence and advocacy strength (Wilson xx).

African Americans endorsed the ideology of progress – and continued to believe that with the advent of freedom and citizenship, they would be able to arrive as full participants in the nation's system. They wanted to be known as “New Negroes” who projected themselves as self-assured, intelligent and talented. They wanted a complete separation from the old images of the stereotypical inferior. They couldn't, however, forget their past. In order to arrive at a new future, they had to “remake their past” by collectively confronting the pressures they faced and working toward a common goal. This they eventually accomplished by showing the world their artistic talents, by scheduling meetings and organizing agendas on racial issues, by educating themselves and their children, and by uplifting each other and believing in their own strengths and abilities (McCaskill, Gebhard 37).

The Harlem Renaissance, (a.k.a. The New Negro Renaissance) promoted a national interest in the African American culture including jazz, the blues, dance and visual art. These, too, were presented to the public in *Crisis* as well as the famous journal, *Opportunity*, edited by Charles Johnson. Dr. Alain Locke, an outstanding figure of the Harlem Renaissance, offered a collection of the works that were presented during this period by black men and women authors in his Anthology, *The New Negro* (1925). He claimed that this new movement, known also as the New Negro Movement, was a

“configuration of new racial attitudes and ideals . . . and was more aesthetic and philosophical . . . than political” (Locke ix).

The early women dramatists were influenced by those who came before them, and they used the realistic theatre to demonstrate lynching’s terror, trauma and impact on the lives of those who witnessed or experienced it. “Theatre represents an attempt to reveal a vision of human life through time, sound and space . . . it is an imitation of reality, acting as a symbol to communicate something about the human condition” (Sporre 66).

The Harlem Renaissance saw African American male playwrights gain success in the theatre: “Wallace Thurman (*Harlem*, 1929), Hall Johnson (*Run Little Chillun*, 1932), and Langston Hughes (*Mulatto*, 1935), saw their works produced on Broadway” (Brown-Guillory 3). Black female writers were not as fortunate. Alain Locke and W.E.B. Du Bois encouraged and identified the importance of these “mother playwrights” who wrote with compassion and sensitivity. Through their efforts in *Crisis* and *Opportunity*, these young women were able to have their works published and read. Alain Locke, in his book, *The New Negro*, called the African American women authors, “the heart” of the period (Brown –Guillory 3). Dr. Locke emphasized that the New Negro must be “a collaborator and participant in American civilization, and he must at the same time preserve and implement his own racial traditions” (Locke *xiii*).

Hazel Carby refers to Sandra Gilbert and Susan Gubar in *Reconstructing Womanhood – The Emergence of the Afro-American Woman Novelist*. Gilbert and Gubar, in their analysis of nineteenth - century women writers, offered this insight:

. . . the literary woman has always faced equally degrading options when she had to define her public presence in the world. If she did not suppress her work entirely or publish it pseudonymously or anonymously, she could modestly confess her female 'limitations' and concentrate on the 'lesser' subjects reserved for ladies as becoming to their inferior powers. . . . She could rebel, accepting the ostracism that must have seemed inevitable . . . she had to choose between admitting she was 'only a woman' or protesting that she was 'as good as a man.' Inevitably . . . the literature produced by women confronted with such anxiety-inducing choices has been strongly marked not only by an obsessive interest in these limited options but also by obsessive imagery of confinement that reveals the ways in which female artists feel trapped and sickened both by suffocating alternatives and by the culture that created them. (Carby 63-64)

By the late 1920s and into the 1930s, white women authors recognized the importance of joining the African American women in combatting the lynching epidemic. Jessie Daniel Ames, who founded the Association of Southern Women for the Prevention of Lynching (AWSPL), recognized that the dramatic presentations of anti-lynching dramatists could be a novel way for her organization to get the message to Southern women that it must stop. The white women authors imitated, in many ways, the patterns of the African American dramatists in their works. These plays and other ASWPL literature – speeches, news articles, and stories, were read and / or performed before mixed audiences in civic halls and educational venues across the South(Hall 218).

The African American and white women authors of the anti-lynching dramas were collaborators and active participants in their efforts to rid the nation of the plague of violent murder. Their creative talents were put to use on behalf of those who could not protect themselves. These female dramatists did not shy away from the volatile subject of lynching. Instead, they gave their audiences a “mirror to the lives” of their races and challenged those who experienced their dramas to respond to and act against the hypocrisy, hopelessness, agony, and devastation that surrounded lynching in the lives of so many black and white families in this country.

CHAPTER THREE

“LYNCHING IS TRAUMA DRAMA”

Self Defense is not just military. It begins with organizations and institutions for true self- consciousness . . . to break down the 'double consciousness,' i.e., seeing yrself (sic) through the eyes of people that hate you. The great Afro American dramatists do just that. They cut through the sickening double consciousness. . . and talk to us about our actual origins and history, draw out our actual intelligence, touch our feelings. (Amiri Baraka) (Hatch, Shine xiii)

The Roots of Black Theatre

The early years of the twentieth century (which encompassed the period of the New Negro Renaissance) saw an increased and heightened concern for black nationalism with regard to the arts. It was important for the members of the African American community to demonstrate their talents and their original works as proof of their competency and worth. Several of the women writers presented in this study 1916 –1936 were contemporaries of the New Negro Renaissance, but lived in the Washington, D.C. area, where the genre of the anti-lynching plays was initiated. Angelina Weld Grimké, Mary Burrill, May Miller, Myrtle Smith Livingston and Georgia Douglas Johnson were acquaintances in the capital city. During the years 1910-1920 they turned away from prose and poetry to address violence through drama (Mitchell 9).

It is significant and ironic, that the genre of the anti-lynching play was born in Washington, D.C. The nation's capital had been a station for the slave trade and eventually, during and after the Reconstruction, the city was segregated like the Southern cities. As the capital of the country, Washington, D.C. represented the nation's commitment to protecting American life and liberty, but in those early years of the twentieth century, it was the location where anti-lynching bills died (90).

For many artists of that period, it was a time for learning their craft. There were a few dramatists who arrived at great success on Broadway, but this personal success was associated primarily with black male playwrights such as – Wallace Thurman, Langston Hughes, and Hall Johnson. Women playwrights did not have the respect of their male counterparts until later years (Brown-Guillory 3). It should be mentioned, however, that these black women authors were instrumental in paving the way for future black playwrights between the 1950s and 1980s. Before 1940, black women playwrights expressed their feelings in a similar manner as the white women dramatists: they wrote about women's lives that had been injured by society. In contrast, however, the white women dramatists wrote in the genres of white men, mysteries, farces, and romantic comedies. The black women playwrights wrote "serious drama characterized most frequently by racial and social protest," which served as an early precedent for future dramatic artists and their writings (3). The protest literature of black writers informed readers of the constant exploitation of their people. Their dramas were by them and about them well before Du Bois defined what Black Theatre should be.

All artists were encouraged to divorce their writings from the distorted stereotypical images of the past. The challenge to present an honest portrayal of life saw

the African American authors and artists arrive at success through publications in periodical magazines and journals. As has been previously mentioned, W.E.B. Du Bois, an active member of the NAACP, initiated its magazine, *The Crisis*, while Charles Johnson was instrumental in establishing *Opportunity, A Journal of Negro Life*. From these publications, with their variety of offerings, black authors and artists were encouraged to contribute their creative works and showcase their unique talents. For decades, barriers based on race prejudice had excluded black writers from the white publisher's arena. *The Crisis* and *Opportunity* served as intellectual outlets which would "break the stubborn stereotype that had misrepresented and malformed implicitly every external view of African American life" (Wilson xx). In addition to this newly-found public exposure for black authors, *The Crisis* magazine served as a platform that spoke against the racial discrimination of the era (E. Hill, *The Theatre of Black Americans* 2).

Du Bois emphasized the need for truth and beauty in art. He believed that art was the embodiment of freedom of expression and through art, truth could be expressed and beauty achieved. He did not want black audiences to shrink at honest portrayals of themselves. If they were represented truthfully, their true essence and their beauty would be apparent (Kirschke 123). This truth in art became the "realism" of daily life that was captured by artists in a movement of the mid-nineteenth century. "It was an attempt to describe human behavior and surroundings or to represent figures and objects exactly as they act or appear in life ("Realism in Art" 1). Realism presented lower-class characters and scenes of simplicity and imperfection rather than the ideal. Realism offered an honest picture of common experiences, and enlisted the cause and effect pattern through character motivation and behavior for credibility (1). Even before realism was in vogue,

the African American writers told their true stories in narratives. The earliest slave narratives that recounted the harsh realities of slavery were honest “mirrors on life” that identified the strength, determination and resources of the black community. Examples of courage, endurance and creativity are presented in such early narratives as those of Olaudah Equiano, Frederick Douglass, and Henry Box Brown, just to name a few.

There are scholars who believe that the New Negro Renaissance was initiated by Ridgely Torrence’s 1917 production of *Three Plays for a Negro Theatre*, including *Granny Maumee*, *The Rider of Dreams*, and *Simon the Cyrenian*. Torrence was a white playwright who had an interest in blacks as subject matter for the American stage. Subsequently, the African American became popular material for leading white writers such as Eugene O’Neill, William Vaughn Moody, Marc Connelly and Paul Green. These playwrights influenced African American dramatists to begin creating their own realistic images of their people and their lives. The white dramatists also emphasized the exotic nature of the African Americans, which relegated blacks to musicals rather than to the serious dramatic stage. Between 1910 and 1940 over eight hundred musicals featuring blacks were produced (Brown – Guillory 2-3). The arts became the means for reaching the public, and theatre, being the most public of the arts, was thrust into the movement.

Early scholars recognized theatre’s potential for “changing, healing, and restoring a return . . . to the pristine function of the communal, ritual drama” of their early ancestors. (E. Hill, *The Theatre of Black Americans* 1). As early as 1858 William Wells Brown chose drama to speak against slavery. It was in 1915, however, that Drama became an instrument for issues involving African Americans. The NAACP appointed a Drama Committee to study ways in which stage productions could be used in the service

of their cause (E. Hill 2). W.E.B. Du Bois and his colleagues established a Black Theatre that would speak to all members of their race. In 1926, he formed the Harlem group of Krigwa Players and the Krigwa Playwriting Contest. Du Bois was adamant in his belief that a legitimate Black Theatre needed fundamental principles from which to operate:

The plays of a real Negro theatre must be: About us. That is, they must have plots which reveal real Negro life as it is. By us. That is, they must be written by Negro authors who understand from birth and continual association just what it means to be a Negro today. For us. That is, the theatre must cater primarily to Negro audiences and be supported and sustained by their entertainment and approval. Near us. The theatre must be in a Negro neighborhood near the mass of ordinary Negro people. (Du Bois, *The Crisis*, July 1926, 135)

In his essay, "Criteria of Negro Art" he further counseled his fellow black artists: "We must come to the place where the work of art when it appears is reviewed and acclaimed by our own free and unfettered judgment. And we are going to have a real and valuable and eternal judgment only as we make ourselves free of mind, proud of body, and just of soul to all men" (9).

In the midst of the Harlem Renaissance, with the work of Du Bois, *The Crisis*, *Opportunity*, and The Krigwa Players (with their writing contests), talented dramatists saw the publication of prizewinning short works: there was an emergence of new Black playwrights, male and female, and there were the beginnings of a nation-wide Black Theatre movement (E. Hill, *The Theatre of Black Americans* 3).

Dr. Alain Locke advocated for the arts in the anthology he edited, *The New Negro*, and included literary works of the Harlem Renaissance. He attempted to analyze the aesthetic direction of the period. Locke recognized that the New Negro artist was in a position to legitimately challenge the intellectual and creative status quo and to gain the respect of his white contemporaries. Locke saw the “New Negro” as “a truly reconstructed presence in the face of white hostility” (Krasner 165). Performers and playwrights aided in the transformation of the image of African Americans from minstrelsy, to a new and modern artist. In a collective response to achieve their goals, the New Negroes worked in tandem with the artists of the Harlem Renaissance to reverse the stereotypical images of the past (Krasner 165). An editorial report from the *New York Age*, 1923, indicated there was “need for a real constructive program in building up racial solidarity . . . a vital necessity” (166).

Locke and Du Bois had differing views regarding theatre. Du Bois saw theatre as propaganda, and he was adamant in his belief that all classes of people needed to be educated, uplifted, and rehabilitated. “Propaganda, handled correctly, would provide the right vehicle for new drama and literature offering enlightenment and progress”(227). Locke believed in the “folk drama” which Du Bois felt was not much better than the primitivist works that had been performed in the past. They both agreed, however, that art should depict black life realistically, and with historical “accuracy ”(227). The anti-lynching plays being discussed in this dissertation were written during the years 1916–1936. Many were inspired by Du Bois’ notion of propaganda or Locke’s insistence on the folk drama (237). These dramas were the voices of women authors who were unwelcome in the commercial theatre of the period. Yet, they are crucial to any discussion of the

development of black play writing in America because they provide the feminine perspective, and their voices give credence to the notion that there was a “New Negro” in existence (Brown-Guillory 4). Dr. Alain Locke agreed that the Black artists were finally moving forward and were now standing in the light of recognition:

In the intellectual realm a renewed and keen curiosity is replacing the recent apathy; the Negro is being carefully studied, not just talked about and discussed. In art and letters, instead of being wholly caricatured, he is being seriously portrayed and painted . . . he is contributing his share to the new social understanding. (Locke 9)

During this time, black theatre explored community issues and put aside the entertainment for whites. For the most part, black actors and playwrights maintained the philosophy of Du Bois whose principal aim for a “Negro Theatre” was to be about their race (Krasner 229). The black audience needed theatre that would teach them how to live productive lives and affirm who they were.

These dramas were significant in their efforts to convey important messages. In the case of the eleven plays in this study, their purposes were to inform and to educate those whites who did not experience the brutality of lynching, and to teach the black race how to live and adjust to their world while seeing dramatized scenarios of their own true-life experiences. The final purpose of the plays was to protest the evils of lynching, and to establish legal legislation that would stop the violence (237).

There was common ground between black and white women working in the anti-lynching movement. This ground centered on combating the mythology of the black male

rapist. Ida B. Wells had clearly identified white women's role in supporting this myth in 1892, but white women did not take organized action until 1930 with the founding of the Association of Southern Women for the Prevention of Lynching (Perkins, Stephens 7). These anti-lynching plays challenged the existing power relationships based on gender and race. The plays also reflected the theatre's developing realism by presenting lynching as a serious social problem that was not given any resolution (Perkins, Stephens 8). The power of these works is that they brought the brutality of lynching directly into the common home, school, church or workplace. They gave artistic form to a harsh reality for African Americans and theatrically created a new reality for white audiences. They also provided an opportunity for creating a new approach to the study of American theatre and culture. The works offered a fuller picture of how theatre reflected the intersection of artistic and social movements. As a distinctly American genre, Perkins and Stephens have noted, "they help to identify ways in which theatre functions as a site for analyzing how black and white Americans have been complicit and /or resistant to racial and sexual domination" (12).

Du Bois and Locke were very influential in the making of the theatre movement. Several women authors were published with the help of *The Crisis* and *Opportunity*, and their works impacted black community theatre. "The dramas are primarily one-act plays about middle class and common folk, about passion and apathy, love and hate, life and death, hope and despair, race pride, oppression and equality of the races and sexes" (Brown-Guillory 4). In addition, and most importantly, the authors "wrote with an intensity to reach the hearts of black people across the nation. They did not write for the Broadway audience that brought with it monetary remuneration" (4). It may be argued

that these women dramatists “document black life more accurately and with greater variety than did the Harlemites playwrights because their works portray blacks from various regions of the country and within a myriad of roles” (4). These women authors wrote with compassion, and they read or performed their works in black venues such as churches, schools meeting rooms and even in salons of private homes. “They even met in nurseries where the black women and children were given roots, nurtured, tested, healed and provided with a sense of survival” (Brown-Guillory 5). These women dramatists provided an insight on black life during those decades when blacks were becoming aware of their own self-worth. Their literature was “protest” against four inconsistencies in American society that were aimed at African Americans: They were concerned about the hypocrisy of Christians toward African Americans. In this category, lynching was the principal impetus for protest. They were outraged that black soldiers fought for their country but were denied their constitutional rights when they returned home. They were discouraged by the economic disparity that existed between the races. Finally, they were fearful that interracial unions would lead to more violence against black men (5).

Lynching plays survive today in the archives and remain a means of understanding the United States at the end of the nineteenth century and beginning of the twentieth century. “The genre was developed by African Americans aware of their communities’ strategies for living with lynching – strategies that require a keen understanding of U. S. culture”(Mitchell 1). Koritha Mitchell, in *Living with Lynching*, contends that the lynching plays “served as mechanisms through which African Americans survived the height of mob violence – and its photographic representation – still believing in their right to full citizenship” (2).

The lynching plays are also relevant because they are part of a larger body of activist literature about the African American condition that dates from the eighteenth century. Specifically, lynching plays emphasize the lasting damage that mob violence caused. It is not just a single body that is ravaged, but entire families, communities, and observers as well. The impact of the violent death creates trauma and anguish for all concerned – especially those women who have witnessed their sons or husbands taken at the hands of the mob. The impact of the murders is discussed in this dissertation with regard to themes that are apparent in the individual writings.

“Black-authored lynching drama sheds light on the New Negro, the New South, and the New Woman” (Mitchell 9). Those African Americans who had not experienced legal bondage came of age, and they demanded unprecedented educational opportunities, and the freedom to find new lives in other areas of the country. Industrialization presented experiences for better finances and opened the doors to entrepreneurs and politicians. Women were also gaining economic and social independence as voting rights were close at hand. In the midst of this activity, the lynching drama was born and was dominated by black women authors (9). Mitchell believed that many of these black women dramatists, successors of Grimké, were not planning to have their texts come alive before white audiences. They did not aim to reach white audiences with the hope of convincing them that lynching was wrong. Instead, the successors of Grimké targeted African American audiences and readers who might stage these plays in their communities. Drama utilizes more than just the written word, even when it is not properly staged. African Americans could bring these scripts alive by performing the business actions of the script or by simply reading to a group (Mitchell 13). Mitchell

contends that she sees the lynching drama as “one example of how blacks used art to sustain their conceptions of themselves as modern citizens, even as they were denied their rights and privileges of that status” (13).

ANALYSIS and COMPARISON ONE:

The Dilemma of the Black Soldier

“I’ve been helpin’ the w’ite man git his freedom, I reckon I’d bettah try now to get my own!” (Burrill 90).

1. Mary Burrill – *Aftermath* (1919)
2. Annie Nathan Meyer – *Black Souls* (1924)

These two anti-lynching dramas describe the issues of racism that affected the African American soldier on his return home from the war at the beginning of the early twentieth century (1919-1921).

Biography: Mary Burrill (1879 – 1946) **African-American Author**

Christy Gavin presents a short biography of Mary Burrill in her research guide, *African American Women Playwrights*, admitting that very little is known of her life. The daughter of Clara and John Burrill, Mary was born and educated in Washington, D.C. She graduated from Emerson College of Oratory (Emerson University), taught English for several years, and returned to Emerson in 1929 where she obtained an additional degree in literary interpretation. She moved on to become the director of the School for Expression at the Conservatory of Music in Washington, D.C. Historians identify two other contemporary playwrights known to Burrill: writer May Miller was one of her students, and scholar, Gloria Hull, suggests that Angelina Weld Grimké was a close

friend, and possibly a lover (Gavin 13). Burrill wrote two plays that gained attention: *They That Sit in Darkness* (1919) and *Aftermath* (1928). Burrill's folk dramas were revolutionary in confronting problems facing impoverished blacks living in America. In *Aftermath*, she advocates for blacks who defend their rights against injustice. In *They That Sit in Darkness*, Burrill argues for empowering women with the information they need to control their pregnancies. Burrill's contributions to the genre lie in her central positioning of poor blacks in her dramas and her solutions to racial oppression (13).

Perkins and Stephens offer a more in depth biography of Burrill in their anthology, *Strange Fruit, Plays on Lynching by American Women*. She was an advocate for women's - especially black women's rights. Her first published work, *Aftermath*, appeared in the April 1919 issue of *Liberator*. It is an example of an anti-lynching play in which the characters are lynched for crimes other than assaulting a white woman (79).

Aftermath, competed in the David Belasco Sixth Annual Little Theatre Tournament on May 7, 1928, at the Frolic Theatre in New York City. It was produced under the direction of the Krigwa Players and the Worker's Drama League.

A review of the play appeared in the May 19 issue of *Billboard* that stated: "the white trash theme is too offensive, and the Krigwa Players took a prize in the previous year's tournament with a more plausible tale of contemporary negro life, which did not deal with a race problem" (qtd.in Perkins, Stephens 79).

Biography: Annie Nathan Meyer (1867-1951)
White Woman Author

Annie Nathan Meyer born in New York City on February 19, 1867, was descended from the Gershom Mendes Seixas family that dated to the pre-colonial period. She was the fourth child and second daughter of Robert Weeks and Annie Augusta (Florance) Nathan. Due to financial woes in 1873, the family moved from New York to Green Bay, Wisconsin, where her father found employment due to the largess of his wife's admirer. The marriage eventually deteriorated, and Annie, and her siblings returned to New York to live with their father (Goldenberg 2). Annie's siblings had public school educations, but Annie was kept home and "denied normal peer experiences" (2). Annie managed to learn and write in spite of her situation and by 1885, she enrolled in the newly established Columbia College Collegiate Course for Women. Her main interest was writing, and she modeled her writing after the writers she most admired: Ralph Waldo Emerson, Margaret Fuller, George Eliot, and Elizabeth Barrett Browning . She authored novels, plays, short stories, and articles on education, art and feminism (2).

Meyer devoted her life to the struggle for women in higher education. A meeting with the chief librarian at Columbia led her to work toward establishing an affiliate women's college at the university (2)

Meyer was active in organizations that benefitted minority groups. She gave her energies to finding scholarships for African American women to study. She worked with the NAACP on conflict resolution, and she spoke against anti-Semitism and the Nazi

policy of the 1930's (Goldenberg 3). She also used her talents as a drama critic and nature writer. Annie Nathan Meyer died on September 23, 1951 (3).

Meyer's play, *Black Souls* (1924) is significant because it was one of the earliest dramas on lynching written by a white woman. "The play confronts many of the issues surrounding lynching, such as white women's desire for black men and the sexual exploitation of black women by white masters" (Perkins, Stephens 133). The play demonstrates the hypocrisy of a nation which sends young , black soldiers to fight wars in foreign countries, but denies them freedom at home. The production was presented on March 30, 1932, at the Provincetown Playhouse with a short run of twelve performances New York critics praised the acting over the play itself. A reviewer wrote: "What the authoress lacked in dramatic power was successfully supplied by the players" (133). Another critic added: "Despite clever staging and earnest performances, the play fails to become either an exciting bit of theatre or a convincing treatise" (qtd. in Perkins, Stephens 133).

Even with the negative reviews, *Black Souls* is important in that it demonstrates "the conflict and cohesion of black and white women within the specific context of lynching drama" (Perkins, Stephens 134). The black and white women were aware of the myth of the black rapist's attack on the white woman. Both races recognized the reaction and resolution of this myth by white male supremacy – death to the black man. The play questions the ability of white playwrights "to create authentic black characters in convincing situations" (134).

The Dilemma of the Black Soldier

The themes of white supremacy, resistance, hypocrisy, futility of black life, faith in God, complicity, trauma, and motherhood, are examined and compared in the anti-lynching plays *Aftermath*, by Mary Burrill, a black woman author, and *Black Souls* by Annie Nathan Meyer, a white woman author. The majority of these themes are represented by various characters' traits, dialogue and / or their motivations and actions. These two plays dramatize the issues of the Black soldier who returns home after serving his country abroad.

The initial step toward the discussion of these two works requires a consideration of the historical and cultural climate in which they were written. Burrill's *Aftermath*, a realistic one-act folk drama, was written in 1919, a year that saw one of the nation's most violent and extreme summers of racial unrest. James Weldon Johnson called the months from June to December "The Red Summer of 1919" (Franklin, Moss 385). It was a period during the Nadir of racial relations when twenty-five major race riots broke out in cities all over the country. These riots resulted in numerous deaths for both blacks and whites. Social tensions increased when economic woes were created by the effects of the Great Migration, European Immigration, and demobilization after the war. Immigrants entering the cities and Southerners moving North, along with the thousands of soldiers (black and white) returning from the war, strained the already crowded urban centers. Employment was difficult to find, thus it was not uncommon for white citizens to "step-in" and take positions and wages of blacks who had been working at a given task. This exacerbated the already volatile unrest that permeated the country. Housing was scarce while rental costs increased, and lack of adequate food supplies caused families to suffer.

The African American soldiers returning from the War found discrimination alive and well. The young black men who fought to protect the freedoms of their nation saw no changes in the pre-war politics they had previously experienced. As a result, there was a change in their attitude toward “resistance.” The race riots saw them fight back in 1919. They were fighting another war, but on their own soil. This “overt resistance” was viewed as an insult to the white citizens and a reason for blacks to be “eliminated.” The white attitude espoused the belief that there were too many of them and they were a nuisance.

In her play, *Aftermath*, Burrill makes this point when her character, John, recognizes the hypocrisy of the country and the fact that he still isn’t respected as a man: “I’ve been helpin’ the w’ite man git his freedom, I reckon I’d bettah try now to get my own!” (Burrill 90). The outcome of John’s resistance is disastrous as well as inevitable. He chooses to defend himself against white supremacy and loses. He knows what the outcome will be, but he is determined to show his enemies that he is a man, regardless of their hatred toward him. John represents the thousands of decorated soldiers who return home from the war and face the hypocrisy of racism in America. Burrill uses this backdrop of racial unrest and resistance as a means of speaking to black audiences about the consequences of resistance as well as encouraging white audiences to stop the violence and senseless murders. Burrill positions the entire play in a small, rustic cottage situated in rural South Carolina. It is the “Red Summer of 1919,” and her drama brings the reality of the African American soldier to the public.

Annie Nathan Meyer’s *Black Souls*, however, demonstrated a sophistication in the genre’s format. A propaganda and protest play rather than a folk drama, the play is

divided into six scenes with various locations, as opposed to Burrill's single scene, in one-act. *Black Souls* was written in 1924 and by 1932, when it was produced, there was evidence of personal success for many blacks in the nation. Personal success of African Americans is reflected in Meyer's setting, dialogue and characters more so than in Burrill's country setting. African Americans were educated, participated in a variety of professional occupations, had experienced the New Negro Renaissance, and women (both black and white) worked for interracial cooperation in a movement to end lynching. The subject of lynching had always been a fearful reality of the black communities, but in the 1920s, the efforts to see it ended gained additional attention due to the Dyer Anti-Lynching Bill that was being debated in Congress. Annie Meyer makes two specific references to this point in her drama through the characters of David and Andrew. David admits that "The white women beginning to take the colored women seriously, eh?" (Meyer 143), and Andrew's comment to Verne's hypocrisy: "I tell you the people of the South are beginning to wake up to this national disgrace" (164).

The Association of Southern Women for the Prevention of Lynching was formed in 1930. It was through this organization (ASWPL) that writing contests, specifically for anti-lynching plays, were held. One of the women authors examined in this dissertation, Ann Seymour, was a participant in the writing . With the energy of women against lynching, and the efforts of organizations (like the NAACP) to acquire legislation to stop the lynchings, there was for a period of time, a decline in the murders (Perkins, Stephens 6). However, this decline was short-lived. Later, in the 1930s the lynchings started to increase again because of the residual effects of the Depression. Many people were without work, the idleness caused irritability, and the lynchings became excessively

brutal and frequent. The Writer's League Against Lynching was formed in 1934 "to help formulate public opinion against lawlessness" (Perkins, Stephens 7). As a result, it was the 1930s that became the most prolific decade for the writing of lynching dramas. Many were never produced but merely read in private settings, so they might not have had the impact on as many people as the authors had intended or hoped. Research acknowledges that women writers had difficulty being published. When Du Bois initiated *The Crisis*, he invited women playwrights to submit their works. This was one means of disseminating their literature. In addition, the one-acts were short and became dramatic reading exercises suitable for private settings - the home, schools, and churches. They could be read without need of spectacle, and they would serve to be "communal literacy," a term that literary historian Elizabeth McHenry identified as a type of "family pastime" (qtd.in Mitchell 40).⁹ According to Kathy Perkins and Judith Stephens, these plays had not been well- studied and more research was warranted to truly be able to understand their full value. Further investigation and research would be required to determine just how greatly they impacted their audiences (4).

The 1930s continued to bring discrimination to the African Americans in the North and the South. They confronted an era marked by increased racial violence, segregation, disfranchisement, peonage, and forced labor. The attempts to keep blacks subjugated continued relentlessly. The constant efforts of the African American organizations to gain legislation against lynching, and the failure (or refusal) of the nation to establish laws, clearly and blatantly pointed to its hypocrisy. The theme of hypocrisy is well pronounced in both Burrill's and Meyer's works.

Meyer makes her point about hypocrisy through the character of the white supremacist, Senator Verne. She also makes the African American characters well-aware of their status in the play, which reflects the reality of African American's lives of the time. In the real world of 1932, blacks were gaining momentum and success – but this success could be a death warrant and had to be tempered by the African Americans. Meyer's characters are educated and cultured teachers with success in their chosen disciplines. But even with their advancement, they are aware that white supremacy does not permit them to over step their positions. They must bow to the supremacy of the dominant race in order to survive. The young student, Corinne, is anxious to become a teacher one day. She is warned about how to act when the time arrives: “. . . don't you let those white folks down on you. Getting cocky just don't get you anywhere!” (Meyer 146). To emphasize how cautious the Magnolia teachers must be in educating black children, David also warns his fellow teacher on how to act: “Ulysses, just you let the white folks think you're going to educate the Negroes away from the cotton fields, and you'll come back all right – in a pine box” (146).

Like Mary Burrill, Annie Nathan Meyer, also uses her drama to paint a picture of the reality of the time period. Meyer situates her drama in the South. This broad agricultural area served as the region for plantation agriculture with African Americans working the lands during slavery. Meyer's choice of the setting is critical to the main issues she develops in the drama: decades after slavery, the South is still not willing to relinquish slave labor, and the Southern cause of white supremacy remains strong. In addition, the white population continues to view blacks as inferior in spite of their

accomplishments, and white women are complicit in the murders of black men by their refusal to speak in their defense.

Meyer develops the theme of hypocrisy through the refusal of the state officials in the drama (who stand for justice and freedom) to admit that African Americans deserve their rights to a fair trial in the face of an alleged crime. In this specific case, the soldier, David, an innocent man, is accused of assault without a trial and summarily lynched. The theme of hypocrisy is woven through Meyer's entire drama and serves as a source of complications for the characters.

Both plots revolve around the lives of the soldiers returning home from the war in France and the situations they encounter. John, in *Aftermath*, deals with the revelation of a family secret while David, in *Black Souls*, confronts a white woman's advances. Both men, John and David, admit that they found France to be a country where they were not judged because of the color of their skin. In *Aftermath*, John, the protagonist, is a decorated veteran who is happy to return home to his country roots, but knows that his life in America will return him to the role of an emasculated man not worthy of respect. The life he experienced in France was not what he will find in his own country. The hypocrisy of America's espousing freedom and yet denying that right to African Americans is exposed by Burrill through John's actions and dialogue as a returning black soldier. He is strong in his opinions about his status in America and has no problem voicing them: "One of these days I'm goin' to tek you an' Millie over there so's you kin breathe free jes once befo' yuh die" (Burrill 87). John is trustworthy, honest and devoted to his family. Like others in his home, he speaks in a folk dialogue, evidence of his simple, country upbringing and minimal education. He is anxious and proud to shower

everyone with gifts from Paris – especially his father with whom he has a special relationship. The major conflict in the drama, however, was the lynching of John's father six months earlier by local citizens. John's father was a God-fearing, Bible - reading man every day of his life. He owned a country store and was known as being an honest and fair citizen of the community. On the day of his lynching, he had an argument with a white man over the cost of cotton. When the white man struck John's father, his father reacted and struck back. He was immediately taken to the lynching tree by white citizens who had known him as a solid citizen and a good man. Concerned for his welfare in a war zone, the family did not tell John of his father's murder. They decided to wait until he was home for good. The majority of the play's quick action and characters' dialogue revolves around this complication. When is the best time to tell John? Who will tell John? How will he react?

In addition to the nation's hypocritical attitude toward rights for African Americans, Burrill uses the unseen characters of old man Withrow and the Sherley boys to represent the hypocrisy of the citizens who live, work, and associate with blacks on a daily basis (Burrill 90). In truth, whites want no relationships with blacks beyond their own needs. African Americans may have personal successes, as did John's father, but his success and demands for all things fair and honest cause him to be targeted for death. Such was the case in this drama. Not only are the white citizens guilty of hypocrisy, they are totally complicit in the death of John's father. There is no trial or inquiry – just the quick judgment of guilt and the rope. This situation of instant “guilt without trial” is also present in Meyer's work.

John also represents the themes of “resistance, trauma, and futility of black life” in the drama. These themes are exhibited by his learning the news of his father. He is traumatized, enraged and immediately decides to put his own life (and that of his younger brother) in jeopardy. The climax is reached with Burrill’s use of “discovery” to expose the family’s dilemma. Mrs. Hawkins, a neighbor, stops to visit and welcomes John on his return. Before the family has an opportunity to tell him of his father’s murder, she expresses her sympathy and divulges the secret: “Ef only yuh po’ daddy had a-lived to see dis day!” (Burrill 89). John is bewildered. He questions the family and asks “Have you been lyin to me? Is dad gone?” (Burrill 90). John’s sister, Millie admits that they were going to tell him but were concerned for his welfare. In a state of shock, which I identify as trauma, John prepares to avenge his father’s death when he discovers that certain prominent citizens of the town committed the crime. He asks: “Didn’t they try him? Didn’t they give him a chance? Whut’d the Sheriff do? An’ the Gov-nur?” His sister replies, “They didn’t do nothin” (90). Clearly, this dialogue points to Burrill’s concern for the strength of white supremacy in the South. No one in authority did anything to help his innocent father. The white mob arrested his father and led him to a tree. There they killed him without any inquiry or concerns about the affair. There was no punishment for the murderers.

With rage and bitterness in his voice, John grabs two guns and vows to kill the men who did this to his father. The news causes him to act irrationally for he is warned by his family that to go after them – a black man carrying guns – means certain death. I believe Burrill is forcefully chastising the white community for their hypocrisy in this scene. While it is fine for the white man to “assume his right” to attack, maim, mutilate

and kill a black man, the black man is not permitted to retaliate. The cliché “ what was good for the goose was good for the gander” does not apply in these racial situations. John has had enough and he does not care what happens to him. He overtly fights back and challenges the hypocritical whites of the community. This act of retaliation seals John’s fate. He knows (as do the members of his family) that he will die by being lynched as well:

I’m sick o’ these wite folks doins’ – we’re fine trus’ worthy feller citizens
when they’re handin’ us out guns, an’ . . . chuckin’ us off to die; but we
ain’t a damn thing when it *comes to handin’ us the rights we done fought*
an’ bled fu! I’m sick o’ this sort o’ life – an’ I’m goin’ to put an end to it!
(Burrill 90)

Burrill’s soldier character represents the resistance that became prevalent in 1919. His death is not a ritual sacrifice, however, as much as an issue of futility of his life. He feels compelled to avenge his father’s murder and he knows his life is forfeit once he challenges the whites. It might be more accurate to say that he knows his life in America is not “truly living” so what does he have to lose? He has experienced the gifts of freedom and respect in France and he knows the difference. This scene is also an accurate account of the attitude of blacks who during this period (1919) are retaliating against injustice in the rampant national race riots. They are the New Negroes who realize that they have fought for their country. They have risked their lives for their freedoms and it is time to fight and redeem the rights they deserve. It is important for John to prove his manhood. He is a brave soldier and for him not to defend his father’s memory makes him look like a coward. His brother, Lonnie, however, is reticent to show aggression and is

coerced by John to join him in the challenge against the white community. Black men were caught between wanting to express their manhood and virility or standing back and allowing the white community to continue to oppress him. John knew that to challenge a white man was certain retaliation. However, not to demonstrate his strength and masculinity forced him to be emasculated. He had to decide if he was willing to die or walk away. In John's case, he chose to fight back and prove he would no longer take their intimidation tactics.

Besides hearing the sudden and brutal news of his father's death, his traumatic reaction may be a result of his being in the war. The symptoms of what is today called Post Traumatic Syndrome were legitimate at that time and were known as Acute Stress Disorder or shell shock. "As far back as World War I, this condition was referred to as 'shell shock,' in which there are similarities between reactions of soldiers who suffered concussions and . . . blows to the central nervous system" ("Acute Stress Disorder" 1).

The young men who fought in "The Great War" experienced "trench warfare" in a conflict never before imagined. World War I saw the first use of modern technologies capable of mass destruction and death: automatic weaponry, poison gas, bayonets, tanks, and grenades. Those men on the battle field would have had a psychological impact from the combat that included these weapons. Young men in war were driven to act quickly in times of danger. John's response to avenge his father's death is immediate. He is reacting to a traumatic situation in his life.

In contrast to John's character, David Lewis, the protagonist in *Black Souls*, is a well-spoken, educated and cultured teacher and poet. After serving in France, he

remained in Paris where he enjoyed the freedom and “beautiful things” the city had to offer. He was even able to meet and associate with a young, white girl, Luella Verne, who was studying in France. Their relationship was platonic in nature, and he knew that there was no place in “Dixie” where the two of them could appear to be more than acquaintances. This is one of the complications of the drama that leads to his demise. He returns to his home and is teaching English literature at the Magnolia School for black students. After living in Paris where he was happy, he finds it difficult living in the repression of the South. He is unable to pursue any friendships that will prove harmful to him or others. He is living again under the thumb of white supremacy and it continues to override black existence. The whites are happy to see that Magnolia is a vocational school – a sure sign that white supremacy is prevalent. This means that the black children are learning how to “mend fences and repair roofs” for the whites. David demonstrates “resistance” against the ideology of white supremacy and fights against the government’s dismissive attitude of the black community’s worth and ability to learn: “. . . The South says it is afraid of Negro dishonesty and ignorance, but it’s more afraid of Negro knowledge and efficiency” (Meyer 147).

In the relationship with Luella Verne, David resists her forward aggression for his affection. When Luella returns from France, she lives with her father, Senator Verne, in the same area as David. She makes no secret of her wishes to make their relationship a permanent one. David explains to her, in no uncertain terms, that their being together alone at any time is dangerous, and he hopes she will understand his position. Black men do not associate with white women. The Southern attitude will not condone it. Luella refuses to believe him and makes constant advances. In the climax of the drama, the two

characters are seen together in an innocent encounter. In a chivalrous, yet foolish act, and recognizing that both of them will now be in danger, he pretends to attack her. He knows his life is over, but at least he will be able to save her reputation. There is no indication at this point in the story that Luella understands David's intentions. Not until the end of the play does she understand his sacrifice on her behalf.

This is Meyer's attempt to demonstrate that even good intentions are ignored when a black man is associated in any way with a white woman. The excuse that black men assault the white woman is the most common excuse for a lynching – another example of white supremacy of the South. Luella manages to get away, but David is chased, caught and lynched in a matter of hours. There is no trial, just the bloodhounds and the mob determining the fate of a black man. Meyer makes David the “sacrificial lamb.” He gives his life so that Luella's reputation will remain intact. As with John in *Aftermath*, David knows that his future is on the hanging tree. Countless people are lynched for less. Again, the theme of “futility of a black man's life” is apparent. Perhaps this act is an effort on David's part to die for something - the concern for a woman – rather than to live an unhappy life at Magnolia. Unlike John in *Aftermath*, David is not willing to fight back. He resigns himself to the inevitable because he, also, has no options.

Meyer and Burrill identify a problem of the period: Black soldiers remain second-class citizens on their return home. Senator Verne, representing the themes of hypocrisy, supremacy and complicity in death, articulates his lack of concern for David's welfare : “. . . what's one nigger against all you can do right here and now for hundreds? . . . This shielding and protecting of your own people has got to stop . . . We white men are banded

together in the most sacred cause in the world – the Supremacy of the White Race. And we mean to maintain it - at all cost . . . ” (Meyer 164).

The school is operated by Andrew Morgan, David’s brother-in-law, and his sister Phyllis Morgan. The Morgans dedicate their lives to making the school a success, yet it is always necessary to defer to those whites who have the necessary financial support they need. Andrew becomes hypocritical in his behavior and attitude, because he needs the help of others. He asks the Senator to visit the school, and hopes that eventually the Senator will help in the funding of a new dormitory. The day finally arrives when the Senator and other dignitaries tour the premises. Andrew is the perfect host and accepts their false praise and flattering words. David, however, resists the flattery and recognizes the hypocrisy of Andrew’s actions and the hypocritical words of all the white guests . David is honest about what he witnesses:

. . . there’s no good shutting your eyes to the truth . . . I couldn’t stand their damnable smugness . . . how could you endure it? . . . and how could you be so polite to that old freak who asked if you weren’t afraid of educating the colored women away from domestic service! . . . your distinguished guests having gazed their fill as a nigger shoes a horse and another roofs a house, they think possibly the Negro is worth saving.
(Meyer 155)

Verne refuses each invitation until he recognizes that Phyllis Morgan lives and works there. The audience is aware of Phyllis’ dislike for the Senator even though Andrew is convinced he is a “real friend and quality.” Phyllis corrects him by saying, “I

thought quality meant good character” (Meyer 140). Andrew doesn’t understand her dislike for the Senator and tries to sway her opinion. It turns out that when she was sixteen, the white Senator Verne assaulted Phyllis. She “resisted” the Senator’s advances by hiding from him in those early days and will continue to do the same now. She is threatened by the Senator who warns her that he could make things go well for her husband if she cooperates. “Just think what I can do for the school and your husband” (152).

The Senator, a respected man of the state, is a hypocrite and proves to be one in several other situations. Verne comments that if he is able to see the new dormitory built, it will be a memorial to his beloved, dead wife. Phyllis sees both the humor and the hypocrisy in his statement. She knows that he was an adulterer with her and other women while his wife was still alive, and yet, he played the part of the faithful husband. Verne remains a static character throughout the play. To the very end, even when he is broken by the news of his daughter’s relationship with a black man, his attitude toward the black community never changes. He continues to live with the ideology of supremacy and his personal entitlement.

Andrew, too, is a hypocrite when he is willing to exchange his integrity for the praise and potential funding of the whites. When Phyllis and Andrew learn that a young black man is accused of attacking a white girl, they ask the Senator to “please help and stop the lynching.” The Senator refuses on the grounds that he will never be elected again. “I’m not going to commit political suicide” (Meyer 163-64). Andrew assures the Senator that he knows most of the men in the area and they couldn’t have done anything so terrible. He doesn’t know at the time that his brother, David, is the accused. Andrew

begs for the man's life – or at least for a fair trial: “Why not try him? . . . the whole machinery of the Law is in white hands. . . . Surely you can't be afraid of a miscarriage of justice” (164). Meyer is being very specific in her accusation of white supremacy with this dialogue. The Senator refuses and replies: “Don't you admit that every nigger is guilty? . . . the Governor will do nothing . . . no man in his senses would stop a lynching that has gone this far” (164). Andrew's futile efforts finally bring him to his senses. He admits that he is a “. . . hypocrite and a truckler - Davey was right. I've bowed and scraped, and kowtowed till I have no manhood left” (165). With this realization, Andrew and Phyllis discover that the young man who is lynched is their innocent and loving brother. David died knowing that he had protected Luella. By pretending to attack Luella, David refuses to be ignored any longer. He plays the part of a “beast” just as the whites see all black men to be. David makes the decision to be caught and lynched since he has no other options, he is powerless to do anything else. It is useless to plead his case because no one believes him or cares to listen. As soon as he is discovered alone with a white girl, whatever the circumstances, he is guilty of rape. David is sacrificed for white supremacy, and with his death, his family will live in pain and suffering. Senator Verne will continue to believe in his ideology, but his daughter may come to realize and live with the guilt of David's murder. Both families are damaged by the reckless behavior of a naïve girl and a hypocritical Senator.

A final look at hypocrisy and supremacy is detailed in one of the last scenes of the drama. Andrew and Phyllis confront Senator Verne about his attack on Phyllis. Andrew learns that Verne has no true interest in his school, but is intent on continuing in his

predatory assault on his wife . Andrew threatens to kill the Senator, but is stopped when Verne reminds him what will happen if he harms a white man:

There won't be a nigger left alive in the whole state . . . you'll set the Negroes back two generations . . . you'll destroy them worse than their worst enemy would. How do you like that, eh? . . . What you do to me will be avenged on your people a thousand fold. You've just seen one lynching. Do you want to see hundreds – thousands? (Meyer 169-70)

Andrew's actions move the drama to a quick resolution. He knows that killing Verne is sealing his own death warrant and in addition, it is a coward's way of dealing with the issue. He decides instead to "kill" the Senator in a more meaningful manner, and so he and Phyllis call Verne's daughter, Luella, to confront her father. When she arrives, it is obvious that she is upset over David's death. Luella recognizes that by refusing to obey David's words of advice, she is complicit in his murder: "Yes. I wouldn't listen to him. . . . I didn't know – oh my God! . . . He told me I didn't know the South – but I wouldn't listen to him . . . I hadn't the courage to say it was my fault" (Meyer 171). Luella readily admits her relationship with David, a black man, and agonizes over her decision not to listen to his appeals. " He warned me that it was dangerous . . . he tried to get me to go back" (171). She is guilty of sending him to his death by not speaking up on his behalf. " I couldn't stand up and face those men . . . they called me nigger lover." Her father is unaware of her involvement and is shocked at what he is hearing. " My daughter beg for a nigger's favors! Is there no shame in you?" (Meyer 171-72).

Andrew explains to Verne that David was innocent of attacking anyone, but he was “guilty of being too complaisant to your daughter’s wooing” (171). Verne replies in disbelief : “It’s a lie – an infernal lie.” Andrew reveals the truth that Verne is unable to accept: “ I congratulate you. Your daughter takes after you . . . You white conquerors stalk about as you choose among our colored women – our sisters and our daughters and our wives, as free as you like. You don’t see any harm in it. But once let a single black man retaliate among your white women . . . ”(170). In a rage, Senator Verne disowns his daughter . The stage directions tell of his broken spirit and trauma: “*His voice suddenly breaks. His rage leaves him. Utterly broken, he slumps in the chair and cries despairingly*” (173). Verne arrives at his lowest point and asks for death: “Oh, kill me, kill me.” Phyllis tells him, however, that he must live now and care for Luella: “Live and protect her from herself” (173).

The thought of his daughter’s association with a black man traumatizes Verne. This is an offence of the worst kind in his mind, and he is shaken to think that his own daughter, a white woman, would lower and embarrass herself while damaging the family’s prominent name. Verne, however, never admits his own faults and hypocrisy for betraying his wife or for assaulting black women. He fails to see his own sins while condemning his daughter’s actions. Verne and Luella create their own problems. He is a racist and is unable to see the black community as anything other than a slave or second-class citizen. Luella foolishly refuses to listen to those who know the dangers of usurping the rules of decorum where blacks and whites are concerned. In addition, both of them bring a sense of “ entitlement “ to their characters with the belief that they can do whatever they wish. Verne and Luella may experience a period of family trauma because

of the new revelation, but that issue cannot be equated to the suffering and trauma that Andrew and Phyllis endure at the hands of the lynch mob. They do not create their problems. They are victims of the racism that limits their opportunities in life and that killed their brother, David,

This begs the question: Does Verne care about what has happened to David? Meyer is consistent in keeping Senator Verne entrenched in the ideology of white domination and (unlike his daughter), he does not show any sympathy or remorse for David's death. The only issue that truly upsets him is his daughter's relationship with a black man. It is doubtful that any of the other complications concern him at all. As in Burrill's drama, Meyer's cast of characters who love David (in one way or another), are left to remember and relive that day for many years.

The themes of faith and motherhood are briefly presented in both plays by the authors' characters. In *Aftermath*, John's father becomes a prominent character of faith even though he is absent from the action. He is discussed in terms of his devout, daily reading of the Bible and his belief in God. Burrill's two elderly characters of Mam Sue, the matriarch, and the comical and naïve, Rev. Moseby, demonstrate their life-long faith in a God who brought them to old age. They have seen suffering and experienced pain – especially Mam Sue, whose son was murdered. Rev. Moseby is more comical than credible even though this is a dramatic script. He is presented as a stereotype of the aged black father figure who is “out-of-touch” with the real world around him. He is insistent that nothing will be disturbed if everyone prays.

Mam Sue opened the drama by quietly singing a hymn “. . . yes, yonder comes mah Lord” (Burrill 82). The song is simple but demonstrates her strong sense of religion, and the soft singing gives a feeling of comfort and peace in the home. Mam Sue consistently encourages her grandchildren to believe and “ put yo’ trus’ in de good Lawd!” (83). Mam never falters in her belief of a higher power, and she is certain that God is bringing her grandson home safely from the war. Her final request of John (before he ventures out to avenge his father’s death) is also faith-filled: “Pray to de good Lawd to tek all dis fiery feelin’ out’n yo’heart!” (Burrill 91). Burrill as well as several other authors enlists their elderly characters to represent the theme of faith in God. If they had lived and survived the “peculiar institution,” they needed faith to sustain them. Faith brought them to this time of their life, and they continue to ask for strength to survive the danger that surrounds them.

Rev. Moseby’s entrance into the drama is short but serves two simple purposes: He is an additional bearer of hope for the future through faith in God, and he creates a modicum of anxiety for the other characters. He quickly learns that the family never told John about his father’s death. “ Whut! Yuh mean to say yuh ain’t’ rite him ‘bout yo’ daddy,yit?”(Burrill 84). This revelation causes additional aggravation and tension for Millie, Lonnie and Mam. It also forces the action forward toward a decision of what needs to be done. Rev. Moseby is a passer-by, a good friend, and a man whose best days on the pulpit are behind him. His faith, however, is not diminished and like Mam Sue, he affirms the need for prayer. He naively encourages the members of the family to “...jes a-keep on trus’n an’prayin’ an evahthing’s gwine to come aw-right” (84). In this situation, however, his belief is unrealistic. The lives of black men are fragile when facing white

racism. Prayer is a panacea for hopelessness, and for those who pray, it is a means of gaining strength. Unfortunately, prayer rarely stops the mob violence, and lynchings were public “ rituals of sacrifice” and entertainment for a community. Prayer is personal and private while lynchings are very public.

The notion of lynching as a “ ritual of sacrifice” compares the event with the sacrifice of Christ on the Cross. There is an ancient belief that the souls of criminals are kept from rising on judgment day if their remains are burned or destroyed (Dray 82). The lynch mobs that burned and mutilated their victims by dismemberment and distribution of the body parts, were not only denying legal justice to the black men, they were also denying them their due with their Creator. The same “Christians “ who attended religious services and spoke of God, were “playing” God by their taking of innocent lives and denying them a Christian burial. This act was another means of exorcising the black community. Those church-going citizens who did not speak up about the murders, were complicit in them. For decades, the African Americans who were threatened with random killings, had no recourse. The church, the local authorities, the state administrators and the nation as a whole, ignored the violence and the deaths. It should be no surprise that prayer did not prevent the lynchings.

Mam Sue and Rev. Moseby show how the older generation live the faith and rely on their beliefs to sustain them. Their strength comes from their hope in a brighter future, if not on earth, perhaps in the next life. For the young people of the drama, however, faith is not as important. Neither Millie nor John have the faith or trust that God is even listening to them. Millie believes that God has forgotten blacks and she wonders why her father, a God-fearing man, was so brutally murdered:

“Sometimes I thinks that Gawd’s done fu’got us po’cullud people. Gawd didn’ tek no keer o’po’dad and he put his trus’ in Him!” Millie was very concerned for her brother’s welfare: “. . . But ef anything had a-happen’ to John I wuz’nevah goin’ to pray no mo’!” (Burrill 83). The lynching of her father and the racism she experiences has hardened Millie. John saw a great deal of misery in the war. If he had any faith before he went to war, he is questioning it now. By the end of the drama, when John is loading his guns, and his grandmother is begging him not to fight, he admits to her his feelings:

No, Mam Sue, I ain’t fu’got God, but I’ve quit thinkin’ that prayers kin do ever’thing. I’ve seen a whole lot sence I’ve been erway from here . . . I’ve seen men go into battle with a curse on their lips, and . . . come back with never a scratch; and I’ve seen men whut read Bibles befo’battle, an’prayed to live, left dead on the field . . . The Lawd does jes so much for you, then it’s up to you to do the res’fu’yourse’f. . . . This ain’t no time fu’ preachers or prayers! (Burrill 88- 91)

At the outset of the play, *Black Souls*, Andrew ‘s faith is not deeply rooted in God as much as being hopeful that the visitors to his school will support him. By the end of the drama, when he realizes his actions toward the white guests are insincere and obsequious, and his visitors are hypocritical, there is a distinct change in his belief in faith and a higher power. He begs God to forgive him for the lies he lives, and he gains a strength he did not have before: “ Dear Lord, fill me with the spirit of the Master” (Meyer, 170). With these words, Andrew becomes a man who bravely confronts Senator Verne and does so without fear of reprisal. Andrew is a “dynamic” character who changes his attitude and actions to become the strong man he truly is : “I still had my

manhood” (170). Andrew moves from the “needy dependent” to the self-sufficient independent” who won’t give in to the weakness of being the white man’s slave any longer.

The final theme to be examined is that of motherhood. Burrill’s *Aftermath* has Mam Sue as the caregiver and mother - figure to three grandchildren whose father has been killed. She is the survivor of the family lynching , the mother who will live with emotional and psychological pain for the remainder of her life. She is old fashioned and relies on her years of experience and faith to get her through each day.

Like many of the anti-lynching dramas, there is a conspicuous absence of a generation, in this case, the father and the mother of the children. No mention is made of the mother in the script. Koritha Mitchell terms this absence , *de-generation*, meaning “generational removal and prevention” (71). She explains further that lynching drama demonstrates how mob violence alters the structure of the black home. In many of the dramas being studied, this is the case. When there is a lynching, those still living suffer by remembrance of the event, loss of a care-giver or young child, changes in the family’s responsibilities, and fears of additional retaliation. Three children are orphaned when their father dies. Elderly Mam Sue cares for the children as her own. She is feeble and weary but continues to provide a home and security for them. Without her, the upbringing of the children is in question. In addition, she lives with the knowledge that her innocent son was tortured, burned and mutilated before hanging from a tree. To face this tragedy once in a lifetime is too much. To be witness to the deaths of her grandsons as well, is unthinkable. John takes his young brother with him when he leaves to face the mob. It is inevitable that both of them will be lynched. The generation that might provide a

continuation of the family name is destroyed forever. Mam Sue and young Millie are the survivors and victims of John's and Lonnie's lynchings. Both of these women will remember for the remainder of their lives, that three men in their family met with mob violence.

In *Black Souls*, the character of Phyllis is the supportive wife and loving mother of two children. Unlike the elderly Mam Sue, Phyllis is a younger, well-educated teacher who helps to operate the Magnolia school. She is intelligent, intuitive, and modern. In addition to her family, Phyllis exhibits a love and concern for her brother, David. She knows his personality, his desires, and how he enjoys his poetry and his former life in France. She is concerned that he is not content being a teacher and living in the South. Meyer is trying to show her readers or viewers the "best" of black family life. The characters are placed in a stable and normal family environment. Meyer is affirming the "successful, happy family" that many African Americans have, and is offering hope for those still trying to achieve that stability. She gives Phyllis a position of authority and worth – as a wife, a mother and a working woman. She is a role model for other black women with this affirmation and validation. Meyer is affirming the fact that there are African American women who are capable of achieving success on many levels.

In *Black Souls*, when the family is preparing for the visitors to arrive, Phyllis is concerned that her children stay clean in their new clothes. She reads them their favorite stories and gives them orders to "wash their hands" just as all mothers do (Meyer 154-55). Meyer uses these actions and her dialogue to make the character of Phyllis "credible and normal." This is to insure that the viewing audience recognizes how black families are as normal, as caring, and as loving as the white families. In contrast and juxtaposed to

this family stability, Meyer's lynching drama points to the threats of death and constant fear in which African Americans lived their lives on a daily basis. In a single moment, if they appear to make a false step (or are perceived to do so), their lives are forfeit.

In both dramas, the lynching events are not presented on stage. This is a characteristic of the genre and a typical "Greek" convention used in the ancient theatre. Violence is off stage and discussed by characters' dialogues or recitations by chorus members. In both Burrill's and Meyer's dramas, the stories of the relatives' lynchings are announced through women characters. In these dramas, Millie tells of her father's death, while Phyllis announces David's lynching to her husband. Another characteristic of the genre is the juxtaposition of the private environment of the family with the brutality of the public lynching arena. The dramatization most often takes place in the private home, until the victims are taken away and lynched off stage. The imagery of the murders is left to the imaginations of the audience. In the dramas of the later years, the brutality of the lynchings is presented through graphic dialogue of various characters .

David's senseless death injures the family, but the lynching, while a horrific event, does not destroy them. The family will never forget what happened, but they will learn to survive – as most families of lynching victims had to do. Meyer leaves the end of the drama with both Andrew and Phyllis "*clinging to each other*" (173) with a whisper of the spiritual "*Your Soul and Mine*" playing in the background. The use of the music is Meyer's way of showing that together, and with their faith, they will get through the pain. Burrill's *Aftermath*, however, ends abruptly with the women, Millie and Mam Sue, powerless to do anything , they stand at the door watching as two more men of their family go to their deaths. White supremacy brings them to this position, and they have no

recourse but to accept it and try to move forward. They are left to grieve and remember those they loved.

CHAPTER FOUR

ANALYSIS and COMPARISON TWO: The Protective Mother

“ ...it would be more merciful – to strangle the little things at birth” (Grimké 42)

1. Angelina Weld Grimké's *Rachel* (1916)
2. Georgia Douglas Johnson's *Safe* 1929
3. Ann Seymour Link's *Lawd, Does You Undahstan?* (1936)

The following three anti-lynching plays dramatize the lives and complications of women who are traumatized by the brutality of lynchings, and who make drastic and difficult decisions to “ protect” their children and themselves from facing an uncertain future .

Biography : Angelina Weld Grimké (1880 – 1958) **African American Author**

Angelina Weld Grimké was a journalist, teacher, playwright and poet who was prominent during the Harlem Renaissance and one of the first African American Women to have a play performed. She was born in Boston, Massachusetts, to an interracial family whose ancestors included slaveholders, abolitionists, and politicians. Her father, Archibald Grimké was a lawyer, the second black to have graduated from Harvard Law School. Her mother, Sarah Stanley, was a white woman from a family in the mid-west. Information about her mother is scarce due to the fact that shortly after Angelina's birth, Stanley left the Grimké household. Several letters of correspondence between mother and

daughter are held in Grimké family archives. Angelina, the only child of the marriage, was raised and lived with her father for whom she had great love, and on whom she was greatly dependent (Herron 2). Scholars suggest that because of Grimké's affection for her father, she may have experienced "restriction and oppression in her own self-consciousness as a lesbian" (Herron 2). Her personal sexual preferences would ultimately influence her writing as would the lack of a relationship with her mother (2). Motherhood is a major theme – certainly in *Rachel*, where a young female character has a close bonding with a loving mother, Mrs. Loving.

Grimké was well-educated, having attended Fairmont Grammar School in Hyde Park (1887-1894), Carleton Academy in Minnesota (1895), Cushing Academy in Ashburnham, Massachusetts, and Girls' Latin School in Boston. She was a teacher at the Armstrong Manual Training School and Dunbar High School in Washington, D.C. where she taught English until her retirement in 1926 (Herron 3).

According to Gloria Hull, "her life was one of racial liberalism . . . and a kind of unhappiness impelled her toward themes of dejection and loss . . . " (110). Hull also affirms that Grimké's social activism accounted for her propagandistic fiction and drama. She was reserved by nature and under the constant demands of her father to "do well and be good." Her privacy and reserve led her to write poetry and fiction as a release. Several of her works were published in *Opportunity* (Hull 136).

Rachel is Grimké's best-known work and one of literary propaganda and theatrical significance. Her play program offered this information: "This is the first attempt to use the stage for race propaganda in order to enlighten the American people

relative to the lamentable condition of ten million colored citizens in this free Republic” (Hull 117). Grimké’s intention was to show how American racial prejudice destroyed the lives of good, upstanding families. Grimké’s purpose in writing this specific scenario was to appeal to white women, whom she wished to rouse from their lack of action with regard to the lynching of blacks.

Grimké’s additional purpose in writing *Rachel*, was to eliminate the stereotype of “the darkey” by offering “the best type of colored people” to the world (118). It was produced in 1916, a year after the release of D.W. Griffith’s popular movie, *The Birth of a Nation*. Her play received mixed reviews due to the serious subject of lynching, but in general, it was well-accepted. *Rachel* was the first successful stage drama to be written by an African American, and she was criticized for appearing to advocate genocide. In a statement to her critics, Grimké assured them that was not her intention: “To the contrary, the appeal is not primarily to the colored people, but to the whites” (Hull 118). Grimké focused on motherhood in *Rachel* as the most “vulnerable point” in the white women’s armor . . . and she hoped that her drama might serve as an arena for interracial communication” (Perkins, Stephens 23). Grimké used details to convince white readers and viewers that black families were the same as whites. Her characters were capable, intelligent individuals who lived normal lives in modest homes, supported their family members , and engaged in the common activities of everyday life.

Even though she aimed her work at white women, there is doubt as to how many may have actually seen the drama. The play was not presented many times as a stage production. It was performed in Washington, D.C. in March, 1916, through affiliation

with the N.A.A.C.P., and subsequently presented again in New York City and Cambridge, Massachusetts, the following year (Hull 119).

Rachel is considered the drama that initiated the anti-lynching genre and represents the foundation of “depictions of racial protest” for realistic theatre. “The traditional historical importance of the play is that it is the first non-musical written, produced, and publicly performed by African Americans for which there is an extant script” (Perkins, Stephens 24). Although I will analyze all three of these dramas, I will concentrate on *Rachel* because of its significance to African American Theatre History.

Biography: Georgia Douglas Johnson (1880? – 1966)
African American Author

Very little is known about the early life of Georgia Douglas Johnson. Her birthdate is uncertain. Several sources suggest that she was born in 1886, but obituary statements indicate 1880 as the correct date. She was born on September 10, 1880 in Atlanta, Georgia, the daughter of George and Laura Camp (Hull 155). Details of her family and upbringing are scarce, but from her pictures, and her preoccupation in art with the theme of miscegenation, it appears that she was a black woman with white blood in her ancestry (155).

Johnson attended Atlanta elementary schools and continued at Atlanta University. After completing her studies there in 1896, she studied music at Oberlin Conservatory in Ohio, and the Cleveland College of Music, taking training in “music, harmony, piano and voice.” Her early adult years were spent teaching school and serving as an assistant principal in Atlanta (Hull 155-56). Her love of music was evident by the songs that she included in some of her writings.

On September 28, 1903, she married Henry Lincoln Johnson, and they had two sons, Henry Lincoln, Jr., and Peter Douglas. In 1910 they relocated to Washington, D.C. (Hull 156). This move proved to be beneficial for Johnson as it provided her opportunities for publication of her early poems. Writing, however, was not easy for women of the period, and Johnson was no exception. "The biggest obstacle of all was probably Link, who 'didn't think much of his wife's longing for a literary career' " (Hull 159). Her husband believed that a woman should be responsible for her home and her children and be content. Georgia was a wife and mother still living under the ideology of the cult of true womanhood. Gloria T. Hull, in *Color, Sex and Poetry* described the Johnson's relationship:

Georgia Douglas Johnson's husband and marriage were typically patriarchal . . . Her and Lincoln's situation was further exacerbated by the ten years' difference in their ages, which could have reinforced the 'master-child' dynamic of their husband-wife arrangement. (Hull 160)

A turning point in Johnson's life came at the death of her husband in 1925. Georgia now became responsible for the family's financial needs. Between the years 1924-1934, she held a series of public jobs to support her family. Her time for writing and pursuing a career became secondary priorities, but she continued to write when time permitted (Hull 165). By the late 1920s her career flourished and along with her poetry, she pursued drama. Newspaper articles, and literary journals gave her exposure and by 1928, she had five books of poetry and fiction available for publication.. She lived in Washington, D.C., in the same house for over fifty years until her death in 1966.

Georgia Douglas Johnson was known in the Washington, D.C. area for her Saturday evenings “at home salon” activities. Weekly she held gatherings where literary figures conversed, read, and discussed the current issues of the day as well as the newest works of artists. These “salon” gatherings contributed to her personal fame and gave Washington, D.C. a reputation for being a haven for the New Negro Renaissance (165).

Johnson is considered to be the most prolific of all playwrights who wrote dramas on lynching. None of her lynching plays, however, was published or produced in her lifetime due to the barriers she encountered: she was a woman, she was using the stage as social protest, and she was writing about a controversial subject. The plays that she submitted to the Federal Theatre Project (FTP), 1935-1939, were rejected on these grounds (Perkins, Stephens 100).

With *A Sunday Morning in the South* (1925), she became the first playwright to deal truthfully with the subject of alleged interracial rape of white women (Perkins, Stephens 99). She was also a pioneer in the genre by having the action of the lynching occur during the dramatic action. She used this technique to make the off-stage events as powerful as those on the set (Perkins, Stephens 99). In *Safe*, and *Blue-Eyed Black Boy* she used “sound, lighting effects, vivid description, and audience imagination to convey the horrors of lynching . . . ” (99). Johnson recognized that drama could have an impact on affecting change for her race’s condition. Unfortunately, a great deal of what she wrote is lost to the literary world (99).

Ann Seymour Link (1906 – 1984)
White Author

Ann Seymour Link was born and raised in Strawn, Texas, about one hundred miles west of Dallas. Her father left the family when Ann was very young leaving her to be raised by her mother, a very devout Southern Baptist. Ann was a student at Texas State College for Women, graduating in 1927, with a degree in Speech Arts and English. She was a teacher in the public schools of Palestine, Texas, where segregation was strictly enforced, and where she participated in productions of the local Little Theatre movement. She was married to Edwin William Link, with whom she had two sons, and she was an active member of women's groups in the Presbyterian Church. Seymour's son, Henry Link, described his mother as a "humanitarian . . . a firm believer in racial equality, and in treating all people with respect" (Perkins, Stephens 190).

Like many women authors of her time, she had difficulty in having her works published. During her career she continued to submit her plays for publication, but with little success. Her play, *Lawd, Does You Undahstan?*, won second prize in a contest on the theme of lynching, sponsored by the Association of Southern Women for the Prevention of Lynching. The drama was produced at Paine College in Augusta, Georgia, in 1936, and again at the Peachtree Christian Church in Atlanta in 1937. "The play received a positive response by the black Paine College audience and created tension by performing for the all-white audience at the Peachtree Church" (Perkins, Stephens 189).

Dr. Joseph T. Lacy (1915 – 1994), a student, educator, and cast member in Seymour's productions, expressed the importance and contribution of the anti-lynching dramas to the anti-lynching movement:

I believe the philosophy adhered to by such organizations as the Ku Klux Klan and others are actually the acting out of an attitude that says, 'if you cross this line, we'll kill you.' These plays brought to the attention of many people the evils of this attitude . . . They made you see just how easy it was to kill a person . . . They were like seed fallen on good ground. (qtd.in Perkins, Stephens 190)

Seymour's play was eventually published in Samuel French's *Twenty Short Plays on a Royalty Holiday* (1937), and in *Representative One-Act Plays By American Authors*, edited by Margaret Mayorga (1937) (Perkins, Stephens 189)

The Protective Mother

This second section considers the comparison and examination of themes in three lynching dramas – two written by black women authors, and one written by a white woman author. They dramatize the stories of three women who make drastic decisions in order to protect their children from a potential, future lynching. Due to the extreme violence and pervasive race prejudice that African Americans faced on a daily basis, there was a sense of futility for a long and safe life for young black males. There were women who found it more "compassionate" to take their children's lives, or to deny themselves a happy future, in order to save their male children from a horrific death.

In two of these particular anti-lynching dramas, the mother – figures kill their children in order to protect them. The idea of deliberately choosing infanticide as a means of saving a child from lynching is the most drastic of measures. The moral issue of killing another person is one for debate and one of the issues for which certain dramas are

criticized. No one has the right to take the life of another, regardless of the situation, but women in the black community knew the brutality of the lynch mob. Their rationale to kill their own child was for the purpose of preventing his suffering by pain, mutilation, burning and hanging. The act of infanticide is not novel, but was made current through the writing of Toni Morrison in her book, *Beloved*.

In the story, it is not a young man who is killed by his mother,(although Sethe does try to kill her sons as well), but her youngest daughter. Sethe tries to escape from slavery with her family but is found and trapped by their slave master. Knowing that the family will be caught and returned to their life of misery, Sethe kills her three-year –old daughter to prevent her from ever being molested or injured by the master as she, Sethe has been. Sethe is haunted by the violence and injury she suffered at the hands of the white men who abused her. She lives with the violence of slavery deeply imbedded in her being and has never known love – or truly been able to love. So how could a mother come to kill her child? Sethe is mentally and physically damaged as a result of her past life, that she wishes never to have her children live through the experience. In her mind, it is better to die quickly than suffer slavery’s brutality. There is also the issue of Sethe’s relationship to her children. As a slave mother, she bore the children, but they were never hers to keep and love. At any time they could be sold and taken from her. She had no rights, she had no life except what was given to her, and for all practical purposes, she had no children. She was cautiously warned one day to “dream small” – a reference to her inability to have those things she wants most because they will be gone from her. She has not been able to bond with her children in the same manner as a mother should. African American slave women cared for their master’s children before they could care

for their own. Sethe is caught between being a mother of her children and a slave who is unable to keep her children. Perhaps this double consciousness, along with the love she desperately wants to give, force her take her child's life. Sethe was traumatized by slavery and her life is full of the guilt she is unable to reconcile with her reason for killing – she loved too much.

The same theory may be applied to women who kill their children or refuse to have children due to lynching. Mothers give birth, and care and love their children until the day a man knocks on the door and accuses the child of a crime. Without any defense, the child is taken away and lynched. Lynching may be compared to slavery in terms of the outcome, and the act of infanticide may be the result of trauma for the mother as well as love for her child.

Grimké's purpose in writing was to make white audiences aware of the brutality the African Americans endured and “ . . . was designed to agitate for social change” (Mitchell 41). The nation was in the throes of extreme racial disruption when the play was produced. The violence toward African Americans that had transpired in years before was becoming even more extreme. This trend would continue through 1919, the “*Red Summer*.”

Georgia Douglas Johnson, the most prolific writer of the genre, and Ann Seymour Link, a member of the Association of Southern Women for the Prevention of Lynching, wrote for black audiences. Their purpose was to “affirm” the black culture, to encourage their own self-conceptions, and to have them identify themselves in the scripts regardless if there was sorrow or pain (Mitchell 41). Ann Seymour Link, though a white author,

sympathized with the victims who had experienced lynching. Her drama was in many ways a mirror image of Johnson's *Safe*.

The themes of motherhood, resistance, futility of black life, hypocrisy, faith, trauma and white supremacy are examined in *Rachel* by Angelina Weld Grimké, *Safe* by Georgia Douglas Johnson, and *Lawd, Does You Undahstan?* by Ann Seymour Link. Motherhood is a prominent theme in *Rachel*, a result, perhaps, of Grimké's upbringing and absence of her own mother (Perkins, Stephens 25). It is no accident that the main characters are named "Loving", and the three characters – mother, daughter *Rachel*, and son, Tom, are portrayed as a family who cares for and respects each other. This is made apparent by the visit of Mrs. Lane, who without knowing the family, assumes they will be kind and accommodating to her with such a meaningful name .

Grimké used specific details to convince white readers and viewers that black families were the same as whites. Grimké is presenting "the best type of colored people" (Gavin 59), all of whom were capable of caring for their homes, living normal lives, supporting one another, and engaging in the common activities of everyday life.

This drama is a long three-act with considerable dialogue and little action. Action is replaced by character dialogue, specific character types who represent certain themes, and specific stage directions that provide additional information. The setting was positioned in the North, and Grimké, was very deliberate in describing the apartment in which the Loving family lived: "*The scene is a room scrupulously neat and clean and plainly furnished*" (Grimké 27). The family lived on the third floor, an indication of their poor status, but they exhibited culture and learning through art that was displayed on

walls – Millet’s *The Reapers*, and Raphael’s *Sistine Madonna*, as well as books, and a piano with music. There are those scholars who view this scene as too unrealistic, but there were African Americans who had opportunities at this time period to be educated and appreciative of aesthetics. Clearly, Grimké herself had lived a very privileged life with an excellent education. She also had social and political acquaintances afforded to her by her father’s status and her great aunts’ activism. Her own life experiences would have been a natural segue to her realistic literary work. Those components which seem to be unrealistic, however, are the “flowery” language used by Rachel throughout the drama as well as Rachel’s strange behavior and ultimate decision never to marry or to have children of her own.

In comparison, Georgia Douglas Johnson’s *Safe* is set in a Southern town in 1893. A sitting room of a three-room cottage is the primary staging area. It is modestly furnished with a cot, a table, an oil lamp and a chair. Unlike Rachel’s home, there are neither pictures nor a piano that would indicate a cultured family. Baby garments, a basket of socks, and newspapers dress the area. It is important to note that Johnson sets her play in 1893 which offers a distance of twenty-three years between her work and *Rachel* written in 1916. The time difference demonstrates a growth in economics and education for characters in *Rachel*. The difference also indicates that African Americans (like Rachel’s family), have moved with the Northern Migration by this time. The characters speak in a country dialect in *Safe* as opposed to the proper English used in *Rachel* that is sometimes too melodramatic.

As Johnson’s *Safe* opens, Liza, the principal character, is sewing baby clothes. Her husband, John, is reading by an oil lamp while Liza’s mother works in the kitchen.

Johnson presents a normal family picture in a quiet and comfortable environment. This is in sharp contrast to the chaos and emotional distress that will transpire as the lynching scene begins. Johnson, like Grimké's *Rachel*, has characters engaged in daily activities of any normal family. Liza is pregnant with her first child, and her mother helps to prepare the home and Liza with the new arrival.

Ann Seymour Link's *Lawd, Does You Undahstan?* is again set in a Southern cabin in present time, 1936. This staging area, however, is the exterior of a rustic cabin rather than an interior setting as the two previous dramas. The exterior set includes a wood pile, a wash bench and pan, a bucket and dipper, and a fruit jar containing cyanide for killing bugs. A cane-bottom chair completes the set.

Aunt Doady, an elderly "wrinkled face" matriarch, sits on her doorstep. Her dialogue (and that of the other characters) is delivered in a Southern rural dialect. The characters of this folk drama are very poor with little education or any connection outside of their country confines (Link 191). The white author's setting is a distinct move from Grimké's Loving family. The Lovings used proper English and are located in a Northern city. While the Lovings are not wealthy, they maintain a slightly better economic status in the North, being in an apartment as opposed to a cabin in the woods. Johnson's characters are similar to Seymour's in terms of low economic status, their Southern locales, and their rural speech patterns.

In relation to economics, Rachel, Tom and Mr. Strong represent the younger, educated black generation, who are unable to find suitable employment that matches their qualifications. This inability to acquire meaningful employment is a result of the racial

prejudice. Grimké makes her point concerning racial injustice and white supremacy through these characters. African Americans' efforts are thwarted by whites who will earn employment positions before them even when the African Americans are qualified for the work. Tom, a character who demonstrates a vocal resistance to the existing racism, admits it isn't his lack of ability that denies him employment, it's because . . . "we're niggers, that's why . . ." (Grimké 38). Rachel cares for children while her mother sews and repairs clothing. Their friend, John Strong, also an educated man, finally resorts to waiting tables. He ultimately offers this opportunity to Tom with the rationalization that it provides a steady, albeit, small income. Grimké also points to the white supremacy theme by John's admitting that if he "caters" to the whites, they might leave a good tip. The characters' economic and social status is also defined by the location of their apartment on the third floor with the daily burden of climbing stairs. Rachel admits to John: "You see, when you're poor, you have to live on the top flat" (30). The Lovings, like most African American families of the period, moved North but continued to experience the repression and second-class citizenship status practiced in the South.

Mrs. Loving represents the older generation who has a minimal education – but sees to it that her children are offered more and experienced some of life's "finer" opportunities. She encourages her son to "always be a gentleman" and reminds Rachel, "be certain to practice your music" (31). She provides a stable home for her family even while earning a meager income. She is a strong woman who harbors a secret that causes her emotional trauma. When she finally divulges the secret to her family, she initiates a downward spiral that moves the drama forward and causes Rachel's undoing.

Georgia Douglas Johnson's characters in *Safe* are also poor but are happy and content in their small cottage. Their dialogue is a dialect – an indication perhaps of little education or the common speech of their residential area. Johnson, and Grimké, present deliberate characters performing common, daily activities – mother is working in the kitchen, Liza is sewing, and her husband is reading. All of this points to Johnson's showing African Americans in a realistic setting while living normal and active lives.

Ann Seymour Link in *Lawd, Does You Undahstan?* presents an even more poverty-stricken family, with Aunt Doady and Jim living in a cabin in 1936. Link's setting is rustic with attention given to the exterior of the home, and only a hint of what the interior may offer. This is a departure from the two previous works that use a simple room as a staging area. This change in the locale to the exterior is an indicator of their economic status. Their cabin is not large enough for their needs, so the necessary, large items are stored outside. Link, a white woman author, presents a more "needy" family as opposed to Grimké's or Johnson's. One can only speculate on Link's choice of staging specifics. Perhaps she sees all African Americans as this poverty-stricken, or she simply is more interested in a more economically disadvantaged population. The stage directions indicated "*dialect is only suggested . . .*" (191), indicating the rural location of the rustic cabin. There is no discussion as to Doady's income, but Jim, her grandson, enjoys nature and collects bugs and butterflies, preserving them in cyanide and selling them to a professor at a local college.

All three dramas included characters who were relatives, visitors or friends of each family, who offered assistance, advice, news and fellowship. Friends and relatives were deliberate inclusions by the authors to show readers and viewers that African

American families participated in communal activities, and were capable of relationships. Slavery had separated families and friends over the centuries. After slavery and beyond, it was vitally important for families to find one another and build their lives together. Dramatizing the family's "togetherness" references that tendency.

The themes of motherhood and trauma are very prominent in all three of these dramas. In each play, a mother, or a mother-figure, resists the joys of rearing or loving a child in order to save and protect him from a brutal death. The theme of motherhood is discussed in *Rachel* through the four characters of Rachel, Mrs. Loving, Mrs. Lane and Mrs. Strong.

Rachel, the protagonist, is child-like. From the outset of the drama, she is happy, engaging, idealistic, trusting and full of life. She is loved by her family and returns that love in full measure. She is enthralled with small children and devotes time to "playing games" with those who live in her building. She admits: "I think the loveliest thing of all the lovely things in this world is being a mother (Grimké 33). This is a definitive measure by Grimké to prove Rachel's deep desire for motherhood, and one that makes Rachel's final act of refusing marriage and children a major form of resistance toward the status quo. Rachel loves Jimmy (her adopted son) but is unwilling to bring more children into the world because of race prejudice. Did Grimké make too much of Rachel's desire to be a mother? Rachel's love of children and her constant articulation of that fact almost make her decision unrealistic, or at the very least, a bit childish. Rachel refuses to grow up and face life head-on. Her love of playing with children appears to keep her from meeting the problems around her as an adult. Granted, she must deal with race issues, but her life in the North is better than many in the South.

Rachel's line of dialogue concerning her wish to be a mother was critical for women of the period. African American women received validation with Rachel's comment. Unlike the white women of the period who were esteemed as pure, modest and worthy of honor, African American women were denounced as sexually promiscuous and unable to be considered as "true women." Under the myth of "the cult of true womanhood," black women were ignored as having any redeeming virtues and incapable of being suitable wives or mothers. Grimké presented four women in her drama who displayed devotion and concerns for their children. The name, "Mrs. Loving," is clearly a deliberate move by Grimké.

Rachel continues as a child-like figure by playing games with her brother and associating with young children in the neighborhood. Her mother comments: ". . . will she ever grow up?" and Rachel's response is: "not for a long time" (Grimké 29). Rachel eventually arrives at adulthood, with responsibilities and disturbing situations to face. She becomes fearful and reluctant to have her son (and herself) face an unpredictable future. She is depressed and detached from those around her and her mother admits: "Rachel, I cannot save you . . . from life" (34). The unreality of child's play that Rachel enjoys at the outset dissolves and becomes her adult reality of prejudice and the hate of racism. But unlike an adult, Rachel does not face her fears. She refuses to marry and have children and thus, denies herself and others the joys of love and family. She appears to live with self-inflicted wounds that her son, her family, and Mr. Strong could help to heal. Rachel is adamant, and in a sense, selfish to use this form of "resistance" that denied her what is her heart's desire. Her actions are more child-like than adult. Rather than take "her ball

and go home,” she should stand-up and refuse to be “bullied” by the status quo. Her “resistance” is hurtful to herself more than those who espouse white supremacy.

The theme of faith is represented through Rachel who considers motherhood to be “sacred” and refers at one point to a baby boy as being “an angel.” Rachel is so enraptured with the idea of being a mother, she claims to have heard a voice in a dream tell her “you are to be a mother to little children” (Grimké 34). She believes that God personally speaks to her and that is why she becomes obsessed with little ones. She prays to have her own “black or brown baby one day” (34). “Ma, dear, if I believed that I should grow up and not be a mother, I’d pray to die now . . .” (33). Grimké offers another example of validation here for the African American mothers. Rachel and the other women characters are Grimké’s vehicles for showing how important the role of motherhood is to the African American community. Rachel and the other women also express their faith in God by praying for His intercession and the safety of their children.

This particular scenario is in total contrast to Rachel’s later behavior and her ultimate decision, however. At the outset, she has a deep faith and a personal relationship with God, but as the drama progresses, she becomes more depressed, and does not pray or invoke the Lord for strength. Perhaps, knowing that she will not have other children, (her greatest wish is to be a mother), she feels that a part of her is dying. “. . . ma, dear, if I believed that I should grow up and not be a mother, I’d pray to die now” (Grimké 33). She does have a son, however, and they love each other. But her decision to remain celibate is drastic and not totally honest or realistic, and Grimké’s work is criticized for being melodramatic. Rachel’s behavior may be excessive in order for Grimké to establish

the reality that women were forced to make drastic decisions about their children and their lives when the fear of lynching threatened them.

Rachel cherishes her role as mother to Jimmy and she enjoys their time together. Rachel tells him “You musn’t grow-up” and she wonders, “what she will do when he does” (Grimké, 43). The stage directions show Rachel’s great happiness: “*Rachel loses all self-consciousness and seems to bloom in the children’s midst*” (52).

Rachel kisses Jimmy, washes his hands, and tells him “he’s good enough to eat” (44). As is typical with a child who is learning from his mother, he is congratulated on every success. Jimmy takes his own bath and puts on his own shoes – albeit on the wrong feet, but Rachel is proud of her little boy. All of the above presents the family as “normal” and engaged in interactions between parent and child. This convention of presenting simple acts of daily life is characteristic of the anti-lynching genre. Rachel continues to enjoy her life until a series of revelations and incidents related to the hatred and prejudice of racism, confront her and cause her an emotional decline.

Motherhood and trauma are also represented by the character of Mrs. Loving, the matriarch of the family. She “dragged and carried” her children away from the South after the lynching of her husband and eldest son (Perkins, Stephens 41). She rears them in the North hoping to protect them from Southern violence, and she sees to their educations and provides a good home.

As a concerned mother, Mrs. Loving never tells the children about their family’s lynching event. She waits until she feels they are old enough to understand the gravity of the situation. Rachel and Tom suspect that their father and brother did something that

embarrassed the family, and that was the reason their mother never discussed anything about their absence (Grimké 33). The children are unaware of the heartbreak and trauma their mother has privately endured over the past ten years. Mrs. Loving was traumatized by the brutal deaths of her husband and young son. The trauma is made obvious by Grimké's descriptions of Mrs. Loving's body language, and the characters' dialogue concerning Mrs. Loving's strange behavior . However, even with the trauma that has plagued her for so long, she is a survivor and moved forward with her life and with her children.

There is a distinct contrast between Mrs. Loving's behavior after her family's lynching and that of Rachel when she learns of the incident. Mrs. Loving eventually gathers strength to bury her husband and son, leave their home with her children, and start a new life in another region. She remains strong and even while suffering silently, she manages to provide a solid upbringing and a comfortable home . Rachel, on the other hand, when learning of her father's and brother's deaths, and without the problems that her mother faced, loses her energy for living and dismisses beautiful offers that are presented to her.

Little Jimmy is brought to the Loving apartment to meet Mrs. Loving and Tom. When Mrs. Loving sees him for the first time, she becomes frozen in place with eyes fixed on him. Grimké describes her actions: “ . . . *her body stiffens; her hands grip her sewing convulsively . . . she makes no sound*” (36). The children decide that their mother's reaction is due to being tired or overworked. They learn later that Jimmy strongly resembles their brother, George, when he was a small child. Mrs. Loving is

seeing an image of her “dead son” standing before her. Young Jimmy brings a flood of frightful memories back to their mother.

At another point of the drama, at the family dinner, Tom and Rachel are playfully teasing each other and debating over the candy dessert they share. Mrs. Loving, usually a quiet and composed woman, uncharacteristically and sharply screams at them to “stop!” (38). The two children obey, but look quizzically at each other. Part of Mrs. Loving’s outburst is due to the noise and chaos around her. More importantly, it is a reaction to the trauma she experiences on this particular day each year.

Grimké reveals the secret of the lynching through Mrs. Loving’s descriptions. In her dialogue, Grimké expresses many of the themes of this study in a short, yet powerful monologue by Mrs. Loving. White supremacy, faith and hypocrisy are criticized by her confession. She states that their family was lynched by “Christians in a Christian land. . . all church members in good standing – the best people” (Grimké 40). This is Grimké’s indictment against religion and those who espouse “faith in God,” as well as the nation itself that advocates freedom, but refuses to recognize the black community as free and equal. The “land of the free and the home of the brave” is complicit – guilty of murder without recourse - for not taking action against the brutality of lynching. White supremacy rules the land rather than law and justice.

Hypocrisy and resistance are apparent in Mrs. Loving’s description of their father and brother. She tells them to be proud of both, especially their father: “He was a saint . . . he was big-bodied – big souled . . . and the wrongs of the Negro – ate into his soul. He was utterly fearless . . . there never lived anywhere – or at any time – any two whiter

souls – or more beautiful souls”(Grimké 41). Grimké uses irony when describing the “whiteness” of the souls of the black family juxtaposed against the white men whose “black souls” murdered them.

Mrs. Loving continues to describe the unfolding of the lynching. Their father, the owner of the local newspaper, denounced the town’s mob in an article for lynching an innocent black man weeks before, while being aware that a white man committed the crime. Through the cowardice and “complicity” of the community, their father received an anonymous letter calling him to retract his statements. “If he refused, his life was threatened” (40). Mr. Loving “resisted” their threats and instead, wrote another article more volatile than the first. Through all of this, his wife begged him to temper his actions for fear of reprisal. Mr. Loving refused to be intimidated by the white citizens, and on that evening, a mob of masked white supremacists “broke down the front door and made their way to our bedroom” (41). Grimké is very deliberate in painting this picture of personal intrusion. A person’s home is a sacred and private refuge. Grimké makes a definitive indictment against “the assumed right, privilege and arrogance” of the white, masked invaders. Their “assumption” that they are above the law and can forcefully enter another family’s home is absurd and yet, this is a reality for all African Americans. This was not uncommon – especially during the period of the Nadir, when white supremacy was associated with the Ku Klux Klan.

Mr. Loving used overt resistance against the intruders by shooting four of them as they broke down his door. He was eventually “overpowered and dragged out” (Grimké 41). George also resisted the mob by attempting to protect his father. Both were led away to the lynching tree. Mrs. Loving, a grieving and traumatized witness to the scene,

remembered George's final words to her: "Ma, I am glad to go with Father" (41). Mrs. Loving was helpless to do anything. "I could only nod to him" (41). Grimké's use of the formal address of "Father" informed the audience of George's great admiration and respect for his father. George's words also spoke to the upbringing he had as a young child. Grimké's disciplined upbringing with a strict, and respected father is reflected in this scene with George and his parents. Grimké expresses the helplessness of the woman - a mother left behind when the men were taken away. There was a finality - and a futility- in the situation. African Americans lived in fear that one simple "situation" could result in an accusation, arrest and death. If they (or others) resisted or retaliated in any way, they would be led away as well.

Mrs. Loving describes only the apprehension of her family and not the actual lynching, common in most anti-lynching plays. Mrs. Loving's story left the actual lynching details to the imagination of the audience. Her emotional speech creates "tension, anxiety and empathy" for her situation and that of her family: "... Your father was finally dragged out ... my little seventeen-year-old George tried to rescue him. Your father begged him not to interfere ... It ended in their dragging them both out"(Grimké 41).

Mrs. Loving's "trauma" is caused by her constant memory of the details of that night. She has reoccurring dreams of the sounds she heard: "The only sounds were the faint rustle of leaves and the 'tap-tapping of the twig of a tree' against the window. I hear it still - sometimes in my dreams. It was the tree - where they were" (41). This particular scene and Grimké's reference to a tree creates the vision of Christ on the cross and presents a lynching as a sacrificial ritual. But the sacrifice took its toll and Mrs. Loving

admits that her faith in God was challenged. She wasn't able to pray when the men came. "I couldn't for a long time – afterwards" (41).

One of the most melodramatic scenes , but one that is very telling of the relationship of child to mother, expresses the love and affection Rachel has for Mrs. Loving who lives with great pain: "*Mrs. Loving bowed her head in her hands . . . Tom controls himself with an effort . . . Rachel creeps softly to her mother, kneels beside her and lifts the hem of her dress to her lips . . .*" (41). Grimké creates this dramatic scene to share the emotions of the family with their audiences. The African American mothers, grandmothers, aunts and sisters are as appreciated and loved by their children and families as are white women. Grimké's work is an invitation for white women to admit commonalities of their lives in spite of racial differences. The "cult of true womanhood" did not apply to African American women. It was necessary for black women authors to portray scenes that negated the myth that African American women were incapable of loving. . The beautiful and rewarding gifts of motherhood were staged as well as the pain and suffering of violence and trauma.

After Rachel learns of her father's and brother's lynchings, she recognizes the pain her mother endures and wonders how a "world so beautiful" can be so cruel, and how does her mother manage to continue. Rachel is more conscious of her mother's pain when she discovers that her seven-year-old son, Jimmy, is called "a nigger" and he is bruised when stones are thrown at him (Grimké 59 -60).

A visit from a stranger causes Rachel additional emotional distress. Mrs.Lane, another figure of motherhood tells her story to Rachel. She expresses the themes of

complicity, hypocrisy and futility due to white dominance and hatred. Mrs. Lane, a black woman, and a caring mother, notices the name “Loving” on Rachel’s door and asks permission to speak with her. “Loving! It’s a strange name to come across – in this world – I thought perhaps, you might give me some information” (55). Mrs. Lane’s words indicate that she has no one to speak with and feels no compassion is present in the world for her. Grimké describes her in this way: “*Mrs. Lane, a black woman poorly dressed, and a little ugly black child enter . . . There is the stoniness of despair in the woman’s face. The child is thin, nervous, suspicious and frightened*” (Grimké 55). Mrs. Lane is concerned as to how colored children are treated in the neighborhood school. Rachel explains that her Jimmy attends and is very happy. It isn’t until later that Rachel learns of the verbal and physical attacks on Jimmy.

Mrs. Lane then asks what color is Rachel’s little boy. Rachel replies, “brown.” Mrs. Lane continues, “Are there any blacks there?” (55). Grimké is making a point with this scene: “Prejudice” exists even within a particular race and Mrs. Lane is worried for her daughter’s physical and emotional welfare because of her dark skin. Mrs. Lane is looking for a school where her black daughter will be more comfortable - where there are others like herself, as opposed to the school she attends where the faculty and students are predominantly white and cause problems for the African American children. The family lives in an adjacent neighborhood, but she explains that they are being forced to move to protect Ethel:

My husband and I are poor - we’re ugly and we’re black. Ethel looks like her father more than she does like me . . . We had a nice little home – and the three of us were happy. Now we’ve got to move.(Grimké 56)

Mrs. Lane proceeds to tell Rachel that Ethel has been in school for two weeks and has been bullied and intimidated by students, and even her teacher. Because Ethel is not an assertive child, she is seated in the back of the room. Students laugh at her, point at her, stare and draw away from her. The teacher's cruel attitude is license for students to bully Ethel. When asked if she has a pet, Ethel answered, "Yes, a blind puppy" (57) at which the teacher and students broke into more laughter. Ethel, in a quiet voice replied: "... I'm glad he's blind ... If he saw me, he might not love me anymore" (57). Mrs. Lane continues:

... one child came up and ran her hand roughly over Ethel's face. She looked at her hand and Ethel's face and ran screaming back to the others, it won't come off ... one boy spoke up loudly: 'I know what she is, she's a nigger! (Grimké 57)

Ethel isn't permitted to join the students at recess because "God made her ugly and black" (57). Mrs. Lane complains to school authorities but nothing is done, and Ethel is afraid to leave her mother. "I'm not going to leave you, Ethel. I'll be right here" (55). The teacher, students and school administrators are racists and exercising their sense of superiority over a child who is defenseless.

There was a deep expression of futility in this scene. Mrs. Lane's admission of being poor, ugly and black read like a death sentence. It is everyone's desire to be loved, to be attractive, and to have a sense of worth. To admit that you had none of those gifts was deeply painful. Grimké was speaking to every white audience member by saying, "I had no choice in the color of my skin"(Grimké 57). When asked if Mrs. Lane has other

children, she responds: “Hardly! If I had another – I’d kill it. It’s kinder! Don’t get married” (58). Her statement was a definite response of futility and a frightening thought for Rachel.

The hypocritical teacher is the poorest of role models. She is complicit in perpetrating and encouraging Ethel’s bullying. She, along with the students and the authorities, represent the hypocrisy and complicity of white dominance which drive African Americans to devalue themselves. It was, therefore, imperative that women dramatists validated the black community when possible.

Following this incident and the bullying of her own son, Jimmy, Rachel grows ever conscious of the uncertain future of her race, especially little boys. She becomes detached from her family, and gradually wonders if her desire to be a mother is fair to children. Her depression, and strange behavior become so acute, that she refuses Mr. Strong’s marriage proposal and vows never to have children: “They have begged me . . . not to bring them here” (75). Her “thoughts” that young children actually talk and beg her not to be born, is a strong indication that Rachel is not thinking rationally by this point in the drama.

Rachel realizes that if Jimmy lived in the South, he could meet the same fate as George. The knowledge that African American males are senselessly killed adds more concern for Rachel and so, she speaks to her mother: “. . . the South is full of tens, hundreds, thousands of little boys - who one day may be – and some of them with certainty – Georgie?” Mrs. Loving simply replies, “Yes, Rachel” (Grimké 42). Rachel worries for her own son, Jimmy, because he attends school one day and asks: “Ma, what

is a nigger?" (59). She asks him how he learned the word and he responded that someone called him that name and threw rocks at him. Jimmy is seven years old and not yet aware of the racism surrounding him. He has bruise marks on his back that are physical signs of Rachel's emotional pain. Rachel cries for her son and grows angry at the insensitivity of the world. Her thoughts of motherhood are questioned. She articulates probably her most telling speech – criticizing racism, and exposing the themes of motherhood, faith, hypocrisy and futility of black life:

... Everywhere throughout the South, there are hundreds of dark mothers who live in fear, terrible suffocating fear, whose rest by night is broken, and whose joy by day in their babies on their hearts in three parts – pain . . . How horrible! Why, it would be more merciful – to strangle the little things at birth. And so this nation has deliberately set its curse upon the most beautiful – most holy thing in life – motherhood! Why it makes you doubt God. (Grimké 42)

After Jimmy is chased, he is frightened to return to school. Each night he has nightmares and cries in his sleep. His behavior prompts more depression and futility for Rachel as well as anger that her innocent child suffers because of racism:

We are all blighted; we are all accursed – all of us – everywhere we whose skins are dark – our lives blasted by the white man's prejudice. And my little Jimmy, seven years old, that's all – is blighted, too. (73)

Rachel refuses marriage, children, and her dreams of a beautiful life. Her conscious denial of these desires is a direct result of the depression, trauma, fear, and futility she experiences due to race prejudice. She will not have young children loved and cared for only to see them grow to be captured, tortured, and burned because of their black skin. She refuses happiness for herself by her decision. When John proposes to Rachel he gives her a dozen red roses. She decides that she will not bring a child into the world, and in anger, she tears the roses apart – crushes and destroys them and throws them to the floor. The symbolism of “little children” as roses “being ripped apart” is a metaphor for children’s lives being destroyed by racism and lynching’s brutality. John questions Rachel about the incident: “Why did you kill the roses?” Rachel responds: “Don’t you believe – it - a - kindness sometimes – to kill . . . ? ” (Grimké 73). Grimké’s purposes are to show how deep a mother’s love and heart ache can be, as well as demonstrate the psychological ramifications of depression.

While Rachel is genuinely concerned for the welfare of Jimmy and other children, her strange reactions to others and her decision to remain celibate - especially when she has been intent on being a mother – seem incongruous. She appears to be incapable of facing her blessings. She has a loving family, a man who wishes to marry and care for her, as well as a child who brings her joy. Her attitude is that of a child who “takes his ball and goes home” when life becomes too difficult. There are others of her race who have more severe issues to deal with than Rachel, but she fails to recognize them.

Her son is bullied, but her long-term decision is too dramatic. To deny herself, her family and Mr. Strong the happiness that all can share together is a drastic move, and maybe a selfish one at that. Is she truly trying to protect Jimmy and other children, or is

she trying to protect herself from the suffering that mothers endure? After all, she sees the pain her mother has carried for years. Perhaps Rachel does not wish to experience the same.

Rachel gains her composure knowing that she made this choice. She says, “No sunshine – no longer laughter – always darkness. That is it! . . . my little children – I shall never see you now . . . Honey, I’m coming – Ma Rachel loves you so” (77-78).

Motherhood and resistance are combined when discussing Mrs. Loving’s actions after the lynching. Recognizing that she cannot raise her children in the South, she dresses her sleeping children and during the night carries them five miles to a friend’s home. She remains there until she has the family “laid comfortable at rest” and then she proceeds to move north (41). She refuses to rear her children under the threat of violence and death, and she is willing to take a chance on a new life for all of them.

Mrs. Loving always provides advice and wisdom to her children. She warns Rachel about racism and white supremacy in her discussion of Mary Shaw, a white girl who befriends Rachel. In recent months, Mary has neither spoken with nor visited Rachel. Mrs. Loving suspects Mary Shaw’s absence is racially motivated and she admits: “Rachel . . . if Mary Shaw didn’t teach you a lesson – someone else would. They don’t want you . . . when you and they grow up. You may have everything in your favor – but they don’t dare to like you” (Grimké 38). Rachel and Mary were friends as children. As they grew into adulthood, the white community refused to associate with the blacks. Segregation, even in the North, kept blacks and whites apart.

Tom is the character who “resists” the status quo. In the early part of the drama, he tries out for the football team and makes the position of quarterback, a position that a white student expects to win. Tom gives the good news to his family, but he also explains that the white boy in school is not well-liked and talks about Tom behind his back. Tom’s mother and sister are happy for him but can’t escape their fears that Tom can be in danger as a result of his success. The white student calls Tom “a nigger” and in retaliation, Tom resists the insult and blackens the boy’s eye: “. . . No one likes him. His father is in ‘quod’ doing time for something . . . One of the fellows says he has a real decent mother, though . . . he called me a ‘Nigger’ today. If his face isn’t black, his eye is . . .” (Grimké 37). Tom’s dialogue confirms that the boy’s father is in jail, but his mother is “decent,” which is another validation of motherhood, and Grimké’s means of demonstrating that white men are capable of being incarcerated for crimes when the law prevails. Also, it points to the fact that not all men in jail are “black brutes” as is the mind-set of that time. The scene also demonstrates that it is the mother – the wife, the woman of the home, who suffers when the men of the family are involved in lynchings or other criminal activities. Tom admits: “She hardly speaks about her husband. Hard on her, isn’t it?” (Grimké 37).

In several scenes of the drama, Tom, who exhibits resistance toward the white community, articulates his resentment of white supremacy. One of his angriest speeches deals with his lack of personal opportunities:

. . . In the South . . . Their children (our ages, some of them) are growing . . . and they are having a square deal handed out to them- college, position, wealth, and best of all, freedom, without galling restrictions, to work out

their own salvations. . . . Look at us and look at them. We are destined to failure – they to success. (Grimké 49)

In the 1920s, African Americans in both the North and the South found themselves discriminated against when searching for employment. Most were resigned to find menial jobs with poor wages even when their qualifications or experience confirmed their abilities. The white population, captured the most lucrative and stable employment opportunities. The majority of the black population did not share in the same economic success.

As a result of his “being black,” John Strong realizes that he will never arrive at the economic level for which he is qualified. Racism denies him future success, and as a result, he is resigned to fate and refuses to “resist” what he cannot change. His name “Strong” is curious in that it may define his personality and can be read two ways: he is strong enough to trust himself and his abilities, thus he accepts life as it is , and chooses an alternative position that forces him to defer to whites – but provides possible longevity, promotions and a regular paycheck; or, he isn’t strong enough to fight back and accepts what is available regardless of what it is. He does not worry about proving his masculinity, he is willing to live safely and comfortably with the status quo. He is passive in his resistance while Tom is vocally overt and though he wishes to prove his manhood, he does it in private.

Unlike Tom who resists the “ways of the world,” and is determined to “fight back” if and when possible, John Strong accepts his position.. He is willing to cater to the whites at the restaurant, and when Rachel refuses his proposal, he does not fight to keep

her. His reaction to her refusal is “lukewarm” at best. He does not fight for her considering his methodical planning of their home and life together. In his proposal to Rachel, John’s calm manner and dialogue give insight to his personality:

JOHN: . . . somewhere there’s a big strong man – with broad shoulders. And he’s willing and anxious to do anything – everything, and he’s waiting very patiently. Little girl, is it to be yes or no? . . . It’s not fair Rachel to take you at your word . . . You’re sick; you’ve brooded so long – you’ve lost your perspective . . . Think it over for another week and I’ll come back.

RACHEL: No, I can’t think any more.

JOHN: You realize – fully – you’re sending me – for always?

RACHEL: Yes.

JOHN: ...It’s settled, then, for all time – ‘Goodbye! (Grimké 77)

On the other hand, it could be argued, that he is “Strong” by recognizing that fighting back for his rights is a dangerous tactic that could have him and others killed. He feels responsible to care for his mother, and if he does retaliate and is killed, she will be without support. John is a good son to his mother, but from his dialogue, it is possible that he sees his position in life as the “caretaker” of Rachel as well. He establishes the home, chooses the furniture and is “inviting” her to join him. As a married couple, it is more appropriate for her to “establish the home” or better yet, for them to do it together.

He doesn't see her as an equal, he sees her as the "little girl" and even calls her by that name. Perhaps he recognizes that her strange behavior makes her more of child than a rational adult. Rachel senses that he is trying to force her into a position where she cannot live. She has been directed for years by white supremacy's segregation - where to ride, where to sit and always treated unfairly. It is time for her to "resist" directions and make decisions for herself. She is living between being a child and refusing to be an adult. Perhaps she feels safer as a child where she doesn't need to experience the pain of being a mother who loses a child.

Grimké inserts the descriptions of the proud mother , Mrs. Strong, and her good son, John, to demonstrate once again, the worth of the black male and to validate the black female. Unlike the white "myth" that black men are "brutes and rapists," Grimké tries to debunk the myth by affirming them in the characters of Tom and John. While John appears to be "patronizing," the author is trying to demonstrate the good intentions of his character.

The theme of resistance is also represented by Tom. His resistance is most often articulated rather than physically demonstrated. Tom is a determined, moral, conscientious, hard-working man who helps to provide for his family. When issues of racism confront him, however, he is vocal and quick to respond. Tom is aware that Mary Shaw, a white friend of Rachel, no longer associates with her. The last time Tom saw her "she made believe she didn't see me" (Grimké 38). In anger and frustration, he is determined never to speak or bow to her again: "I guess we can still go on living even if people don't speak to us" (38).

Mrs. Loving is adamant that her children be courteous to others. When she demands that Tom “be a gentleman,” he boldly responds: “If being a gentleman means not being a man – I don’t wish to be one” (38). Black men are unable to overtly express their strength . They are caught between trying to defend their rights (which is nearly impossible since they have few), while at the same time trying to protect their families and homes. They know that to be overly aggressive against any white citizen will be suicide. Tom wants to “ be the man of the house” for his family in the absence of his father. Tom is proud of his father’s life and his brother’s courage when he learns of their deaths, and he is determined to resist the obstacles placed upon him and make something of himself in honor of his father and brother:

I want you to know, Ma, . . . how proud I am. why, I didn’t believe two people could be like that – and live. And then to find out that one – was your father – and one – your own brother. It’s wonderful! I’m not much yet, Ma, but I’ve just got to be something now. (Grimké 41)

His determination – coupled with his pent-up anger and desire to be successful, urge him forward. Even Rachel recognizes that her brother is strong: “Ma, don’t worry about Tom . . . he’s gone . . . He doesn’t show the white feather” (45). White supremacy taught Tom at an early age that his life was not equal to whites. Both he and his sister graduated from school. Tom was an electrical engineer. Rachel did ironing and worked with small children when possible. Tom had no job, but searched for seven months and earned a meager salary. His lack of success created Tom’s sense of futility and his loss of faith in a benevolent God:

It seems our educations aren't of much use to us: we aren't allowed to make good – because our skins are dark . And, in the South today, there are white men. They're well-dressed, well-fed, well-housed; they're prosperous in business . . . Look at us – and look at them. We are destined to failure – they, to success. Their children shall grow up in hope; ours, in despair . . . They're nothing but low, cowardly, bestial murderers. The scum of the earth shall succeed. –God's justice, I suppose!(Grimké 49)

Tom's mother tries to convince him to keep faith in God. Tom only replies, "I'll try, Ma" (49). Mrs. Loving also lost faith when her family was murdered. She understood Tom's sentiments and hoped that he would believe again – just as she had ultimately been able to do.

Eventually, John Strong suggests that Tom come to work at his restaurant. Strong realizes that Tom is educated , but after months of searching, Tom admits to him: “. . . a colored man hasn't even the ghost of ghost . . . finding a job!” (51). Initially, Tom “resists” Strong's offer to work as a waiter. He determines that he will not “bow and scrape” to the white racists. John understands Tom's anger and says the offer is open if Tom should ever change his mind. He is willing to train Tom and offer a regular salary. Eventually searching was “futile” and Tom puts his pride aside. He accepts John's offer, becomes a waiter – and in order to earn “good tips,” he is accommodating to the whites who frequent his establishment – something he had vowed never to do. The futility of job hunting gives way to financial needs and common sense.

Rachel also recognizes that for her, job searching is futile. She admits to John that she will not find a better position than what she has. "There's no more chance for me than for Tom . . . for those of us with dark skin . . . We make the best of it . . . it could be worse . . . we manage to stay in the poor house" (Grimké 54). White supremacy generates the evils that repress the blacks.

Resistance is dramatized by two of Rachel's actions: She resists John's advances and his offer of marriage. She feels he is too domineering. "It's as if you're trying to master me" (54). Grimké is arguing for all black women in this scene. Black women are seen as "slaves," and are "mastered" by men – slave owners. Other women (black and white) lived under the thumb of patriarchy. *Rachel* denounced the repression that all women endured for centuries and is showing the face of the New Woman emerging.

John wishes to take Rachel to the theatre but she refuses. "I don't want to go where they put you off by yourself as though you had leprosy" (54). This is a direct indictment against white supremacy, segregation, and the hypocrisy of the nation. African Americans are not permitted to sit near or be near the white community. These rules are established by the nation that espouses "life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness." Rachel, by this time in the drama, is experiencing her mother's words: "I can't protect you from the world" (Grimké 34). Rachel is living those words through racism.

Grimké through Rachel, identifies the trauma and futility that African American men and women (especially women) endure due to race prejudice, violence, terrorism and death that haunts them. She points to the extreme measures of "resistance" that are taken by mothers who find no good solution to their fears of mutilation, burning and

lynching. While Grimké's writing may be melodramatic, many of the true stories of the twentieth century's sadistic lynching rituals were beyond normal human comprehension.

Rachel is a drama of great importance and was produced in 1916 when motherhood was idealized. The ideology, however, was not applied to black women. Grimké tried to show the white women of the world that both races had motherhood in common and the tragedies of lynchings left "profound effects on the lives of all families" (Perkins, Stephens 24). Grimké's *Rachel* "represents the foundation of a unique American dramatic genre . . ." (Perkins, Stephens 25).

In Johnson's *Safe*, themes of motherhood are represented by Liza, a mother-to-be, and her own mother who attends to her needs. *Safe* is a very short protest drama, and the major conflicts revolve around Liza's trauma, which develops as a result of her witnessing a lynching and forcing her decision to kill her child.

As the drama opens, Liza is sewing baby clothes and preparing for the birth of her first child. Johnson includes Liza's mother as a "helper" for her daughter. As in most households, it is common for another adult to be attentive to the new mother when time for birth nears. Johnson makes a point here that African American women care for each other and have similar traditions.

Liza's mother, like several others in these dramas, is elderly and weak. She speaks in a rural dialect and she shows concern for her family as well as the residents in their town. Liza's mother, after a long life, knows her place in the world. She is an African American woman and she knows the rules she must follow. Her scenes in the drama presents her as the doting and consoling mother to her daughter and son-in-law.

Liza's physical description is limited. Beyond her pregnancy, very little information is given about her physicality. Liza is immediately engaged in sewing her baby's clothes. She soon learns that a seventeen-year-old boy is arrested for hitting his white boss. In a dispute over wages, young Sam Hosea is struck by his boss. In an act of "resistance," and quick anger, Sam hits back and is quickly placed in jail by white racists of the community. Koritha Mitchell, in *Living With Lynching* identified this story as a retelling of an incident involving a boy, Sam Hose, who in 1893 was lynched when he was suspected of killing his boss (161).¹⁰ Liza demonstrates "motherly concern" for Sam through her dialogue:

He was a nice motherly sort of boy . . . Twant no woman mixed up in it, was it? . . . I been setting here thinking 'bout that poor boy Sam – him working hard to take kere of his widder mother . . . trying to be a man and stan up for hisself, and what do he git? A slap in the face. (Johnson, *Safe* 111-12)

Liza's concern is genuine and as the play progresses, her fears for Sam evolve into worry for her own child. In her short dialogue, Liza expresses the theme of resistance by Sam, and also presents a cautionary lesson to readers or viewers – overt resistance against whites is dangerous. Life's reality is brought to the theatrical venue. Hannah, the female character who explains the mob actions in the town makes that very point: "Chile, that ain't nothing – if he gets off with a slap. These white folks is mad – mad – he done hit a white man back" (Johnson, *Safe* 112). Liza becomes anxious and asks questions that disturb her family: "What's little nigger boys born for anyhow? I sho hopes mine will be

a girl. I don't want no baby to be hounded down and kicked 'round. No, I don't want to ever have no boy chile" (112).

Johnson delivers a powerful and frightening statement with Liza's admission. To deny a child's birth is a strong refusal of life – a life that the mother still carries. Any mother who is about to deliver her baby wishes her child to be healthy. Liza's statement is a total reversal of a mother's hopes. Johnson makes several observations through Liza: The life of a black boy is uncertain and like *Rachel*, it is better to deny life than to have a child live to be tortured. She also identifies the role of the mother who rears a child only to see him dragged away to die. A mother's trauma never goes away and she is left to grieve for her son. Liza's mother chastises Liza and uses her "faith" to do so: "Hush, honey, that's a sin. God sends what He wants us to have – we can't pick and choose" (Johnson, *Safe* 112). Like other authors mentioned in this study, Johnson uses the elderly character to represent "faith in God."

Johnson uses a variety of theatrical conventions to enhance the drama. In this specific case, gun shots are heard, as mob noises and horses' footfalls create tension for the scene – and for Liza's response. She becomes more and more alarmed at what is transpiring – Sam is going to be lynched. Finally, she hears the young boy screaming for his mother. The stage directions read: . . . *a voice rises above the men outside shouting,* "Don't hang me, don't hang me! I don't want to die! Mother! Mother!" (113). With these words, Liza is undone. Johnson gives every mother in her audience a moment to empathize with this scene by mentally positioning their own children in the situation. The voice of a child screaming for his mother creates a strong mental picture for everyone – especially women. One of the characteristics of Johnson's work is her use of vivid oral

description. With this emotional device, she not only causes Liza to be broken, but undoubtedly forces the audience to react sympathetically to Sam's dilemma. She leaves the details of lynching, however, to be imagined by the audience. Liza breaks down "*crumpling up on the chair shivering, her teeth chattering*" (Johnson, *Safe* 113). As the screams grow louder, Liza reacts to them: "Oh my God, did you hear that poor boy crying for his mother? He's jest a boy – jest a boy – jest a little boy!" (113).

Besides her worrying for the young victim, Liza is also concerned for her husband, John. He walked into town and has not returned. She becomes hysterical with the circumstances building up around her. Worried for her health, the doctor is called and Liza, trembling, paces as she listens to noises in the street. Johnson's building of action creates the tension and climax that causes a traumatic reaction from Liza and forces her to kill her child. She repeats: "Did you hear him cry for his mother? Did you?" (Johnson, *Safe* 114). Johnson's repeating of this dialogue indicates its importance in affecting a reaction from the audience. It also serves to establish the point at which Liza's trauma is defined and her decision to kill is confirmed. Johnson uses foreshadowing of doom in the final scene when Liz's mother and husband comment about Liza's condition:

JOHN: Mighty upset . . . Do you think she'll git through all right?

MANDY: I never did see her look like she looked tonight . . .

(Johnson, *Safe* 115)

The theme of faith is once again represented by the family's praying for Liza and the baby's safety when the doctor arrives: "I pray God she do . . . We's all in the hands of the Lawd" (115). The sound of a baby's cry is heard. The anxious family waits for the

doctor's announcement. When he meets with them, he is distressed. Dr. Jenkins relays the results of Liza's trauma:

. . . she asked me right away, 'Is it a girl?' . . . And I said, 'No child, it's a fine boy,' and then I turned my back a minute to wash in the basin. When I looked around again, she had her hands about the baby's throat choking it. I tried to stop her, but its little tongue was already hanging from its mouth. It was dead! Then she began, she was muttering over and over: 'Now he's safe – safe from the lynchers! Safe!' (John, *Safe* 115)

This dramatic dialogue offers the audience another mental picture of the action.. Liza sees infanticide as an option to the more brutal death of lynching. Like Rachel, she resists the joys of being a mother: holding and feeding a child; watching a child grow and achieve; and experiencing an unconditional love. Liza is traumatized by the very thought that her "boy child" could become a victim – just because of his color. By experiencing Sam Hosea's murder, she will not risk such a possibility for her own son. She prefers to live knowing that she loves her child and she saves him from a more brutal death. In order to save him, however, she becomes a murderer. This can be viewed as a selfish act on her part. It is possible that Liza is not able to put herself through the torture of hearing her own son screaming, "Mother, Mother."

Infanticide becomes a form of "resistance" against white supremacy for Liza, while Rachel, also resists by refusing marriage and children who will be victims of senseless murders. Liza's killing of her baby boy is her reaction to the trauma that she experiences when she mentally places her child's life in the same scenario. The futility of

the situation has no resolution for her. She sees no other option available to her and her “black baby boy.” Liza and her family are left to grieve and agonize over her criminal act and the loss of their child. The lynching of Sam Hosea also impacts his widowed mother’s life and Liza’s family as well. Both families are injured forever with the deaths of two innocent boys.

The themes of hypocrisy, white supremacy, and complicity in *Safe* are represented by the white mob in their attack against the young black boy, Sam. The mob removes him from the jail when soldiers are not present to stop their advances. Sam Hosea retaliated against a white man. He argued over his “fair” wages and was struck by his boss. In anger, Sam strikes back and is quickly taken away. Sam is seventeen –years-old and “doing the best he kin, trying to be a man and stan up fer hisself...” (Johnson, *Safe* 112). Sam resists his boss’s punishment and defends himself because he is unfairly paid. Sam is correct in his attempt to demand fair payment, but his overt retaliation (resistance) “hitting a white man” is a death sentence. The hypocritical employer is cheating Sam and abusive to him. Sam is justified in resisting this unfair treatment , but foolish for trying to win the argument against white supremacy. Johnson is demonstrating that black men have no recourse. It is futile and dangerous to fight back. On the other hand, there is no punishment for the white mob of the community who illegally murder an innocent young man.

A double standard exists where white supremacy prevails. The nation is indicted by the author for its hypocrisy and complicity in its denial of rights for all citizens. There are the issues of trial by jury of one’s peers and the right to proper defense. These constitutional rights are denied to African American men who are forced to the roots of

the lynching tree. The nation, as well as the men of the mob, are hypocritical and complicit in the lynching deaths.

Motherhood in "*Lawd, Does You Undahstan?*" is represented by two characters: the elderly and tired Aunt Doady, and Lucy, the lazy, unconcerned, and inattentive mother of "Fruit Cake." Link provides two female stereotypes of the white community's conception of "the picture of black women," which are not necessarily the reality. As is common in several other anti-lynching dramas of black authors, Ann Seymour Link, a white author, characterizes Aunt Doady as an elderly, feeble caregiver of her grandson. Assuming that she was the only adult remaining in the family, (another example of *degeneration*) and in spite of her age and poor health, she reared her grandson, Jimmy, after the lynching of his father, Doady's son. Like other similar characters, she is poverty-stricken, and uneducated, but wise in the ways of life's pain and suffering. She is superstitious and profound, "screech owl mean death" (Link 192) and "They's things crueller than death, Epsie Lee" (201). She lives with a "calm acceptance of fate" (192). She is called a saint by her friends because she has lived well, and she is known as a faith-filled woman and a moral person (195). She sees her position in life as her grandson's care-taker. Jim does not hold a regular job. Instead, he enjoys nature and is paid for collecting and killing "buttahflies" for a local science professor. The porch of Jim's and Doady's cabin is a collection of nets, pans and "cyanide pizen" where Jim drops the butterflies and "Dey jes' sorta goes to sleep...hit doan huht none" (Link 194).

Link's conception of Lucy is in reference to the ideology of "the cult of true womanhood." The premise of the ideology proclaims white women to be pure, domestic, submissive, and pious. In comparison, the black woman is sub-human and does not

exhibit these same virtues. African American women, because of their history as slaves, are considered to be promiscuous and incapable of loving or caring properly for a family (Welter 1). Link creates Lucy as a mother who is content to do nothing. "She liked just sitting at night." Doady answered: " You also like to sit all day" (Link 193). Lucy proves to be unconcerned about her young son. She allows him at six years of age to run alone in the thick woodland, and when asked if her son has another name other than Fruit Cake. Lucy responds: "Lawd, I doan know. Fruit Cake is you got an uthah name?"(193). Doady is shocked that a mother could be like Lucy. Doady replies: "Doan even know whethah youah oun young'un got anutha name?" (193).

The theme of faith and reference to God's creations and the dominance of white supremacy is presented by Epsie Lee's singing of the song, "God Made De Dahkey." Fruit Cake asked Aunt Doady, "Why I so black anyhow?" and Epsie tells him why in a song:

*God made de dahkey,
Made him at night
made him in a hurry
and forgot to paint him white.*(Link 193)

In addition, faith and religion are expressed through the cast's marching to Church services and Doady's dialogue: "When you gits as old as I is, an' has known God as long as I has, you doan have to go to church; you can jes' set on youah do'step an' talk to Him ...I'se just known de Lawd an' He's known me (195). Doady relies on God to carry her through her darkest times. She tries to live as a good person and her friends call

her “a saint,” but she is honest and humble and does what she feels is necessary to one day meet her maker:

Doan be makin’ no saint out of me. It’s jus’ dat I’se lived my life, an’ it’s been a long one, an’ in all dose yeahs I’se known de Lawd an’ He’s known me...I ain’ nevah stole, no’ lied no mo’ that I had to, nor killed nobody. I’se kept as right as I could. And now dat I’se almost ready to go, I feels kinda peaceful lak – without nothin’ to worry about. (Link 195)

Aunt Doady is established as a good woman, but she has been an emotionally injured survivor since the brutal death of her son. When grandson, Jim, is away hunting for butterflies, she hears the barking sounds of bloodhounds coming in the direction of her cabin. She immediately remembers that same sound from years before. Jim returns home in an agitated state, and she knows that something is wrong. He is being chased by a white mob and in grave danger. He confesses to Doady that he did nothing but try to help a wounded white man, but he was spotted in the area and was suspected of being the perpetrator. He ran as fast as he could to get home, even going through the swamp to divert his scent. His plan is to go away for a time until the situation is settled.

Doady has him get the hidden gun and money in the shed before leaving, and suggests that he rest and have something warm to drink before heading out. As Jim prepares to leave, Doady makes him a cup of coffee and carefully drops a spoonful of the cyanide from his bug paraphernalia into the drink. She settles him on his cot and has him sip the drink to quietly “fall asleep.” The mob and the dogs are soon at her door and asking for Jim. By this time, he had “fallen asleep” with Doady’s plan for his protection

because she knows, when the mob comes looking for him, “You cain’ nevah git away from’em.” The men in the mob find Jim dead and insulted Aunt Doady with their racist comments: “ Couldn’t lynch a dead nigger” Link (198-200).

At the conclusion of the drama, Doady is in anguish over the death of Jim, and prays for God’s understanding because of her sin and her actions:

Lawd, you gotta undahstan: I didn’t know it. I thought dey kill him. I thought dey hand ‘em up on a tree lak dey did his pappy. Jesus, I done kill my own gran’son. De owl he hoot t’ree times! Wish it u’d been me... nevah know peace no mo’! (200)

Her anguish is two-fold and is a result of past trauma. First, she remembers vividly the sounds of the bloodhounds chasing her son years before: “I cain’ nebah fo’git dat soun! De nighe dey come an’ got yo’ pappy” (197). When she hears the bloodhounds (Link’s clever convention for increasing tension and empathy) following Jim, she knows immediately that he is in trouble. She also knows that once the mob mentality is engaged, there is no stopping it. “...When white folks staht out lynching; de ain’ no hidin’, no runnin’, no talkin’ ‘em out of it” (197).

This is one of the few dramas that gives a detailed and graphic picture of the lynching event. The genre’s characteristic of having a woman tell of the event is accomplished through Aunt Doady:

Dey didn’t say much . . . an’ dey wouldn’t let us. Dey tie him onto a horse an’ drag him, drag him ovah de groun,’ ovah de rocks and weeds. Den dey

hang him to a tree an 'dey shot him, shot him plum full o'holes! . . . Dey wouldn't let us take him down!...We could see him up dere, dangling . . . God, dey cain't take My Jim! (Link 197-98)

The second reason for her trauma occurred at the climax of the drama when Doady makes decision not to have Jim die by the hand of the mob. She will kill him herself and protect him from the torture of the lynch mob. Jim's death, like that of the butterflies and bugs he collects, will be painless. She, on the other hand, will live with her sin and be condemned. "Ef'n I gives him pizen, I kills him. I kills him myself. Blood on my soul! ... I goes to Hell, Lawd, not Jim, not Jim" (194-198).

Considering that Ann Seymour Link portrays Doady as a good, God-fearing and moral person, it is disturbing (as with the other two dramas) to consider murdering one's own child or denying yourself the joy of having children. Doady 's decision to poison Jim relieves him of the torturous murder of the mob and eliminates her fear of another lynching. The difficult decision to save Jim comes from a deep love and concern for him, and a personal fear of her own – to live with this again. She was helpless in her position. The mob is going to take Jim and kill him, regardless. She will not be able to fight them or help him once he is dragged away. Her decision to poison Jim with his " bug cyanide" is her way of helping and saving him while resisting the mob. He dies peacefully and Doady remarks: "They's things crueller than death, Epsie Lee" (Link 201).

White supremacy and hypocrisy are exhibited by the mob and through the two characters of Miles Chambers and Tom Moore who arrive to catch Jim. The mob's violence expresses their power over the African Americans. As in the previously

examined plays, the white mob's audacity fuels their actions. A mob storms a home, removes a victim and kills him. No one can offer assistance for fear that their lives (and other family members) will also die. Without recourse, the mob invades, insults, and injured=s the African American families, and this is seen through Link's specific dialogue:

TOM: Jim just killed a white man and we're here to get him. You can't let niggers get away with things like that . . .

MILES: You've got to put the fear of God in these damn niggers or they'll take the country . . . (Link 199)

After Doady kills Jim, the men learn that a white man committed the crime – the brother-in-law of the victim. Doady is traumatized again knowing that she is the cause of Jim's death , and she must live with the fact that her “traumatized” state and her wish to “protect” Jim was hasty. Jim might have been saved if she had not been so intent on saving him. If she had waited, perhaps Jim would still be alive. Now, it is too late.

The hypocritical men who come for Jim leave with a simple apology. If they had investigated the facts of the situation beforehand, Jim would not have been chased. They were too much in a hurry to satisfy their blood lust, and Jim was convenient. “We shouldn't have bothered you . . . He allus seemed like a good nigger . . . ” (Link 200). Even with an attempt at reconciliation, the vigilantes insult Doady and Jim by using a derogatory term to identify him. The mob won't admit to Jim's being a young man. There

is no law officer mentioned in the script, but the complicity and hypocrisy of the nation toward African Americans is instilled in the members of the mob.

Futility is the theme that determines Doady's decision to kill Jim. Her knowledge of the mob's intensity, and her past experience of her son's demise, make it obvious that Jim will die. She felt there was no other way to prevent the lynching. Ann Seymour Link wanted the white women of the audience (the play was performed for an all-white audience) to understand the complications and trials that black women face: They rear young boys to be men; the men, if they demonstrate their masculinity, are marked and could die at any time. How then to save them when the law offers no protection? How to prevent them from being accused without proof? What options do they have? The African Americans have nothing to save themselves in the majority of these dramas. Futility of life of the black male led to lynchings. In Aunt Doady's situation, the murder of Jim is for his "safety" " and a form of "resistance." For Doady, it is another traumatizing event, and Link's way of addressing the suffering that women endure due to lynching murders of the men they love.

CHAPTER FIVE

ANALYSIS and COMPARISON THREE:

The Precarious Position of Young Black Men

"I sometimes get right upset and wonder whut would I do if they ever tried to put something on me . . ." (Johnson, *A Sunday Morning in the South* 105)

1. Georgia Douglas Johnson³ – *A Sunday Morning in the South* -- (1925)
2. Corrie Crandall Howell – *The Forfeit* -- (1925)

Biography: Corrie Crandall Howell (no dates available) White Author

No substantial amount of information on Corrie Crandall Howell has been available. Kathy Perkins and Judith Stephens suggest that "the obscurity of the play and of Corrie Crandall Howell – a name that could be a pseudonym – point to the neglect of the genre and the need for further research" (93). Additional research through Moorland-Springarn Research Center at Howard University and Swarthmore College of Pennsylvania's African American Peace Collection have not provided any additional information as to Howell's life or work. Her play, however, *The Forfeit* is worthy of consideration in this study.

³ Biography of Georgia Douglas Johnson · p.162

According to Perkins and Stephens, “it is a prime example of a one-act lynching drama written in the anti-lynching tradition . . . and it is unique because it shows a white woman’s active participation in lynching” (92). The two authors suggest that perhaps the obscurity of the play and its author is due to this “uncommon and undoubtedly unpopular perspective” (92).

The Forfeit was published in the literary journal *Poet Lore* in 1925. The play is cited in Ina Ten Eyck Firkins’s *Index to Plays, 1800 to 1926* (1927), Hannah Logassa’s *Index to One-Act Plays, 1924-31* (1932), and Frances Diodato Bzowski’s *American Women Playwrights, 1900-1930* (1992). According to Perkins and Stephens, no other references to Howell or her play have been found (92).

The Precarious Position of Young Black Men

The following two dramas present the stories of two families and their sons whose lives are impacted by vigilante justice. The dramas offer different perspectives on the uncertain lives of African American boys and men during the Nadir.

The themes of motherhood, white supremacy, complicity, hypocrisy, trauma, futility of life and resistance will be examined in these short one-act dramas: *A Sunday Morning in the South* (1925) by Georgia Douglas Johnson, a black woman dramatist, and *The Forfeit* (1925) by Corrie Crandall Howell, a white woman dramatist.

In the early years of the twentieth century there was a new perception and sense of “self-identity” that was captured by the African American population. Through their participation in the arts – music, visual art, drama, and writing, they were able to prove that they were “capable” and “talented.” This perception of “the New Negro” who was

beginning to demand his rights and demonstrate his abilities, was seen as a threat to the white communities who feared that blacks would “ dare” to achieve more. Repeatedly, when African Americans gained a modicum of success , white dominance became more aggressive in its repression of them. White supremacy “ . . . imposed its rigid racial segregation, refused blacks equal educational resources, and disseminated racial caricatures and pseudo- scientific theories that reinforced and comforted whites in their racist beliefs and practices” (Allen et all 11).

There was no escaping the threats and assaults to African Americans. There was a “cheapness to black life” that continued to see African Americans –well into the twentieth century –as inferiors, and less than human. Thus, lynching was a means of warning the African Americans to stand back and stay in their places – or else. Lynching became a national phenomenon and was more than just being hanged by the neck. “ It is the story of slow, methodical, sadistic, often highly inventive forms of torture and mutilation” (Allen et all 14). Black men and boys were the most frequent victims of the crime. The following anti-lynching plays dramatize how fragile their lives could be.

A Sunday Morning in the South (a folk play) is set in 1924 in a rural Southern town, and focuses on the lives of common African Americans. The poor family of grandmother, Sue Jones, lives in a two-room house with the central staging area being the kitchen. The stage is set with a stove, a table with chairs, a pie safe with dishes and bottles, and a wooden water bucket with a tin dipper (Johnson 103). The rustic setting brings immediate recognition to the poverty that was still very prevalent with many blacks. In spite of the economic successes gained by educated African Americans by

1924, there were numerous others who never arrived at a more improved status, especially in rural areas.

As the drama opens, Sue Jones is setting the table, wearing a gingham apron, a bandana over her gray hair, and comfortable shoes – all indicative of her domestic status and her seventy years. She is hampered by a “sore” leg that forces her to limp and to walk with a “stick” (Johnson, *A Sunday Morning in the South* 103-04). She is singing a song, “*Getting Home Bye and Bye*,” which may reference her age, her ill health, and her mortality. The hymn establishes her faith, and possibly offers a symbolic meaning – that eventually, everyone dies and returns to his eternal home.

Grandmother Sue represents the themes of motherhood, faith, and trauma. The stage directions described her appearance: “. . . *she uses a stick as she has a sore leg, and moves about with a stoop and a limp . . .*” (Johnson, *A Sunday Morning in the South* 103). By age seventy, Sue has lived a long life, but she continues to “carry on” because she is needed by her two grandsons, Tom, age 19, and Bossie, age 7, Tom’s younger brother. The boys came to live with her after the death of their father. Grandmother Sue is grounded in her faith, and this is confirmed by her dialogue and her daily singing of familiar hymns: “. . . I sho is lucky I’m right here next door to the church . . . ” and “The good Jesus only knows, but I’m talking to the Lord now asting Him . . .” (Johnson 105-107).

It is Grandmother Sue who loves and cares for the boys. Their father and mother, are absent from the drama, and no mention is made of them. This is another example of Koritha Mitchell’s term, “*de-generation*” where one generation is absent from the family

(Mitchell 124). Grandmother Sue becomes ill and has a heart attack when Tom is taken away and arrested – which may be attributed to sudden trauma of the situation.

Tom's character and personality are established by his initial dialogue: “. . . There's the church bell. I sho meant to git out to meeting this morning but my back still hurts me . . . sprained it lifting them heavy boxes for Mr. John . . .” (Johnson, *A Sunday Morning in the South* 104). Tom is a kind, hard-working, conscientious and religious young man, who works to help provide for his grandmother and younger brother. He is the “man” of the house who has aspirations of “a little book learning” (Johnson, *A Sunday Morning in the South* 105) to improve conditions for his family and perhaps help to change the laws regarding the random lynching of young black men. In a short exchange of “foreshadowing” dialogue, Tom questions the horrible possibility of his own lynching: “. . . I sometimes get right upset and wonder whut would I do if they ever tried to put something on me . . .” (Johnson 105). He is assured by a friend that he will never need to worry about such an event because “. . . everyone knows ya” (105). In reality, Tom and his family, like all black families, have the constant threat and fear of lynching. The simple fact that they are “black” is reason enough kill them. The characters articulate this fact of life and express the themes of white supremacy, complicity and hypocrisy of the white community:

SUE: . . . Sometimes the white uns been knowed to blackin they faces and make bleve some po Nigger done it . . .

TOM: They lynch you bout anything too, not jest women. They say Zeb Brooks was strung up because he and his boss had er argument. (Johnson 105)

Tom's character is presented as a "gentleman." He will protect, comfort, and support rather than attack or injure someone. Johnson provides this portrayal to validate the position of black men. During this period in history, the black male was seen as "the black beast" and was unfairly accused of raping white women. Johnson juxtaposes the brutality of the racist officers who arrest Tom for this exact crime, with the quiet demeanor of his reaction to the situation:

OFFICER: Where were you last night at ten o'clock?

SUE: Right here, sir, he was right here at home...

OFFICER: You keep quiet, old woman . . . that sounds fishy to me . . . your word's nothing . . . he'll be back – if he's innocent. . . . You just keep cool Granny . . .

BOSSIE: I seed him an heered him.

OFFICER: Shut up! . . .

TOM: . . . I'll splain to him how I couldn't a done it when I was here sleeping all the time. I'll be right back. Granny, don't cry, don't cry. Jest as soon as I . . . (Johnson 106-07)

The family's unexpected and disturbing intrusion by the officers forces the family from a quiet morning breakfast to a potentially disastrous series of events. In a matter of

minutes, due to the “assumption” of the white officers that here is a “guilty” man, the threat of lynching, plus the futility and helplessness that accompany it, become a reality. Only minutes before Tom wondered what he would do in such a situation. There is no introduction, no courtesy, just their barrage of questions that will only be answered according to “what they want to hear.” Tom is helpless to do anything.

The officers refuse to validate any of the responses of Sue, Bossie or Tom. By calling Sue and “old woman” and by demanding her to “be quiet,” the officers negate not only her answers, but also her person. Black women struggled to be recognized as equals to white women. It was not surprising then that Johnson’s white officers were dismissive of feeble, old Sue. As they leave the house, dragging Tom to jail, they warn the family to remain. The family is left to imagine and worry about what will happen to Tom.

The character of seven-year-old Bossie, Tom’s younger brother, is the typical child who looks up to his “big brother” and respects his grandmother. However, he is vocally demonstrative and representative of the theme of “resistance” concerning his future. He wants more than what his brother has now: “I ain’t never gointer break my back like Tom working hard – a gointer be a – preacher that whut . . .” (Johnson, *A Sunday Morning in the South* 104). His “resistance” is naïve, for it is possible that he does not have full knowledge of an African American’s second-class citizenship issues, and he does not realize that his dreams might not materialize. His “resistance” to his brother’s status is premature. When Tom is taken away, Bossie asks his Grandmother, “Grannie . . . whut they goingter to do with him?” (Johnson 107). This is a possible indication that Bossie, who is only seven, is unaware of the threats that haunt black boys and young men.

Liza, a sixty-year-old neighbor and friend serves as an aide, a gossip, and a confidant for the family. She also represents “faith” and belief in the power of God’s love. She is more agile than Sue, friendly, genuinely concerned for Sue’s welfare, and definitely opinionated on matters of justice and the law. Liza offers the latest news of goings-on in their town, as well as her opinion of the hypocrisy and complicity of its law enforcement officers:

. . . I did hear as how the police is all over now trying to run down some po’nigger they say tacked a white woman last night . . . They says as how the white folks is shonuff mad too, and if they ketch him they gointer make short work of him . . . I thinks the law oughter hanel ‘em too but you know a sight of times they gits the wrong man and goes and strings him up and don’t fine out who done it till it’s too late! . . . I say the law . . . it ought to perfect the weak . . . (Johnson, *A Sunday Morning in the South* 105)

Liza articulates the lack of honesty and fairness that is necessary for true justice in the early twentieth century. Black men are accused of attacking white women, and white mobs lynch them for the crime. In many situations of lynching, the law officers choose anyone (especially blacks) as perpetrators of the crimes. They often do not bother to seek or investigate if the accused is guilty or innocent. They “assume” he is guilty and without a fair trial, he is murdered by hanging. They do not abide by the law even though they are sworn as public servants. The officers of the law and the mob of white citizens in this drama portray the white supremacy and the hypocrisy of the nation as a whole. In addition, they do not protect the weakest of the population - the blacks and the poor

whites. Instead, both groups become targets for death. An example of this is given through Liza's specific comment to Tom about the possibility of his being arrested one day. In foreshadowing dialogue, she is reassuring to him: "Pshaw . . . everybody knows you . . . nobody would bother you. . . ." Sue also offers encouragement: "No, sonnie, you won't never hafter worry bout sich like that but you kin hep to save them po devels that they do git after" (Johnson, *A Sunday Morning in the South* 105). Tom is unable to save himself or anyone else.

The two officers who rudely enter Tom's and Sue's home, are the characters that Liza describes and who are searching for an alleged attacker. The scene captures the themes of supremacy, hypocrisy and complicity. The men need a victim, and they know Tom and where he lives. He "resembles" the attacker, and if they can convince the white girl to confirm him as the perpetrator, they will swiftly solve the case. Grandmother Sue tries to protect Tom from the rude officers, but the verbal "resistance" she offers is totally dismissed. She is, after all, an elderly, African American woman of no value or purpose to these men:

SUE: Whut you doing? Whut you doing? You can'trest my grandson – he ain't done nuthin – you can't rest him! . . .

Mr. Officer, that white chile ain't never seed my grandson before – all niggers looks alike to her. She is so upset she don't know whut she's sayin'

FIRST OFFICER: (to Tom) . . . the quieter you comes along, the better it will be for you. (Johnson, *A Sunday Morning in the South* 106-07)

When the accused is taken away by the law, in many cases, he never returns. Such will be the case with Tom. He doesn't offer any "resistance" on his own. He quietly, obediently but "*with terror in his eyes*" goes with the officers so as not to endanger his family. He speaks comfortingly to his Grandmother: "Don't take on so. I'll go long with him to the sheriff . . ." (Johnson 107). The hypocrisy and complicity of the officers is demonstrated in their behavior and refusal to abide by the law.

Because the officers know Tom, they are aware of his good and gentle nature . Their arrest of Tom is bogus because they wish to quickly solve the murder . It makes no difference if the accused is known to be a good and innocent. He is a black man so he is guilty. The officers do not search for the true perpetrator, refuse to confirm the responses of the family as to Tom's whereabouts, and coerce the white girl to make an uncertain confirmation of Tom's identity. They are complicit in his murder and hypocritical in the discharge of their duties. They operate under the ideology of white privilege by doing what they want without fear of reprisal. The proof that the officers neglect to find the true perpetrator is confirmed by Tom's swift death.

Faith in God is also presented through Liza's prayers when Tom is dragged away and put in jail:

LIZA: Sweet Jesus, do come down and help us this morning . . . do Jesus bring this po orphan back to his ole cripple grannie safe and sound, do Jesus . . . help, Lord, help us to bear our cross, help us! (Johnson, *A Sunday Morning in the South* 107-08)

Both Liza and Matilda, neighbors, offer assistance and friendship to Sue and her family. Johnson is dramatizing the care and respect shared among African American families, and continues to confirm that lives of the black communities are the same as those of white families. The author also affirms the values that are inherent in black relationships. Liza and Matilda support Sue when her grandson is taken away, and when Sue is showing signs of traumatic illness. These women understand Sue's pain and offer comfort when she needs it: Matilda announces, " I flew down here to tell you, you better do something . . ." and Liza adds, "Set back comfortable in yer cheer and listen to the singin' . . ." (Johnson, *A Sunday Morning in the South* 107-08). Most of the characters represent Johnson's wish to show honorable and humble African Americans who appreciate, respect and protect one another.

Curiously, Johnson does not give a name to the "white girl." Without a name, she has no identity, no personality traits, and no importance. She is just a "white girl." Perhaps this is Johnson's way of saying that anyone who is "white" might answer in the same way as the girl and identify the black man as the perpetrator regardless of his guilt or innocence. The words of a white person, even without a name and an uncertain response, are accepted over those of a black man. This speaks loudly to supremacy , hypocrisy and complicity on the part of the officers and the lynching community.

Another scenario to consider is Johnson's "symbolic dismissal of the girl." By refusing to give her a name and an identity, Johnson is doing to the character what had for centuries been done to African Americans. African Americans were denied their own identity when they were slaves, taking in many instances, the names of their owners. Also, they were denied identity as human beings and legitimate citizens of the nation.

When Grandmother Sue becomes distressed over Tom's arrest, her friends encourage her to call "some of your good white folks, that's whut and get em to save him" (Johnson, *A Sunday Morning in the South* 107). Sue decides to call Miss Vilet, a young white woman for whom she had been a wet nurse years before. "I nused her when she was a baby and she'll do it . . . Her pa's the Jedge" (107). It is Johnson's intent to show that whites do exist who "resist" and speak out or fight against the oppression of African Americans. By this time in history, women were beginning to see their rights (or lack thereof) as synonymous with those of African Americans – especially African American women. All women were eager to gain the vote and to find their own identity by moving from under male domination.

Grandmother Sue asks Matilda and Bossie to run to Miss Vilet and ask for help on her behalf. Unfortunately, before Miss Vilet or her father can intervene, Tom is lynched. It is assumed from the title of the drama that all of the dramatic action takes place in the short period of one morning. Without definite proof or due process, white citizens hastily murder another innocent man by lynching. The fact that neither Miss Vilet nor the "Jedge" come to Tom's defense may indicate that they had their own racist attitudes. Considering that the Judge is an elected official of a certain jurisdiction, he is expected to uphold the law for all of his constituency. Instead, he sanctions this criminal activity: unlawful arrests; prejudiced officers; mob gatherings; and brutal murders. It seems reasonable to assume that he is also deeply involved in the cause of white supremacy, and thus, he does nothing to prevent the lynching. Sue's comment about being Vilet's nurse year before is also an indication that she "worked" for the Judge as a servant, if not a former slave.

It is disturbing to admit that Sue had to “go to good white folks” to try and intervene for her grandson’s life. While this scenario speaks to the sympathetic whites who might offer help, it also speaks volumes to the “futility” of the situation for African Americans who have no voice of their own. They are helpless and the efforts to stop the murders are futile during the extensive period of the Nadir. There are no African Americans who can intervene without retaliation.

Johnson is known for her use of theatrical components such as music, and aural sounds of voices or noises to bring the audience’s imagination into play. These elements help to enhance a mental picture for the audiences as well as to provide empathy for the characters and their situations. In this specific drama, hymns are heard “*drifting in from the window*” while Tom is being questioned by the officers (Johnson, *A Sunday Morning in the South* 105). This is Johnson’s juxtaposition of a quiet scene of an early morning suddenly being interrupted by the harsh reality of racism.

Georgia Douglas Johnson and the other authors of these dramas, dramatize the effects of lynching on young black men and their families. The constant threat of a brutal death is traumatizing and its residual effects are permanent. Families are physically and emotionally destroyed when someone is lynched. In this case, Grandmother Sue dies of the traumatic shock of Tom’s sudden death, and Bossie’s future as an orphan is in jeopardy, since his entire family is erased by Tom’s murder. African American men like Tom, are “marks” for those whites who fear blacks’ gradual success and potential power. White supremacy’s hatred and inhumanity destroy Sue’s family and thousands of others without just cause.

The Forfeit by Corrie Crandall Howell (1925), a white woman dramatist, was one of the earliest plays that combined “literary realism with folk drama tradition” (Perkins, Stephens 92). Kathy Perkins and Judith Stephens called it “a courageous endeavor” because Howell presented a female character (a white woman) as an accomplice in the lynching of an innocent black boy (92). In a period of history when white women were considered to be obedient, modest and pious, this characterization was a serious indictment against them.

The setting of this folk drama is similar to *A Sunday Morning in the South*. The action takes place in a rural Southern community in winter at the cottage of Tom and Fanny Clark. The principal staging area is their bedroom with doors leading to a kitchen, a hiding area, and an exit. The bedroom is furnished with a bed, chairs, a table and lamp, and an organ that provides an additional hiding space. There is an open fireplace with a gun above the mantel, and the walls are decorated with religious lithographs (94). This area, like the staging area of the previous drama, represents a quiet, comfortable and lived-in home, of a simple family. This family, however, is white and somewhat dysfunctional.

As the play opens, Tom, the father, is whittling an axe handle and whistling softly while his wife, Fanny, is piecing a quilt. The poor economic status of the family is articulated by Tom who speaks in a country dialect. He is concerned and bothered about his son’s work ethic:

TOM: Where yer reckon Bud is all this time?

FANNY: I reckon he went over to Dobbses Mill, He likes to hear old man Dobbs talk.

TOM: . . . He goes ter play craps up in the loft . . . How's I gwine ter make er crop with him er layin off all ther time?(Howell 94)

Tom depends on Bud's ability to help him in the fields. Bud's negligence makes it difficult for Tom to complete his work, and all of Bud's procrastination makes the earning of a substantial income very difficult. Tom is aging, tired and angry with no kind words for his son's or his wife's behavior:

TOM: Hit ain't right. And hits all yer fault. Er petting him and yer makin over him all ther time. Whut's yer got to show fer it? Yet listen to me. He gwine ter change his ways or us'll . . . (Howell 94)

A loud knock comes to the door and voices are heard outside. Tom can see the glow of torches from his torn window shades. Stage directions set the action: "*Fanny stands . . . with her hands at her throat and a look of apprehension on her face . . . Tom takes the gun down and starts toward the door . . .*" (95). Rushing, Tom pushes his wife aside and opens the door yelling, "Thars gwine ter be a hanging in Hell tonight" and he exits the house to join the waiting mob (95). Tom, Fanny, and the mob of men, represent the white supremacy, hypocrisy and complicity of the Southern community.

This short opening scenario offers a reasonable amount of history concerning the different characters of this family. Tom's life revolves around his work on the farm, earning a living, and being associated with mob activity – an agent of strength and power in his life. He is a racist and believes in his right to terrorize and kill when the

opportunity presents itself. In this scene, he is making a new axe handle, an indication that it is necessary for his type of work. His tirade with his wife is angry, curt and insulting . This is another means of Tom's "showing of power" due to his low self-esteem. He is not able to discuss their son's problems rationally, so he blames Fanny for his inability to control Bud's immaturity and irresponsible attitude. He takes no responsibility for Bud's upbringing himself, but berates her for causing him to be " a good fer nuthin lout!" (Howell 95). As for being involved with mob activity, Tom's behavior is almost second nature. As soon as the quiet voices are heard outside their home, and Tom sees the torch lights through the shades, without a word being spoken, he grabs his gun, announces " a lynching in Hell tonight" and storms out. Tom has obviously joined more than one lynching party for he knows the drill well. Fanny whispers, " I wish Bud . . ." (95). Her incomplete line is full of meaning. She wants her son safely home. She is his mother, after all.

Another observation concerning Tom's probable participation in lynching parties is the lack of response from Fanny. She asks only two questions when he prepares to leave: "Whut's ther matter, Tom? Whar yer gwine?" (95). She knows where he is intending to go because he has been involved in similar situations in the past. He responds with " a hanging . . ."(Howell 94). She doesn't try to stop him and she doesn't ask any additional questions. She is a white woman in a Southern town, and she knows what happens when a mob gathers.

Fanny represents the themes of motherhood, complicity, and hypocrisy. She is a mother guilty of being overly – indulgent where Bud is concerned. No other children are mentioned in the script so it may be assumed that he is an only child, and Fanny has

showered him with a great deal of attention for this very reason. Fanny is also a racist because this is the life she knows. She possibly grew up in this area and the black community has always been beneath the whites in terms of social status. Blacks are disposable and of no consequence in the long term. She believes this scenario and she sees no problem in dismissing or negating blacks on any given day. Fanny loves her son, but she is not a fool. She knows him well and has reason to believe that he is in trouble. She will help him, as she always does..

Bud is not well-disciplined, and he is an irresponsible adult. He is more interested in gambling and wasting his time than helping his parents at home. At any time when he finds himself in trouble, he knows his mother will intervene. Unlike Georgia Douglas Johnson's closely knit and caring black family, whose young boys and men show great respect for their parents and responsibility toward their families, Corrie Crandall Howell presents a dysfunctional white family whose son is less than honorable.

Fanny and Tom are given simple but practical chores when the drama opens. This quiet scene is quickly broken by the mob activities and Tom's exit. In all of the dramas examined in this section, the comfort of the home is broken by the violence of a gathering mob or the news of a lynching. Corrie Crandall Howell's drama follows this same pattern.

A second door is rudely opened and young Woodrow, a white boy of thirteen, enters. He asks Fanny if he may light his torch in her fireplace. She asks why and he responds: "Thars gwine ter be a hangin! . . . Haint yer heard about hit?" (Howell 95). Fanny is curious to know the details and Woodrow obliges. He proceeds to tell Fanny

that “Twas teacher . . . she wasn’t dead yet, but old Mr. Berry found her before dark” (95). The victim is carried to the Doctor’s house before Mr. Berry runs to the local store to tell the men. He continues to relate the news that the town will soon know about the attack once the bloodhounds are let out. “ She can’t talk none. Her throat’s all swelled up, and her clothes is all tore offen her. I reckon he drug her round considerable. Hot dog! If she dies, ther won’t be no school this yere again!” (Howell 95). Fanny asks where they found the white girl and discovers she was near Dobbeses Mill picking ferns. Woodrow suggests that Fanny join the other ladies who went to “look” at the teacher: “Why yer orto go ter ther Doctor’s house and see her, she shore looks terrible” (96). Woodrow hears his father’s calling for him to join the men, and he leaves to participate in the lynching party.

This particular scenario demonstrates a reality that exists during numerous lynching “parties.” There are events of lynchings that are advertised on bulletin boards, posters and even in newspapers that “invite” citizens to bring food and chairs to “see a hanging.” It is not uncommon for “ activity” buses to be chartered for those who wish to travel to a hanging venue. On very “special lynching events,” children are dismissed early from school and attend “ hanging picnics” with their families. Lynchings become rituals of sacrifice as well as public entertainment for towns or communities where other forms of leisure are scarce. As the bodies are hanging from ropes, children and adults mutilate by dismemberment, the fingers, toes, ears and noses of the victims. Sometimes, this is done while the victims are still alive. The victim’s body might be doused with gasoline, burned and then dragged through the streets. It is not surprising that Howell has a young child join his father’s lynch mob. His joyous attitude is disturbing but probably

accurate. He is more concerned about being free from school than worrying about the serious condition of his teacher. Children learn from their parents. Young Woodrow is a racist already influenced by the adults around him. Children are taught that the ideology of white supremacy is their way of life , and they inherit the hate and prejudice that permits them to kill for pleasure. Woodrow dramatizes the themes of supremacy and complicity just like his father and the vigilante group.

Fanny, as a racist represents white supremacy and complicity as well. She doesn't stop her husband or endeavor in any way to hinder Woodrow. Before his father calls for him, Fanny cleverly decides to discover more about the incident by bribing Woodrow to bring her additional information. She is complicit because she has suspicions about her own son's tardiness. Fanny gives money to Woodrow and asks him to do her a favor". . . take this and tell me jest as soon as she dies if she sed ennythin and don't let on I give hit ter ye or Tom will get us both" (Howell 96). Fanny is nervous and tries to continue her quilting. Her concern for Bud prohibits her from accomplishing any work. She waits and worries for his return and even talks to herself: " She was a pretty gal, fer a city gal . . . wish Bud would cum"(96).

Howell establishes plot conflicts for Fanny with these lines. As a mother, she wants her son home safely and free from trouble – regardless of his age. But there are too many signs that point to Bud's involvement, and Fanny has her suspicions. Even with her love for Bud, she understands her son's occasional bad behavior . Bud is late, he is in the same area as the assault, and he is not without his personal problems. She will need to do something to protect him if this develops into the worse- case scenario.

It is curious that Fanny's speaking about the teacher's appearance is in the past tense. This is the second time that she has "assumed" the woman's death. Perhaps this is Howell's means of foreshadowing – or just wishful thinking on the part of Fanny. In this particular line, "she was a pretty girl . . ." Fanny is quietly speaking to herself as though she is losing her touch with reality or, more importantly, the girl's death is nothing of consequence to her. Throughout this drama, Fanny exhibits a lack of concern for everything except her son's welfare. As a mother, she cares for her son, but has no empathy for others who are in need of assistance. Fanny's love for her son will allow her to destroy another man's life without remorse. She doesn't kill her own son (as did other women), she exchanges her son's life for one she feels won't be missed.

Bud eventually returns home. Howell's stage directions offer an insight to Fanny's suspicions: "*. . . the door . . . is pushed softly open and Bud comes quietly into the room. He is a heavy-set, sullen - looking youth in the early twenties, with the appearance of having just emerged from a catastrophic state*" (96). Howell makes it obvious that Bud is involved in "something," and Fanny proceeds to question him about his whereabouts and his activities. Bud lies and says he was "wrasslin" with friends and wanted something to eat. Fanny prepares food and watches quietly as Bud eats slowly. The barking of bloodhounds force him to his feet - Fanny immediately knows that her son is guilty. "Bud, Buddy! Yer didn't! tell yer Maw yer didn't do hit!" (96). Again, Howell is very specific in her stage directions which offer the audience as much information as the dialogue itself: "*. . . she reads the truth in his face as she stands stricken, horror of things unimaginable in her face . . . Bud gropes as if blinded . . . the baying of the hounds is clearer now*" (Howell 96-97).

This particular drama is very short. It compares to the drama of Georgia Douglas Johnson in its length, and in its emphasis on dialogue and detailed stage directions. It also compares to the other work by the quick action that propels one complication to another – sitting by the fire, exiting with the mob, visitor’s entrance, Bud’s return, the barking of dogs, etc . . . all of which enhance the scenes and build the tension. These conventions help to develop the stage realism that is in vogue during this time.

At this point in the drama, Howell quickly gives Fanny the personality that defines her as a racist and an accomplice in the crime. “ Bud! We gotter do smuthin, quick. Them hounds will track yer right ter ther door”(Howell 97). Fanny checks to see if people are outside her door and walks toward Bud. “ *Leaning over him she touches his hair softly . . . he jerks away from her*” (97). Howell gives Fanny the instincts that all mothers possess. She loves her child and will do anything to help and protect him. Her touching his hair is reminiscent of a mother’s tender touch for her infant. Regardless of what has transpired, Bud is her boy and she will be there for him.

In Georgia Douglas Johnson’s drama, *A Sunday Morning in the South* the mother solicits help from those “important whites” who might be able to save her son. Miss Vilet and her father (*Sunday Morning in the South*) however, never arrive to be of any help. This is not the case with Fanny Clark. Fanny is a white woman and lives under the ideology of white supremacy. She does not need to call others to help her, nor does she fear reprisal if she injures a black man. She will devise her own plan to protect Bud, without concern as to how she accomplishes it.

The black farm hand, Jeff, arrives to deliver potatoes to the family. He does not know that he will soon be the victim of a lynching scheme. Fanny immediately determines her plan to save Bud. She quietly has Bud hide behind the door for safe-keeping but when he refuses to remain there, she shoves him for his own protection into a hiding space . She invites Jeff into the house where he carefully places the potatoes in the kitchen. Howell's description of Jeff's physical appearance is insulting but reads to mean that " Jeff wouldn't understand what was going on." She describes him in this manner: " . . . a slight negro with a stupid, good-natured face . . . " (Howell 97). Fanny will discover that Jeff is smarter than he looks.

Jeff and Fanny hear the bloodhounds getting closer to her house, and he asks why they are out. Fanny makes the excuse that they are hunting rabbits. Jeff, however, is clever and knows this is not the case. Fanny learns that Jeff is more astute than she thought . Jeff is hungry so Fanny offers him food and tells him to stay and eat in the kitchen. When he is enjoying his dinner, she bolts the door to the kitchen and moves Bud once again to a safer location. She rings a bell to attract the attention of the men in the street, and hears the bloodhounds nearer to the house. Jeff, hearing the commotion, tries to escape from the kitchen with the door bolted against him. He is screaming: "Miss Fanny! This yere door is stuck, hit won't open. Cum let me out . . . !"(Howell 98). Tom and the men arrive and Fanny points to the kitchen: "He's in thar. Hits Nigger Jeff." Jeff is carried out screaming again: " I haint done nuthin! . . . O Lordy! White folks lemme go! . . . Before the Lord, I haint done nuthin!" (98). Tom orders the men to take Jeff away to the hanging tree. The lynching of an innocent boy is initiated by the racist family – especially the mother and father who will protect their own son and relinquish a black

man. As the mob of vigilantes leaves the house, Woodrow comes running in to see Fanny. His last line of the drama seals the plan to save Bud: "She's ded, Miss Fanny! Maw sez she never sed nothing at all" (98).

Fanny represents the themes of motherhood, complicity, hypocrisy and supremacy. In comparison with the character, Liza, in Johnson's play, Fanny is complicit in the lynching. She engineers her son's escape while condemning an innocent boy. Her casual treatment of Jeff's demise, and her lack of concern for the injured teacher, are Howell's means of demonstrating the prevalent feelings of whites against blacks. Fanny is hypocritical as she pretends to be concerned for Jeff but uses him for her own selfish purposes. She has no feelings of remorse for what she is about to do.

Fanny's lack of concern for the teacher's condition also speaks to her lack of Christian humanity. White citizens saw African Americans as "non-human, disposable, useless and without value." As slaves, the African American had worth to his master. Once the slave was freed, he no longer held that value. African Americans were seen as threats to white supremacy. In order to keep domination and white power, it was essential that whites keep blacks terrorized. The lynching tree was one means of accomplishing their goal.

The themes of supremacy and complicity are also represented by Tom, Woodrow, and the mob, all of whom find great enjoyment in hunting for a perpetrator with rifles and dogs. Being a boy in the South, Woodrow has already developed the lust for blood and the mob mentality. Woodrow's excitement comes from a sense of "youthful playing" but

with a serious and deadly outcome. Tom and the mob gain a sense of empowerment with the excuse that they are protecting their white women from black brutes.

The themes of hypocrisy and faith are created by the lives this family lives, and by displaying the religious “lithographs” that decorate the walls of the bedroom. These lithographs should be evidence that those in the home have an attachment to a sacred entity. The Clarks, however, are ruthless in their actions, and hypocritical in their display of religion when there clearly is none. The only mention of faith in God comes from Jeff’s screaming as he is hauled to the lynching. Tom’s and Fanny’s only affiliation with religion hangs on the walls. The couple’s dialogue and actions give no indication that they have any Christian sensitivity to the welfare of others. The family members act with serious intent to protect their own interests and those of white supremacy in the South.

Fanny’s orchestration of hiding and protecting her own son, while ensnaring Jeff in the crime, represent her collaboration with white power. With her secret plan, she prevents the mob from taking her son. Other mothers who tried to protect their children by killing them took the most drastic measure – but they didn’t involve, injure or ensnare anyone but themselves. Their actions are not to be condoned, however.

The only trauma exhibited in this drama is that of the innocent boy, Jeff. He faithfully performs his duty for Miss Fanny and in a short period of time, is being led to his death – no questions asked, no help, no recourse – just the words of an “overly-indulgent white mother” protecting her son. This is a luxury that hundreds of black mothers never have. Corrie Crandall Howell is making that point to her audiences. Black mothers want to save their son’s from the lynchings just as much as the white mothers. It

is impossible for African Americans to do anything once the violent mob takes their men. They need the help of everyone to put the issue of lynching on the national agenda and see that it is stopped. All mothers, white and black, want and deserve to have their sons grow to be men.

CHAPTER SIX

ANALYSIS and COMPARISON FOUR: **The Strength and Determination of the Woman**

“I had made up my mind what to do. I dressed myself and then I woke you both up and dressed you. We set forth. It was a black, still night. Alternately dragging you along and carrying you – I walked five miles to the house of some friends. They took us in, and we remained there until I had seen my dead laid comfortably at rest. They lent me money to come North – I couldn’t bring you up – in the South.”(“Mrs Loving,” Grimké 41)

1. May Miller – *Nails and Thorns* (1933)
2. Mary White Ovington – *The Awakening* (1923)
3. Tracy Dickinson Mygatt – *The Noose* (1929)

Biography: May Miller (1899 – 1995) **African American Author**

A poet, playwright, and a teacher, May Miller grew up in Washington, D.C., near Howard University where her father was a sociologist. Her mother had a career as a teacher in the city. Through her parents, Miller became familiar with many of the writers and scholars of the New Negro Renaissance, including W.E.B. Du Bois, Alain Locke, and Booker T. Washington. Miller received training in the theatre at Howard University, from which she graduated in 1920. She won third prize in an *Opportunity* magazine

contest in 1925, and in 1930, two of her plays were chosen for Willis Richardson's anthology, *Plays and Pageants from the Life of the Negro* (Gavin 187).

As a teacher and playwright, Miller believed that black students needed greater exposure to the work and life of blacks. She wrote plays about key figures in African American history and produced them with her students at Frederick Douglass High School where she taught drama, speech, and dance. Miller wrote in various genres and incorporated white characters in her works as in *Nails and Thorns*. The white characters were usually principals who expanded the ways in which Miller could deal with the issues of racism (Perkins, Stephens 174).

Miller was a member of the S Street Salon of Georgia Douglas Johnson, where she shared her work with writers and scholars. She continued to write plays until 1943. She retired the year later from the Baltimore school system and moved back to Washington, D.C. She was a noted artist in both drama and poetry. Miller died on February 9, 1995, in Washington (Perkins, Stephens 175).

Nails and Thorns is Miller's only play which focuses on the subject of lynching. She entered the one-act play in the 1933 contest sponsored by the Association for Southern Women for the Prevention of Lynching (ASWPL), where it won the first prize (175).

Biography: Mary White Ovington (1865 – 1951)
White Author

Mary White Ovington, a social worker and freelance writer, was a principal NAACP founder and officer for almost forty years. Born in Brooklyn, New York, into a

wealthy abolitionist family, she became a socialist while a student at Radcliffe College. Financial problems forced her to withdraw from College after two years, at which time she went to work for the Pratt Institute in Brooklyn. She helped the Institute to establish a settlement house, Greenpoint Settlement in Brooklyn, New York, where she worked from 1895 to 1903, serving the underprivileged (Lewis, "Mary White Ovington"1).

In 1904 Ovington made an extensive study of the economic situation of African Americans in New York. Her research resulted in *Half a Man: The Status of the Negro in New York* (1911). This study pointed to white prejudice as the source of discrimination and segregation, that ultimately led to the lack of equal opportunities for the black community ("NAACP Founder, Mary White Ovington,"1).

In 1909 Ovington and other civil rights reformers established the NAACP, where she held a variety of positions during her tenure: secretary, acting secretary, treasurer, and chairman. She was active as well in the National Consumers' League, and in activities eliminating child labor. As a supporter of the women's suffrage movement, she worked for inclusion of African American women in the movement's organizations ("NAACP Founder, Mary White Ovington"2).

Her autobiography, *The Walls Came Tumbling Down* (1947), offers a history of the NAACP. She also wrote, *Portraits in Color* (1927), a collection of short biographies of African American leaders ("Mary White Ovington,"Britannica Online 1). Poor health forced her to retire from her active life and move to live with her sister in Massachusetts. She died there in 1951(2).

Biography: Tracy Dickinson Mygatt (1885- 1973)
White Author

The biographical data on Miss Tracy Mygatt was acquired through Swarthmore College Peace Collection in Swarthmore, Pennsylvania. The following information was included in her obituary that appeared in the *Philadelphia Inquirer* on November 24, 1973:

Tracy Dickinson Mygatt was an author and a life-long peace activist. She was born in Brooklyn, New York, March 12, 1885, and died on Thanksgiving Day, November 22, 1973, at the age of eighty – eight in Philadelphia .

Miss Mygatt was a 1908 graduate of Bryn Mawr College where she majored in English literature. She was committed to suffrage for women and became one of Pennsylvania's first suffrage organizers. Mygatt, along with her lifetime companion, Frances Witherspoon, founded the War Resistance League in 1923 and served as co-chairwomen of that organization for many years. Mygatt was a member of the Women's International League for Peace and Freedom, and served as the co-editor of the League's publication, "*Four Lights*." Mygatt also served as the East Coast Secretary of the Campaign for World Government in her early years.

Mygatt devoted her life to creating a better world through her dedication to peace initiatives and through her literary writings. A number of her one-act plays were published and produced, notably, *The Noose*, a play against lynching, and *Good Friday*, *A Passion Play of Now*, depicting cruelty to early Conscientious Objectors. A religious book, written in collaboration with Frances Witherspoon, *The Glorious Company*, *Life and Legends of the Twelve and St. Paul*, gained them recognition. During both World

Wars and the Vietnam Conflict, she and Witherspoon worked in support of amnesty for Conscientious Objectors. They wrote countless letters to officials of government to support the positions of those who were against the fighting and to put an end to the wars (“Tracy Dickinson Mygatt” 1).

The Strength and Determination of the Woman

The themes of white supremacy, hypocrisy, complicity, faith, resistance, trauma and motherhood are examined in the three anti-lynching dramas: *Nails and Thorns*(1930) by May Miller, an African American author, *The Awakening* (1923) by Mary White Ovington, and *The Noose* (1929) by Tracy Mygatt. These three dramas present women who stand against the violence of the South, and the consequences they encounter as a result of their positions. It is fitting that these three dramas are written by women who work for the good of others. They were role models for the many women of the early twentieth century who were trying to fight for their own identities, as well as for the improvement of the country as a whole.

As mentioned in the biographies, May Miller was a teacher who encouraged her students to read and learn more about their own African American history. To initiate their curiosity and interest, she wrote, directed, and presented theatrical productions of prominent African Americans, that offered a unique learning experience to her students.

Tracy Mygatt was a life-long peace activist who co-founded the War Resistance League in 1923, was a member of the International Women’s League for Peace and Freedom, and was dedicated to peace initiatives in her native Philadelphia. She and her

companion, Frances Witherspoon, were especially devoted to the issues of the Conscientious Objectors during war time.

Mary White Ovington, was one of the original founders of the NAACP, and served as a member of that organization for many years. She helped to found the Greenpoint Settlement Home in New York, supported women's suffrage, and was instrumental in working for the inclusion of African American Women into the women's movements of the period. These women authors, by virtue of their courageous writing of anti-lynching dramas, were offering their form of "resistance" to the violence and death that became a national holocaust and embarrassment.

May Miller's *Nails and Thorns* (1930) is set in a small Southern town in the 1930's, in a comfortable home of the White Sheriff, Stewart Landers, his wife Gladys, and their infant son. Their economic status is that of middle-class, considering that he is the Sheriff, a position of authority. They speak in English without a dialect, and they are an educated couple.

The living room is the main staging area, and is modestly furnished with overstuffed chairs, tables, reading lamps, and a sofa. As the drama opens, Stewart is "pretending" to read while watching over his shoulder as Gladys, standing at the door, nervously latches and unlatches the door. Gladys is concerned about the unrest in the town, and asks Stewart to inform the Governor and call the militia for help before trouble starts. Stewart refuses and informs Gladys of his opinion: "The Governor is a busy man and can't be disturbed every time there is a little outburst" (Miller 177). Gladys reminds Stewart that when there is a Negro assault on a white woman, it is serious.

She worries for Lem, the young man in jail who is accused of the crime. Stewart reiterated that there is no proof that Lem, or any other Negro committed the crime against the Davis girl. The girl is so upset, she is unable to give him any information. Stewart, however, admits that he arrested Lem, a “simple man,” and locked him in jail for his own protection. There is a bit of evidence that points to his being in the area of the assault, but no definite proof. Stewart has extra deputies at the jail – just in case. He is certain no one will try to make trouble.

Stewart’s behavior does not necessarily identify him as a racist. In addition, he does not appear to be influenced by white supremacy. He does, however, appear to be “lax” in his concern for the welfare of a black man – especially in a Southern town during this period of the Nadir. It is prudent and appropriate for him to heed Gladys’ concerns when she sees and hears people gathering in the streets. The fact that a “bit” of evidence is discovered might be enough for the mob to react against Lem. Stewart should have been more pro-active.

Gladys is very sympathetic to the African Americans who live in the town. She tries to encourage Stewart again to walk to the jail and be certain that Lem is safe. Once again, Stewart refuses and hands her a comic strip: “The comic will be good for your nerves” (Miller 178). Gladys becomes more distraught with Stewart’s attitude and proceeds to check on their son. Stewart returns to his chair and continues to read. Gladys is a “strong , willful and concerned” woman. She is genuinely upset at the thought that the mob will do something drastic, and that Stewart’s nonchalant attitude will prove to be disastrous.

Stage directions change the tempo of the action: “ *A frantic knock on the screen door breaks the silence. An excited voice calls, Mis’ Landers! Mis’ Landers. Stewart goes hurriedly to the door*”(Miller 179). Annabel, their African American servant, nervous and afraid, stumbles into the room. She was trying to get to their street but was caught in the crowds that were gathering. She had to take a long way around for fear of being stopped and injured or worse. “ I thought as I’d nevah git heah. I was scared” (Miller 179). She describes what is happening in town:

Ma’m, it’s happ’ned to all us cullud folks. Down there beyond the railroad tracks, there’s nary a dark face about. They’s gone in an’locked their doors an’ pushed chairs an’tables up’gainst’em so as nobody kin git to ‘em. Tomorrer mos’o’em what kin fine the money’s gonna git way from here . . . We cullud folks has heard all bout it. Someo’the men uptown done tole their friends as’say foh’em to git off the streets to keep out o’trouble cause they wouldn’t lak to hafta burn up all the good cullud folks, too
(Miller 179)

Even with Annabel’s information and obvious agitated state, Stewart refuses to believe her. “ Negroes are very excitable” (180). He is concerned, however, that a majority of the blacks will consider leaving in the midst of crop season. He also agrees that “ It’s too bad . I wish we could have kept Lem’s arrest from them. That’s one of the bad things about these cursed affairs – the good ones suffer with the bad” (180). There is a sympathetic nature to Stewart even though he is slow to action. Gladys immediately reminds her husband that it isn’t just the blacks who suffer, “ Every time an injustice is done or any disgrace falls, all of us feel it . . . ”(180). This was May Miller’s message to

her audiences: When any one is victimized or marginalized, everyone suffers for it in some way. When a lynching is held in a community, it is not just the victim or his family who suffer, the entire community is stamped with the guilt and complicity of the murder.

Both Gladys and Stewart agreed that they do not want their child to grow up in an environment of violence. Gladys explains why it is so important to her:

I lived in a town once where they lynched a man and I can never forget how the town and the people suffered. It wasn't what they did to the unfortunate man alone. He was out of his misery. It was what they did to every soul in that town. They crucified everything that was worthwhile—justice, pride and self-respect. For generations to come, the children will be gathering the nails and thorns from the scene of that crucifixion. (Miller 180)

Undeterred, Gladys tries again to convince Stewart that he needs to see if what Annabel tells them is valid. He reiterates that he still doesn't believe Annabel's story, but because Gladys is so upset and nervous, “. . . it can't hurt and you'll be satisfied” (Miller 181). Gladys' nervousness continues, but she tries to relax knowing that her husband is going to investigate the situation. She calls Annabel to ask more questions about the gathering mobs, and Annabel tells her what she heard:

. . . He tole Josh that the folks was gonna give Lem a li'l necktie party so as others would 'member that even if they ain't got sense, they got to know a white woman . . . I doan know what Lem done 'xactly but the

whole town's gone plumb crazy, an Josh's boss say they's gonna burn Lem.(181)

White supremacy is presented through the gathering mob outside the jail. Stewart and Gladys understand the racist attitudes that prevail, but life is quiet and peaceful in Stewart's town, so he is convinced that the town and his prisoner will be safe. Gladys experienced a former lynching and though she is nervous over the potential violence that could develop, she is able to act rationally. This will change as she becomes concerned for the town's future and when she tries to "resist" the mob's intentions to kill Lem.

Annabel informed Gladys that even though Lem is in jail, he isn't safe. Gladys asks why and Annabel explains: ". . . the man what hole the keys is the Davis girl's cousin an he's mad lak all the res. He come in the store, too, an plan wid the men . . . Anyhow, he's gonna let 'em in tonight . . ." (Miller 181-82). Annabel is so upset and scared when she arrives that she forgets to tell Stewart this news. Gladys immediately becomes agitated and decides that she must do something to protect Stewart, in the event he approaches the crowd or the deputy with the keys. Annabel offers her services, "He's got mah prayers to help him out" (182). For the first time in the drama, the theme of faith is presented through Annabel, a young character. This is a diversion from most of these dramas where the elderly mother- figure expresses faith in God.

Gladys becomes more irrational as she thinks of the trouble brewing in town, and how everyone will suffer if Lem is killed. Annabel tries to comfort her, but it is useless: "Doan take on so, Mis' Landers. You's shakin all ovah. You bes'go in . . . an' lay down"(182). Gladys by now is screaming and pacing with nervous agitation. The stage

directions indicate her distress: “ *Gladys shudders and buries her head in her hands . . . hysteria in Gladys’ voice . . .* ” (182). “ I am here helping him fight back the mob! I’m fighting to save all of us from sorrow – the torture to that crazy boy, the disgrace to our town and against all the evil they’re building for our children . . . ” (Miller 182).

Outside the door, voices are heard screaming, “ Lynch him, String him up, They got him..” (182). With these orders, Gladys stops and gains her composure: “They’ve got him haven’t they? . . . And they’re passing up Greene Street? Burn a human being, oh, no! There must be some way to stop it . . . I’ll tell them how I feel . . . I’ll show them my baby – he is this town’s tomorrow . . . My son will show them the way” (182). Gladys is irrational and in a state of frenzy, and with her new baby in her arms, she rushes out the door toward the center of town and the angry crowd. It is obvious that Gladys is so traumatized by the activities of the town, she is not thinking clearly and is endangering her life and that of her baby. Not recognizing her won mental state, she goes forward believing that she is able to stop the mob’s lynching.

May Miller offers the reader an example of her growth and sophistication in writing with this scene. She effortlessly creates Annabel’s dialect before changing to Gladys’ style of proper English. Miller demonstrates both a range of styles and rich diction for a more deliberate character distinction.

Shortly after Gladys leaves her home, Anderson , Wilson, and Thomas, three of Stewart’s deputies, come to protect the family. They are concerned when Annabel informs them that Mrs. Landers went into town with the baby. Anderson leaves to try and find her, while the other deputies talk casually and freely about the crowd’s taking Lem:

THOMAS: You know half the deputies were the Davis kin an I heard Milton give 'em the keys.

WILSON: Milton'll sure be in hot water.

THOMAS: . . . Wonder if the sheriff finally got 'em to change their minds? . . . He stood in front o'Lem's cell pleadin' an' someo''em was half listenin.' Then somebody yelled, 'Spose it was your wife!

WILSON: I know that ended it.

ANNABEL: They took him on up to Town Square to burn him didn't they? . . . Oh, Lawd, have mercy on his po'daffy soul.

WILSON: I guess so Annabel. (Miller 184-85)

The casual discussion by the deputies is deceiving, and Stewart's behavior is strange. The entire male cast of law officers is apathetic / indifferent to the brutal chaos around them. They discuss Lem's arrest and burning without emotion or concern. Wilson comments that he is glad to be working the Landers' home rather than seeing the lynching: "I'm glad the boss put me on duty down here. I guess now that they got the fellow, they'll lynch him an I ain't much on stomachin' the likes of that" (186). Wilson tells about Lem's being taken from the jail without emotion or concern for Lem's life. It appears to be "business as usual" for these men who don't want to get involved. The deputies permit this behavior in their jurisdiction, but they do nothing to stop the lynching. Likewise, the Sheriff is very non-chalant about anything that is going on in his town.

The Sheriff half-heartedly tries to persuade the mob to stop the lynching. Stewart says there never is any trouble in his town. He is confident that it won't happen today. Yet, his behavior, and that of his deputies, indicates that they faced the mob before and they are not "strong enough or willing" to "resist" the mob's actions. Because of their casual attitudes, it makes lynching in this town relatively easy – and with no problems from the authorities. All of these men, Stewart, the three officers, Thomas, Anderson and Wilson, as well as Milton, who offers the keys, along with the mob – all express the theme of white supremacy because they permit such behavior by the white mob in their town. They also represent hypocrisy for being officers who don't do their duty by protecting the innocent, and the theme of complicity in terms of allowing the vigilante murder of Lem. The entire group of law officers is guilty of disobeying civil law and dereliction of duty, and yet, no one person, except Gladys, has made an effort to stop the mayhem.

Stewart soon returns home to learn that Gladys went into town with their baby. As he prepares to find her, she is carried into their house. The stage directions describe the scene: ". . . *Anderson half-leading, half-carrying the disheveled and hysterical Gladys, enters . . .*" (Miller 186). Stewart tried to calm Gladys before he asks her about the baby. "What is it Gladys? Where's the baby?" Gladys replies: "Dead – dead! Didn't they tell you? The mob lynched your son along with crazy Lem. They knocked him down – they stamped on him. Oh, Stewart . . . they won't listen . . . they're killing my baby" (Miller 186).

The crowd following Gladys home is led by the local Doctor. He confirms that Gladys is knocked down by the crushing crowd, the baby falls from her arms, and she is

unable to pick him up before he is trampled. The Doctor examines the baby and takes his body to his office. He also tells Stewart that Gladys has “the severest type of shock” and needs rest (Miller 187). Gladys is comforted but in a traumatized state. Stewart calls the militia for help, albeit a bit late, because their baby is gone, and Gladys is distraught. A great tragedy transpired for this family in a very short time due to the activities of a mob and a lynching.

Early in the action, Gladys warned Stewart that when there is an injustice, everyone suffers. For this small town, this is the case. The community attends the lynching and becomes complicit in Lem’s murder. They have blood on their hands for killing a man who is unable to defend himself. They also are complicit in the murder of the Landers’ baby. The crowd was uncontrolled – a mistake that clearly is Stewart’s. He and his deputies did nothing to stop the mobs from gathering. Stewart needed to be involved when Lem was first put in jail. Instead, Stewart was slow to action and negligent in carrying out his duty. His lack of urgency when the crowd was gathering resulted in his son’s death, his wife’s anxiety and Lem’s lynching. Stewart is as complicit in the act as the mob and the deputies who released Lem.

“Resistance” to the lynching is presented by Gladys and to a certain degree, Annabel. Gladys insists that Stewart do something and finally, she tries on her own. Unfortunately, her efforts are disastrous and she is not in a proper state of mind. She is traumatized by the entire sequence of events, and it might be suggested that she was traumatized at a young age when she saw her first lynching. Her current trauma manifests itself with this second incident, but her memory of past events is also in play. The trauma

of seeing and remembering all of the sensory sounds and sights of the earlier murder are brought back to life in this scene.

Annabel demonstrates a genuine show of responsibility and bravery by making her way to work when the mob is so active. She knows what is happening in the town and she could have remained home. Her “resistance” came in the form of “navigating” around the town for personal protection and for explaining to Gladys’ and her husband the activities of the mob. She is hoping to initiate a response to action from the Sheriff. The African Americans who lock their doors or are moving away demonstrate their “resistance” to the violence of the town as well.

Gladys also represents the theme of motherhood. She wants her child to live a full life. She doesn’t want him experiencing violent behavior or reading comic books that offer poor role models. She is a typical mother who wants all the best for her child. Stewart, as well, wants what is best for his son. The difference between them, however, is that she is intense and motivated to try and do something – even if it is foolish and irrational, and she is unknowingly traumatized. Stewart has no ambition, and his indifference causes the town to be destroyed by the guilt of killing two innocent people. Gladys is strong in her conviction that injustice hurts everyone. From the outset of the drama she is the one character who “resists” her husband’s excuses, and the mob’s activities.

Gladys makes an effort to try and make the situation less volatile, but instead, she is emotionally destroyed by the death of her child, and the town now has the reputation of being a venue for murder. Stewart’s reputation as a dedicated public servant, however,

can be debated. Considering his lack of initiative in stopping Lem's murder, and the fact that he permitted the Lynching to occur without arresting members of the crowd, he is seen as a white supremacist. He is upholding the Southern laws of vigilante murder because in his heart, he believes in white dominance over the African American community. He is seen as an ineffectual law officer who chooses to let the mob rule while he stands back and protects himself and his family. Perhaps he knows that the mob mentality will abate as soon as their "fun" is over, and he must watch and hope that no further danger is in store. There is also the possibility that the community elected him to this position knowing that he wouldn't interfere. His apathetic attitude toward the day's events certainly does not place him in a good light, except for those who also are advocates of white supremacy. Those who do not condone the senseless murders will remember the day as one when two innocent people were lost forever by the actions of a frenzied mob, apathetic law officials, and a traumatized mother..

The four major themes in *The Awakening* are: supremacy, resistance, complicity and motherhood. Ovington's drama was set in the year 1922 in the North. It was a four-act drama as opposed to the majority of other one-acts in this study. The varying acts moved staging locales from residential areas, to a public courtroom scene, to offices of the NAACP, and back to the residential. Moving one location to another demonstrated sophistication to the realism of the art. This drama and its reference to the NAACP, a current topic in 1922, may have proved more palatable for production.

There are numerous secondary characters in this drama, but for the purpose of this study, focus will be given to the four major characters: Helen Ray, an idealist and officer of the Social Club; Edward Marston, a young lawyer and fiancé to Helen; Caesar Smith,

an African American from the South, and William Jones, a Southern Sheriff following Smith.

Act One opens with Helen's Club members meeting at her home. Helen is making last minute arrangements while Edward and others are talking and dancing to ragtime music. The living room is comfortably arranged to accommodate the large group - all of whom enjoy drinks and friendship. Helen hopes to encourage the Social Club to be more involved with their community. She wants the members to be focused on making the world a better place, while Edward is looking forward to a prosperous law career and marriage to Helen. The Social Club of this 1922 era is comprised of young African Americans who are educated, socially engaged, and upwardly mobile. Ovington's own history of social activism is reflected in this drama.

Helen's character represents "resistance" to the status quo of lynching and the lack of protection by the laws of the South. She is an idealistic, young teacher who wants to do something to protect her brothers and sisters suffering from Southern violence and death. She encourages the Club to join as a group in the NAACP to enlist citizens against the summary justice of lynching. Few members of the Club are interested in her suggestion, and Edward is totally against being involved in any activity that will jeopardize his political aspirations. He says as much in his debate with Helen:

EDWARD : *Getting angry . . .* If you weren't crazy from reading all that lynching and peonage stuff you'd see what I mean . . . a man ought to take care of things near home . . . you know as well as I do that I'm thick in politics . . . I don't want to be dragging in lynching and peonage every

other minute. If I can make things decent in this town, get jobs for colored people, help the man who gets run into jail . . . I'm useful . . . Besides it might hurt me at work. (Ovington, *The Awakening* 16)

Edward is adamant in his decision not to worry about or offer help to anyone associated with Southern problems. He demonstrates unyielding refusal to join the new Association. Edward's stern reply convinces Helen that they are not suited for marriage, and eventually she "resists" his proposal and is determined to join the NAACP and offer what services she can. She becomes an active member of the organization and is instrumental in saving a man's life (Ovington, *The Awakening* 16-17).

On the evening of the Social Club's meeting, as Helen is clearing the room of drinks and snacks, she hears a noise outside her door. Suddenly, an African American man, dirty, out-of-breath, and frightened, bursts into her home. Before she can scream for help, he asks her to protect him: " . . . don't gib me up. Caesar Smith, Ma'am, from Georgia . . . Dey's after me" (Ovington, *The Awakening* 19). Helen listens as Smith proceeds to explain that a Southern sheriff is following him North. William Jones, the Sheriff of Casper County, Georgia, has been trailing Smith for several days and intended on returning Smith to Georgia to be lynched. William Jones and the Ku Klux Klan members of this drama represent the themes of hypocrisy, white supremacy and complicity.

Caesar Smith continues to explain to Helen that he is innocent of any wrongdoing. He was trying to protect himself and his home. Smith admits that the Ku Klux

Klan and white members of his community are hunting and killing African American men for assaulting white women:

Ef sumpin wrong happens, ef some white man is shot at by a nigger, or some white gal gits hurt, dey don cyah wherever dey punish der right nigger or der wrong one, don make a bit o'diff'ence, so long as dey hurt some one and has der fun . . . a white gal were – well, hurt badly miss. Nobody knowed who done it . . . but it looks like a white man got a grudge agin her father. But de white folks, an' specially dose ole Ku Klux, dey must hit on somebody, so dey hits on me. (Ovington, *The Awakening* 20)

Smith begs Helen to believe in his innocence and help him hide from the Sheriff. Helen asks why he is being chased if he was innocent and Smith replies: “I had a right nice li'l place. Chicken and a hog an' anice patch er sweet pertatoes. An' I owned it, too. Dey didn't like dat. I was getting biggerty, dey says . . .”(Ovington, *The Awakening* 20)

Smith continues to relate the story of his escape. He hid in the swamps for two days, “der mud up ter my elbows” in an attempt to lose the bloodhounds on his trail. He is afraid to be caught because he knows he will be lynched and burned with “de fire dat burns slow, slow while dey sits around to watch an' hear yer scream . . .”(Ovington 20). The Ku Klux Klan surrounded Smith's home and tried to break down his door. In an effort to protect himself, he shot and wounded two men before escaping out his back door. Fortunately, Smith's family was visiting relatives in another town:

Lindy wanted ter take her kitten. I wish she had. Dere ain't nottin' lef' ob dere place, not a pertater in der ground, or a shingle on der roof –

everything gone. Dey set fire ter de heap, spectin' me ter be in it. But I had gone a good stretch an' purty soon I heard der dogs. (Ovington, *The Awakening* 21-22)

Smith followed the North Star as the old slaves had done and finally arrived safely in the North. He knows, however, that the Sheriff is chasing him and is determined to take him South again. Helen agrees to help Caesar Smith in any way possible. From this point in the drama, Helen's actions "resist" any attempts made by the Sheriff or his partners to return Caesar for lynching.

William Jones, the Southern Sheriff, is a mean and ruthless supremacist. As a deputy of the law, he is bound to obey and uphold the tenets of justice. Instead, he rudely barges into Helen's private residence and insults an African American woman who is brave enough to stand her ground. He feels he has the right to do whatever is necessary to capture his alleged criminal. He is a hypocrite in terms of his treatment and dismissal of Helen, and as a man of law, who is expected to be fair and law-abiding. His dialogue and actions are evidence of his personality: "*The Sheriff takes hold of Caesar and pushes him toward the door*" (Ovington, *The Awakening* 23).

HELEN: Leave that man alone, you've no right to enter this house.

JONES: Well, I'll be damned. What sort of nigger wench is this?

HELEN: . . . we won't let him go back to be lynched.

JONES: . . . (*menacingly*) See here, you'd better drop this sort of gab with me. You're nothing but a nigger, and you want to keep your place.

HELEN: . . . I'll have you arrested for it.

JONES: I'll be damned . . . You're a high-brown colored gal all Right- but how do you think you're going to keep me from taking my prisoner away with me? . . . Well, we'll see whether this ain't a white man's country. . . (Ovington, *The Awakening* 23-25).

Jones meets additional "resistance" in the characters of the two policemen who are called by Helen to protect Caesar Smith. One of the officers reminds the Sheriff that he is now in the North and Caesar Smith is a prisoner of that state. Smith will be placed in protective custody by them until a lawyer can be provided to represent him. They will ask the NAACP for help. This scenario of defense for a black man is new to the Sheriff.

The setting for Act Two is the local office of the NAACP. Helen works enlisting new members who volunteer their services in various capacities. She also collects funds to provide an attorney for Smith. Helen, as well as all of the volunteers, represent the theme of "resistance," by their efforts on behalf of Caesar Smith. The NAACP chose Edward Marston as Caesar's lawyer, and Edward becomes another representative of "resistance" against white supremacy. In a change of heart, he becomes an active member of the NAACP, and refuses his fee for defending Caesar Smith.

Faith and hypocrisy are represented in a scene where Reverend Todd exchanges dialogue with William Jones. Todd is examining books and pamphlets on lynching, and Jones is curious and bothered that anyone will question Southern habits. Reverend Todd admits why he is so interested: "We must all pull together if we are to rid ourselves of the demon Race Prejudice" (Ovington, *The Awakening* 37). Rev. Todd, while looking at a

lynching pamphlet, notices a friend of the Sheriff's, Dick Simpson, pictured on the back page and makes a comment that this specific pamphlet was sent all over Europe. Jones replies angrily: "What you sending the picture over the world for? It ain't nobody's business but ours how we settle up with niggers . . . Dick's a good church member . . . never misses a Sunday . . . (Ovington, *The Awakening* 39).

Reverend Todd asks if Mr. Simpson is "escaping hell fire by burning up a black man here on earth?" (39). Jones continues in his racist tirade by admitting that neither he nor his friends are going to permit blacks or anyone else to take over the country:

JONES: . . . they's better not come around our way if they're nigger lovers, either. We know what to do with folks like that . . . I never thought I'd have run up against a bunch of niggers that'd keep me from getting my man. Why, ef I'd been home the'd have handed him to me as quick as you could shoot off a gun . . . (Ovington, *The Awakening* 41)

The short dialogue of the hypocritical Sheriff points to the complicity of the Southern citizens who participate in the lynching rituals. Mr. Simpson, the Sheriff's friend, is a regular, Christian, "church-going" man who participates in religious ceremonies on Sunday and pretends to be a moral man. In reality, he is a murderer of innocent black men and a hypocrite who does not abide by God's laws.

White supremacy is also exhibited by Sheriff Jones when he discusses the South's true feelings about African Americans in an argument with Edward:

JONES: When they're biggerty, we send 'em away at the rope's noose . . .
Any nigger who lives down my way has got to know first that it is a white
man's country . . .

EDWARD: Where is Helen?

TODD: . . . at a meeting. She will be back directly.

JONES: A right pretty nigger wench.

EDWARD: Get out of here. You have no business in this place!
(Ovington, *The Awakening*, 42).

The stage directions describe the Sheriff's immediate response: "*The Sheriff goes over to Edward and starts to pour the tobacco juice from his mouth onto him. Edward hits him. The Sheriff draws a pistol and fires. Edward grabs his left arm, stumbles, falls unconscious . . .*" (43). Jones' final words to Edward were: "Knock a white man down, will you?" (Ovington, *The Awakening* 43).

The shooting of Edward is news in the town. The local police quickly arrest the Sheriff for his intent to kill Edward and take him to jail. Edward is laughing when he finally regains consciousness and learns that Sheriff Jones "was in handcuffs" (44).

Act Three is set in the local courtroom with various members of the cast seated in the audience. One conspicuous character, Fannie Landers, is seated beside Helen Ray. She has not been in the drama until this point. She provides testimony that serves as the climax for the drama. She, too, is an example of "resistance" against lynching. She

represents the themes of motherhood and the trauma that she experienced in the past. It is her story that “awakens” the courts to the truth.

The District Attorney calls Sheriff Jones to the stand and asks if he can guarantee that Caesar Smith would get a fair trial if he is returned to Georgia. Jones replies: “There’s no state in the union where a man can have a fairer trial” (Ovington, *The Awakening* 47). The questioning continues: “State to the Court what assurance you have that you can keep your prisoner safe from a mob if you return with him” (47). “*Jones put his hand to his hip and draws out a large revolver. He runs his hand lovingly along it*” (48). “I have this, Sir” (48). The judge immediately takes the revolver from Jones who is under bail for shooting Edward Marston. Jones lies on the stand. He is well-aware that the murder of black men in Georgia is routinely without a fair trial. Caesar Smith admits the same to Helen in his initial story. Jones is carrying his revolver and this is noticed by Marston. Who would be able to determine if an “accident” should take Smith’s life on his return to Georgia? It is obvious that Jones’ dialogue and behavior prove him to be a racist. He is arrogant, convinced of his “white privilege,” and insulting by his constant use of the word, “nigger” for which he is reprimanded several times by the judge. rude Marston began his cross examination of Sheriff Jones:

EDWARD: I would like to ask Mr. Jones a question. . . If some night . . . I were to walk up to your front door and pounding angrily demand entrance, and if, when the door was not opened, I broke into your home, what would you do? (*Jones’ hand goes involuntarily to his hip. There is a ripple of laughter in the court.*)

JONES: . . . You think a nigger, Negro, home is the same as mine?

EDWARD: Not at all, Mr. Jones. You have shown me that it is not, and it is not entitled to the same protection as the white home in your state. That's all. (Ovington, *The Awakening* 49-50)

Marston is quickly able to show just how biased Jones is – and how dangerous it is living in the South if you are a black man. Edwards presents the facts of the case in a very deliberate manner. He explains the Klan's breaking into Smith's home and his escape. He describes the attack of the young girl, Dora Court, and the fact that there is no evidence connecting Caesar Smith with the crime. Regardless, Smith is a marked man, because he is showing signs of personal success. His shooting of the Klan members is in self-defense and "We look upon him with respectful eyes, feeling the dignity of his action in repelling the men who tried to invade his home . . . if the State grants rendition, it turns this man over again to a masked mob" (Ovington, *The Awakening* 51-52).

Edward gives the particulars of Smith's case to the Court before presenting statistics of lynchings in Georgia. Sheriff Jones denies that any lynchings take place, but Marston proves him to be a liar. Marston tells of a lynching that took place fifteen years earlier. A white woman was attacked in the same area of Georgia where Sheriff Jones resides. The white residents gathered to hunt and "kill the nigger" (53). Two bloodhounds were put out and stopped in front of a white man's home.

Ovington adds a sound from the audience at this point that causes Edward to stop – a clever device on the author's part to create tension and curiosity. Her directions were very telling: ". . . a moan comes from the audience. It disturbs Edward for a second but

he soon proceeds” (53). Edward continues to explain how the father of the white girl is an enemy of the man who lives in the house where the dogs stop. The mob doesn’t stay at the house, but instead moves to “nigger bend” where a black boy, Jerry Landers, is seen earlier that day. *“Another moan is heard. . . . it comes from Fanny Landers . . .”*(53). Edward describes how the mob races to Landers’ home yelling and screaming for blood. Jerry Landers is an only son to his mother, a widow. The mob needs revenge and rather than investigate who is responsible in the house where the dogs stop, they move to charge an innocent boy with the crime. The mob is complicit in initiating violence, escaping punishment, inciting a riot, and murdering an innocent man. The attitude of white privilege prevails over justice.

Fanny Landers, the mother of the lynched boy, is seated in the court room. It is she who moans when Marston mentions the killing in Georgia fifteen years earlier. She is traumatized by the brutal death of her son , and this trauma causes her to continually live that nightmare. She stands in the courtroom and in an emotional state, describes the series of events that took her son from her years before. As in other dramas in this study, an elderly woman is the character who describes the lynching. This particular incident is one of the most graphic in this study. Fanny describes the brutality as only a mother can:

FANNY: I am der mudder ob dat boy. Dey burn him, Sir, dey burn him ter death. I saw de light, de yellor flame in de sky, an’ I runned and runned. He was screamin’ when I got dar. God, I kin hear him scream now. (*Her voice rises to a scream . . .*) Eberybody members. Dere was hunnerds ob’ em watchin’ my boy burn. . . . Jedge, don’ yer let him take dat man down

dar . . . If yer do at night you'll smell de burning flesh. (Ovington, *The Awakening* 54)

One of the strongest of human senses is the sense of smell which conjures memories of past events. This deliberate and graphic description is the author's convention for giving the men and women of the courtroom – and the reading or viewing audience of the play – a true sensory image of Fanny's experience. It creates an empathy for her character and a sympathetic response for the defense. It is a successful tactic because after Fanny's dramatic story, women are heard crying in the courtroom and men are clenching their hands.

Fanny Landers' trauma gives her courage to speak of the death of her son. She is a black woman who is able to use her experience to save a man's life. In two other dramas, "important white friends" were enlisted to try and save lives. In this particular play, a trauma-stricken mother of a lynched boy is instrumental in "awakening" the jury to the reality of lynching with her graphic story. She lives that experience every day. Now, in the court room, she can verbalize the agony she has bottled inside. For a mother to hear a child scream is traumatic – and to know she can do nothing for him, leaves her helpless. She represents every woman who has a child who is injured, sick, killed or lynched. Her life will never be the same once a child is lost. Fanny's speech serves as the most profound testimony for the defense. Edward rests his case and the curtain falls.

The final Act Four returns the action to Helen's home and resolves the drama quickly. Edward Marston is applauded as an outstanding young lawyer for the community. Helen is congratulated for her planning and research because she

orchestrated Fanny's appearance in court when she read of the lynching in one of her lynching journals. Edward knows nothing about Helen's plan. Caesar Smith and his family stay in the town and work for a merchant who offers him employment. Sheriff Jones, rather than take Smith back to Georgia, is arrested and incarcerated by the local officials. The Social Club continues to meet and determines to work with the NAACP, and accomplish as much as they can to help others of their race: "We can't turn our backs on them . . . because they happen to be born black . . ." (Ovington, *The Awakening* 62).

The Noose (1918), by the white woman dramatist, Tracy D. Mygatt, is a short one-act propaganda play against lynching. Mygatt's history of social activism led her to write the drama in hopes that it would promote action to end the violence in the South.

The time of the drama is Christmas Eve in the 1920s at the home of a white family, Mr. and Mrs. Houston Clay. Clay and his wife, Margaret, have one small daughter. Clay is a lawyer in a small Southern town, and his wife is a homemaker. Clay is involved in local politics and is looking toward the Governor's mansion while Margaret is protective of her child's welfare and sympathetic to the plight of African Americans in her state. She is concerned over the violence that permeates the region and hates the ruthless murders that occur. The elderly Mrs. Clay, (Houston's mother), lives with them and comes from the white Southern mentality that "looked down its nose" on the black community.

The action of the drama takes place in the large and comfortable living room of the Clay's home. The Clays are a middle-class family with a home furnished in the manner of an old and established Southern mansion. A sofa, chairs, tables, lamps,

children's toys, a grandfather clock, and a Christmas tree dress the stage (Mygatt 1). A burning fireplace can be seen in a corner, and noises and commotion are heard offstage. The Clay family members speak in proper English, while the elderly and African American characters speak in a dialect. The author chooses to use these speech patterns to distinguish the differences in social and economic positions.

The drama opens with the black boy, Pete Johnson, delivering a bucket of coal for the fire. He is agitated by the outside noises and periodically he stops to listen and to take a deep breath. He is conspicuously nervous.

The elderly Mrs. Clay enters the room, walking with a cane, “. . . *but the proud dominance of her manner is undismayed by physical weakness*” Mygatt (2). Mrs. Clay is one of the characters who represents complicity, hypocrisy and supremacy in the drama. In her customary, condescending manner, she questions Pete on the decorating of the Christmas tree. Pete, always obedient and submissive, is afraid to admit that other servants are too busy to do it, so he decorates their tree. “You? Well, who told you to trim it? . . .” Pete quietly responds: “ Miss Jean, she were hanging’ round, kind of hintin’ fer me to . . . ” Mygatt (3). Mrs. Clay concedes that if Miss Jean agreed, “I don’t know that that was so very objectionable” (3). Before Pete can take a sigh of relief, Mrs. Clay warns him that he can no longer play with Miss Jean, the young daughter of the family. Pete is distressed that the family no longer trusts him with their white child. Pete is black and eighteen while Miss Jean is only a small child. The stage directions describe Pete and his emotional state: “*Pete Johnson, a good-looking young Negro of eighteen . . . speaking with timid earnestness*” (1-3).

PETE: M's Clay – I reckon you 'members befo' Miss Margaret went to Virginia . . . she tole me she trus' Miss Jean to me befo' Am'belle, 'case she knowed I were mighty fond of her . . .” (3)

Mrs. Clay in a “*kindly brutal manner*” tells Pete that the family treats him well, but things have changed since there was a “frightful” crime. Pete fears that he will be sent away: “We’ll not send you away . . . but not have you about the house anymore!” (Mygatt 2).

The elder Mrs. Clay is a racist. She has lived all of her life under the ideology of white supremacy. Even though the drama is set in the 1920s, the mentality of white dominance is very much alive in the South. Her demeanor of superiority frightens the young man, Pete, who cautiously guards his actions and his manner of speaking, so as not to aggravate the white woman. He is aware that his life is in the hands of the white people for whom he works. It is “their world” and they control the blacks by continually keeping them oppressed.

When Pete delivers the coal, he is conscious of mob noises gathering outside the Clay’s home. The noises continue and grow louder. Rather than leave the house for fear of being caught up in the mob activity, he asks Mrs. Clay if he may stay at her house:

PETE: (*with perceptible effort*) M’ Clay, please, M’am, can I stay here tonight?

MRS. CLAY: (*surprised*) Stay here? Tonight?

PETE: Yas’m. Sleep here. I – I could sleep in de attic.

MRS. CLAY: The attic? Why – but that’s in the house! Besides, why should you want to sleep here?

PETE: (*with a shiver*) ‘Case, ‘case . . . I’s’e afraid to be gwing home tonight.

MRS. CLAY: (*with a shrug*) Afraid! You niggers are all such Cowards!
(Mygatt 4)

Mrs. Clay speaks rudely, and with her customary air of superiority, she dismisses the young man’s legitimate fears – and stereotypes him in the process. She is a cold woman who, never recognizes her insensitivity to another human being. He is a “non-entity” in her mind. She continues to see Pete as “the chattel” that slavery made his ancestors decades before. Mrs. Clay, because of her whiteness, is able to grant or refuse his wishes – or even his existence. The ideology of white supremacy existed for so long that it is not recognized as anything but a “common and normal” way of life for her.

Pete explains why he is afraid. Years before, his mother told him of a mob that had mutilated several young black men: “Dey wen’ after de young niggers . . . an’ de tole dem dey’d burn ‘em to deaf . . .” Mygatt (5). Mrs. Clay answers: “Well, I reckon we have to teach you, don’t we? . . . Now, Pete, go up to my room, and bring down my Bible. We’ll have prayers after your master gets back!” (Mygatt 5).

The themes of hypocrisy, complicity and supremacy are captured by the short dialogue of Mrs. Clay. The dialogue also demonstrates how “she” and “we” (the mob) are responsible for murders. According to her, these murders are “lessons to be learned.” When mobs of white citizens, or members of groups such as the Ku Klux Klan terrorize

black communities or ethnic groups, they use their violence as “threats – here’s what will happen if . . .” Violence creates fear and the groups who threaten the black communities expect the fear to prohibit any advancement of African Americans. Mrs. Clay’s demeanor and attitude make her just as complicit in the lynchings of innocent men and women, as those vigilante groups who tie the noose or stand by and watch.

Pete knows what can happen to him if the mob gets out of control. He is an eighteen-year-old black man. He is uneducated, he is a “beast,” and he is “available.” He could be the mob’s next victim. There is no concern for guilt or innocence. The mob doesn’t need any proof – just a black body.

The stage directions of the drama set it in present time, 1922. The directions also establish its copyright date as 1918, and its production in New York in April and May of 1919. It is forty plus years after the end of the Civil War and the Emancipation of slaves. Still, the author has Mrs. Clay order Pete around and refer to Clay as “his master’s return.” Mrs. Clay does not accept the freedom of blacks as a legitimate Southern (or national) phenomenon. Pete is still seen as a “slave” while her son remains his “master.” For decades following Emancipation, the Southern mentality was focused on keeping the black man as a slave. Regulations, rules and restrictions were constantly limiting the advancement of the African American population: black codes, peonage, forced labor, and Jim Crow. Mygatt’s reference to “slave” and “master” are direct indictments of those Southern tactics of oppression, and proof that the Southern ideology remain current.

Mrs. Clay represents hypocrisy. She orders Pete to get her Bible for them to pray. Minutes before she refuses him help and shelter, insults him as a coward, threatens him

by teaching him a lesson with lynching, and orders him around as a slave. Her pretense of piety and moral living is conspicuously phony.

The two characters who represent motherhood are the two Mrs. Clays. The younger, however, proves to be moral, kind, generous and totally unlike her mother-in-law. Margaret Clay arrives home from a visit to her mother. She is a graceful, energetic young wife and mother, who is kind, capable and self-assured. She is devoted to her family and believes in equality and concern for all persons. She greets her mother-in-law and Pete with warmth and genuine happiness and asks for her husband and daughter. The only response she receives from Mrs. Clay is vague: "You know we didn't expect you back till tomorrow! This is a perfectly fine surprise you've given us!" (Mygatt 6). Margaret suspects that neighbors are having a Christmas party and her family is invited. Her mother-in-law continues to evade a direct answer. "Well, not exactly a party! It's just a – the fact is, Margaret, almost everybody in Warino is up on the hill! . . . Then this thing!" (7). Margaret asks what is happening, but Mrs. Clay quickly changes the subject.

A letter had arrived for Houston, and was sent from the State boss, George McCormick. Margaret is concerned because McCormick has a reputation: "McCormick soils everything he touches. . . . I know how interested Hugh is in politics but . . . it's clean politics he cares about . . ." (6). Eager to see her husband and daughter, Margaret decides to walk up to the party on the hill. Mrs. Clay tries to prevent Margaret from going by asking questions about her mother's health. Margaret admits that she tries to convince her mother to spend the holidays but "You know she never quite got over that shock! . . . that horrible thing that happened here when she was just a girl! . . . that's why she never visits us . . . that lynching . . ." (Mygatt 9).

Margaret proceeds to tell of the lynching that took place in the town years before. Her maternal grandfather Matthews was the Sheriff of the town and risked his life to save his prisoner. Margaret's mother, then sixteen, saw the mob drag the young man to the fire, burn him and hang him. She moved from the town and never returned. She warned Margaret not to marry a Southerner because of what she saw that day. It was assumed that a black man had committed the crime of assaulting a white girl, and this had greatly disturbed Margaret's mother. Margaret said the young man was innocent. It had been another man who had committed the crime, and her mother was greatly disturbed by the innocent man's brutal murder. At sixteen, she had been traumatized and never got over the shock.

On hearing this story, Mrs. Clay (the elder) articulates that she has no sympathy for the black victim. She "assumes" he is guilty: ". . . the worst crime there is – a nigger's takin' a white woman . . ." (Mygatt 11). Margaret replies: "I'm not talking about that crime! I'm talkin' about the crime that nearly cost my mother her reason – a hundred white people . . ." (11). Margaret's dialogue explains that her mother's trauma was caused by the lynching those years before. Margaret's mother can't visit her daughter's home or celebrate the holidays with her granddaughter, because she is unable to return to the site of the murder. The hundred people who came to see the lynching were complicit in the murder, and Margaret relates the story: "The victim had been in the custody of the law, then came the people with distorted, fiendish faces, carrin' oil and whips and tar an' a rope – draggin him to Pine Hill . . ." (11).

As Margaret delivers her dialogue, she speaks in ". . . a low, strained voice, as if the words were wrung from her" (11). These directions are Mygatt's "foreshadowing" of

a break-down for Margaret. She is thinking about and replaying in her mind, the scene of the lynching – even though she was not there. The tension of this scene is built by Pete’s next question and the fact that Margaret still has not seen her family. Margaret is moving toward a revelation that will shock her and change the lives of her family forever. It is the climax of the drama.

Pete returns to ask Margaret if he may please sleep at her home. He is afraid to leave her house because of the noises outside and up on the hill. At this point in the drama, the author, Mygatt has a flash of red light come through the window. This attention to a “special effect” generates additional tension and continues to build to the point of Margaret’s realization of the murder. Margaret runs to the window, observes the rushing mob of spectators, and sees the conflagration burning on the hill. Pete tries to comfort Margaret: “. . . Don’t you faint nor nuffin’! Don’t take on so!” (Mygatt 13). Margaret tries to understand the horror she is witnessing. She is shocked and asks Pete: “Why didn’t you prevent it yourself? You’re a man!” (11). Pete responds: “Ms., Ms. Margaret, me?” (11). Margaret realizes the question is ridiculous and they both are helpless to do anything. She cannot offer any form of resistance that will prevent the lynching. Certainly, Pete can do nothing to fight the mob. He would be killed as well. She tells Pete that he should have contacted her husband, Houston. Certainly, he would have prevented the murder. Pete responds: “Mas’r Clay were there, Miss Margaret! Mas’r Clay, he were standin’ jes der – trimmin’ de tree fo’ Miss Jean . . . when dey call him on de telephone, an’ say dey need him . . . it were de folks dat had’ caught Sam, an’ I reckon you knows how ‘tis Miss Margaret . . .”(Mygatt 15).

Houston Clay walks in from the lynching. Margaret is distressed by the news that he is involved. She is so upset, that Houston tries to calm her by patronizing her and treating her as a child. This is Mygatt's way of showing the belittling of women and the dismissal of consideration for women's intelligence. His dialogue and actions are evidence of his opinion of his wife's capabilities:

"But child, what are you talkin' about?" "*Caressing her . . . he draws her into a big chair, seating himself on its arm, and, continuing to stroke her hair, he looks fondly into her face*" (16). "I haven't been away! Why, I reckon its little head must have been addled with its long trip on the choo-choo train! Come, Doll-Baby, let it rest here . . ." (Mygatt16).

Margaret is not Houston's "baby" and she snaps back at him. In a scene reminiscent of *A Doll's House*, Margaret, like Nora in Ibsen's Naturalistic drama, demands answers and asserts herself when she questions her husband about his activities. In addition, Margaret comes to realize (just as Nora did), that she no longer recognizes the man she married. She uses her strength and determination to do what is correct and necessary for her life and her daughter's future.

Mygatt's personal life and her long relationship with Frances Witherspoon may have been an influence on her writing decisions for women. She and Witherspoon lived and collaborated together most of their adult life on various projects. They were strong women who worked to defend those less fortunate, and from the biographies that tell of their lives, they were not afraid to challenge anyone when they felt there was just cause. In this drama, Mygatt transferred her strength to Margaret.

Margaret wants to shield her daughter from the horrible scene of the lynching. She saw the damage it caused when her mother witnessed a lynching as a young girl. Houston hardly reacts and casually puts his feet on the ottoman and stretches out comfortably. He is far too nonchalant about the lynching – another blatant example of the “assumption of privilege” and the attitude of supremacy and disregard for the law.

Houston admits that he permitted their daughter, Jean, to join Miss Florence along with other children of Pine Creek, where they could experience “well, of course not the – the details, as you might say . . . I reckon you know how children love a bonfire” Mygatt (18). He also admits that Jean probably didn’t see everything, but there were many children on hand that night “havin’ a high old time!” (18). Once again, this is a reference to the children whose parents permit them to witness lynchings as entertainment. The callous and insensitive attitude of the white perpetrators is as shocking as the lynching event. Houston is a hypocrite and a complicit participant in a murder.

Margaret begs Houston to say his story isn’t true. He apologizes because he has upset Margaret, but in an irritated voice tells her his true feelings about their daughter’s upbringing : “we can’t train her too early to be a true daughter of the South!” (Mygatt 19). Houston continues by criticizing Margaret’s grandfather for inserting himself in a mob’s attempt to kill a black man years before. Her grandfather, who is discussed in the drama, serves as a representative of overt “resistance” by making an effort to protect his prisoner and avoid an innocent man’s death. According to Houston, “Guilty or innocent, the principal was the same!” (19) . Margaret cannot believe what she is hearing. Her husband is a lawyer, and he is expected to uphold the law. Now he is joining the mob and is being hypocritical in his profession as well as complicit in a murder. She asks him to

tell her the truth: "Wait! It is true, then is it, that you helped lynch a Negro tonight?" Houston replies: "I did my duty! . . . the whole of Warino – every one of the best people in it – strung up a nigger, and as I am a Southern gentleman, I wish to God we'd done it sooner!" (20).

Houston's confession confirms "the best citizens" of the town as being complicit and hypocritical in the issue of lynching. The Southern mentality of white domination is pervasive. Houston argues with his wife that black men deserve their punishment because they are "brutes" and attack white women. Margaret fights back and "resists" his comment: "And who taught them first? Who stole their wives and daughters, and after they had used them, sold them on the block like cattle . . . ?" (21). Houston tells Margaret that he must do what he thinks is right. The assaulted victim is a little girl, Nannie Pringle, about the same age as their daughter Jean. Because of the age of the child, many women attend the lynching. Margaret points to the complicity and lack of motherly compassion exhibited by the on-lookers: "Women, yes, we're as blood thirsty as you when we begin" (Mygatt 23).

Houston rambles on about the gruesome murder. As he does so, he watches as Margaret aimlessly wanders about the room, picking up and dropping items in an absent-minded manner. She is distracted and not listening to her husband. Margaret is showing signs of the trauma she experienced and Houston recognizes that there is a problem:

CLAY: Now just because you're a little – a little hysterical, Margaret,
don't forget I'm your husband!

MARGARET:: You forgot you were my husband tonight; you forgot it so thoroughly that – that I reckon you’re not my husband anymore! . . . I loved somebody else . . . he was just and loyal and courageous; he had the courage of chivalry! He was brave for all pitiful, sinning creatures; they could go to him for refuge. . . . he was the father of my child . . . now he isn’t here anymore . . . he would never have done that coward’s deed tonight . . . (Mygatt 25-26)

Houston begs her to understand his actions, but Margaret resists his pleas and makes it clear that she cannot live knowing her husband kills out of hatred. She represents this theme of resistance again as she prepares to leave Houston. He becomes angry and worried of what people will think and say about him. Women don’t leave their husbands, he reminds her: “Margaret, you might consider my feelings a little” (Mygatt 27). Not only is Houston Clay a hypocrite and a racist, he is also an arrogant and self-serving child. His main concerns are for his reputation and political aspirations. He has no remorse about his involvement in the lynching, and like the other citizens of his community, he believes in terrorism and violence as a means of oppression and fear: “I’m not one bit sorry I did it! I had to - ! I’m only sorry you’re makin’ such a fuss . . . if every woman left her husband for a lynching, I reckon there wouldn’t be an intact home in Georgia tonight . . .” (Mygatt 26).

Margaret represents devoted motherhood. She makes it clear that she is leaving in spite of Clay’s pleas. She is protecting her daughter, Jean, and taking her away. Margaret cannot rear her daughter in an environment where adults use murders, mutilations and burnings as entertainment for their children. Margaret resists the life of a happy family

because she is a concerned and loving mother to her child. She still cares for her husband, but she no longer recognizes him. Her swift reaction and decision to the day's events may have been partially prompted by trauma, but the lynching itself, along with the revelation of her husband's involvement, become too much for her. She feels she has no choice but to leave.

Loud noises are again heard outside the house and a knock at the door interrupts the action. Several inebriated men, members of the town's mob, appear at the door. With the crowd is a frightened Pete Johnson who asks Mr. Clay, "Oh, Mas'r Clay . . . Fo' de Lawd's sake, save me! Save me!" Clay responds: "Get up, can't you, you blasted nigger! And get out of my sight!" (Mygatt 31). Clay's dialogue is evidence of his intolerance for the black boy. Margaret, being sympathetic and kind by nature, walks to her husband, and prompts him to pull the terrified boy into the house. Clay is angry to be quietly forced to help Pete. Clay roughly shoves the boy toward the elder Mrs. Clay and orders her to "take him upstairs – and bolt the door!" (32).

Two characters, Warren Fite and Arthur Henderson, representing the white supremacy of the town – as well as hypocrisy and complicity, enter the house by breaking through the French window. Both are drunk and half-heartedly apologize for disturbing them so rudely on Christmas eve. In drunken slurs, Henderson and Fite try to make excuses for the event that took place that evening. They want Margaret to be proud of her husband for the "prominent part" he took in the event. Clay is unnerved by their retelling of the lynching. He doesn't want Margaret to know the truth – he tied the noose around the victim's neck. He is an active participant in the lynching. He and his fellow citizens

“all good and prominent residents” killed an innocent man. Clay makes efforts to prevent the men from divulging too much information about his actions.

Margaret asks the men to tell her quickly what they want her to know. She is leaving and she is in a hurry. The men question her “leaving” while Clay makes more excuses. He doesn’t want his wife to embarrass him in front of the men. In a firm and determined voice, Margaret admits her reasons: “My mother is not ill, Mr. Henderson. Nobody is ill. I am going’ away because of Jean” (35). She stands her ground against all of the men – including her husband for their lynching murder. She is leaving to protect her child as any good mother would do. Realizing that Margaret is determined to go, Clay becomes very remorseful and begs her not to leave. He regrets his actions and asks for her forgiveness: “Oh, forgive me, Dear Heart! I wish to God I hadn’t. . . I’m sorry!” (Mygatt 36).

Mr. Fite immediately steps in to bring the news he has been wanting to divulge, and the remorseful Clay quickly becomes the self-centered hypocrite again:

FITE: There! You’re shorry! . . . I wish to God, I’d tied That noose! Then I’d be the next Governor of Georgia.

CLAY: (starting violently, breaking away, heedless of Margaret’s eyes)
Who’s talkin’ about being Governor?

FITE: Well, not you, I reckon! You’re sorry! Dirty Yankee!

CLAY: But he said “Governor”! You know I . . .

HENDERSON: (*holding unopened letter*) . . . so you don't even bother to read your letters from McCormick? . . . Yes, I know you've wanted it for five years? And that your friend, George McCormick will name the next one? . . . (Mygatt 37)

Standing at the doorway, Margaret hears another mob approaching their home. They are singing a "lynching" song instead of a Christmas Carol on Christmas eve. Henderson says the song is made especially for the occasion and it is going to be printed in the Gazette the next week. The mob is coming to sing to Houston Clay for his new appointment. They are celebrating because Clay is their hero, their savior, their leader. In reality, he is a murderer – plain and simple. The entire group represents the white supremacy, hypocrisy and complicity of the South in Mygatt's drama. The words of the song are cruel and racist:

*The damn black worm,
Can you see him squirm,
As we burn his way to hell?
The damn black worm,
We can hear him yell . . . (39)*

Henderson continues with more "good news" for Clay and Margaret: Ten minutes after you left Pine Hill, George McCormick rode up on his black horse. . . . said the county was waitin' for this . . . said there was just one man whom he'd thought all along would make a first rate Governor . . . a Governor that could be dependable all along the line, specially – the color line . . . McCormick asked, 'Who did it? Who tied the noose?'

And then we told him. And by God, he said . . . Houston Clay shall be Governor of Georgia. (Mygatt 38-40)

The mob stands outside Clay's home. Margaret begs Clay to tell the group he is sorry for what he did, and that he knows that it is a cowardly murder. Clay fights against his personal desire to be a political hero while facing the possibility of losing his family. To admit his mistake is "political suicide." The elder Mrs. Clay is thrilled that her son is appointed and comments that his father would have been "so proud" (Mygatt 43).

Margaret again asks Clay to denounce his actions and is immediately verbally attacked by Mrs. Clay: "You, Margaret! A daughter of the South!" (43). Clay refuses to admit he made a mistake: "I'm not sorry! I shall not repudiate it! I was lyin' to you because I loved you, but . . ." (43). Realizing that the situation is a futile battle, Margaret responds: "Then good-by Houston . . . I do think of my child!" (43). Margaret walks away – as a form of resistance – from her home, her marriage, her husband, and the Southern mentality. As a mother, she leaves to protect her child from racial injustice. Mr. Henderson yells at her as she opens the door: "You're not leaving your husband because he lynched a nigger? I never heard of such a thing!" (44). The mob stands outside the home shouting, "Speech, Speech", and Clay, holding a noose in his hand, walks out to greet them as their new Governor. Many children join their parents in the cheering crowd.

The most prominent themes in Mygatt's drama are motherhood, white supremacy, hypocrisy, complicity, resistance and trauma. Mygatt makes a strong indictment against the callousness and cruelty of Southern whites. The characters of the elder Mrs. Clay and Houston Clay embody the worst characteristics of racial prejudice. She is a white woman

who refuses to admit her prejudices and he is a coward, a hypocrite and a murderer. He is willing to sacrifice his family and the lives of innocent men for his own self-gratification.

Margaret is the strong woman who stands against the violence and her husband's hypocritical and complicit actions. Her strength, however, denies her the future that she once expected - love, marriage and family. She will survive, however, because she knows that her convictions are correct and her daughter's future will be brighter. She also knows that she is a strong woman – a survivor.

CHAPTER SEVEN

GENERAL OBSERVATIONS OF THE ANTI-LYNCHING DRAMAS OF AFRICAN AMERICAN WOMEN DRAMATISTS AND WHITE WOMEN DRAMATISTS

Realism in Anti-Lynching Dramas

Realism in literature of the early twentieth century should not be compared with the realism of today's literature or society. Realism of one hundred years ago was in its infancy. To look at these anti-lynching dramas in the same light as today's modern, technologically sophisticated plays are viewed, would be unfair. The anti-lynching dramas while "realistic" theatre are considerably less crafted than today's theatrical offerings. The anti-lynching dramas must be analyzed with that thought in mind. They were as "realistic" then as they could be in terms of offering "a mirror to the lives" of the black community.

The list of anti-lynching dramas analyzed and discussed in this study have more commonalities than differences among them. All of the dramas represent "realistic" theatre that came into vogue during the early twentieth century. The dramas offer women's perspectives on the atrocities of lynchings, and the traumatic effects that were experienced by those "living victims" whose loved ones were murdered. Yet, the story lines are of ordinary people, living "their ordinary (or extraordinary) lives and the

circumstances that surround them. The trauma, however, is especially acute for women and children whose lives are forever changed by lynching's brutal rituals.

There are few distinctions between the dramas of the African American women authors and the white women authors. Both races identified well with the subject matter. All of these plays demonstrate a deep understanding of the seriousness of the lynching phenomenon and its aftermath even if they are only one-act plays. It is uncertain as to how many (if any) lynchings were personally experienced by these authors, but certainly, there was ample discourse, literature, and information dispersed on the subject to give it national attention. The white women authors joined the writing campaign against lynching in the 1930s in an effort to support the African American cause.

In terms of "realistic" drama, both races have a definite and clear picture of the lynching issue though the individual dramatists offer their unique perspectives on the tragedies. Their characters cover a multitude of socio-economic types and personalities which makes a point : no black person is safe from the lynching tree .

Comparisons and Contrasts

Genres, Plots and Characters:

These plays are the genres of folk dramas, protest dramas, propaganda dramas, and womanist/feminist dramas, and the lynching rituals, central to the plots, are either in the past tense or are accomplished during the dramatic action (Perkins, Stephens 10). The former lynchings are most often described by the distraught women left behind from a personal lynching experience. The earlier plays considered here have minimal descriptions of the murders, but as years progress in the writing of the dramas, the

lynchings are described in more specific and graphic details. The usual lynching victims are young, innocent, black men, and the most common crime that warrants lynching is a black man's alleged attack on a white woman. This excuse is false, with an expeditious and brutal killing of an African American man being the end result. The action of the lynching is off-stage, permitting the audience to imagine the details of each lynching incident. As the plays became more sophisticated, off-stage conventions (noise, voices etc...) created more effect for audiences.

Two dramas by African American women authors, *Aftermath*, and *Rachel*, do not present this exact scenario described above. *Aftermath* follows a soldier's return from war and his effort to avenge his father's lynching. *Rachel* dramatizes the story of an idealistic young girl, who becomes depressed and traumatized by the news of her father's and brother's lynchings, and the racial prejudice that she and her family face. The result of her trauma compels her to refuse marriage and deny herself the opportunity to have children of her own. This is a dramatic decision for her in light of the fact that she loves children and she considers the role of the mother as a special gift from God.

Two plays by white authors also present a different plot line: *The Noose* and *The Awakening*. In *The Noose*, a prominent white citizen participates in a lynching and denies any wrong doing. As a result, his wife leaves him in order to protect their young daughter. In *The Awakening* a young black female protects an alleged rapist and proves his innocence.

Seven of the dramas are short one-acts, while Angelina Weld Grimké's *Rachel*, has three acts; Mary White Ovington's , *The Awakening* is the longest with four acts; and

Annie Nathan Meyer's *Black Souls* is divided into six scenes. In the dramas by black women authors, the characters are predominantly African Americans, with white characters being the racially motivated law officials or members of the mobs. Female characters are also more predominant than male characters in the African American plays. In the dramas written by white women dramatists, white characters are dominant in two of the five plays: *The Forfeit*; and *The Noose*. In all of the ten plays, the African Americans are the victims or potential victims of lynchings.

Action and Directions:

Action in these dramas is not a prevalent feature. More emphasis is placed on characterization through dialogue, attitudes, motivations and personal history. The lack of stage action in the dramas may be attributed to two factors: First, the majority of these works were written by women who had little or no training in dramatic script writing. Their previous literary work was primarily in prose and poetry where there was no need for staging movement or action. In order to enhance these dramatic works, these women authors include directions for characters' "stage business," along with simple gestures, specific body – language positions, and expressions that demonstrate and clarify their moods, feelings, thoughts, opinions and intents. Second, the directions also describe specific stage settings, costumes, and other theatrical elements necessary for the audience to gain a familiarity with the particular drama. In several instances, directions are included for music and other aural conventions, employed for creating tension or empathy in the scenes. These components are instrumental in propelling one complication to another by providing information for the audiences on specific character traits or plot developments.

The action is also lacking in these dramas because many of them were not presented as staged performances. In this study they are: *Aftermath*; *Lawd, Does You Undahstan?*; *Sunday Morning in the South*, *Safe*, and *The Noose*. Several of these ten dramas gained a reading audience through periodicals such as, *The Liberator*, *The Crisis*, and *Opportunity*. African American women as well as white women dramatists were encouraged to submit their writings in contests sponsored by these journals. Opportunities for staging the women authors' plays or being published were often unavailable to them.

Audiences and Venues:

Grimké's *Rachel* is a lengthy production specifically directed at white audiences. Grimké's intentions are to show how racial prejudice destroys the lives of so many families and to appeal to white women to join in the campaign against the unlawful killings. Her successors abandoned her long format and chose shorter and more "reader – friendly" one- acts. "Rather than represent the race in ways that they thought could influence whites, one-act lynching dramatists targeted African Americans themselves" (Mitchell 58).

The availability of short plays aimed at black audiences (written by both black and white authors) is conducive to what Elizabeth McHenry termed, "communal literacy" opportunities. These plays are read, memorized, acted, and discussed in small groups and in private venues – schools, churches, and private homes (Mitchell 57). It is an additional advantage to have short plays, for they can be presented or read easily without need of expense for spectacle or specific staging areas.

By the 1930s when Jessie Daniel Ames and the Association of Southern Women for the Prevention of Lynching joined the campaign, the women authors also presented their works in churches, public halls, and educational venues of schools and colleges. Audiences for those Southern dramatizations were organized women's educational, civic or religious groups, and due to the strength of Ames and her organization, she was able to convince Southern white women of prominence to support (in one manner or another) the campaign's goals. The African American women's groups were invited as guests (Hall 218).

Purpose in Writing:

The purposes for writing the anti-lynching dramas are also common to both white and black authors. The dramas serve as agencies of information, support and change. All of the authors wish to inform and educate whites about the brutality of lynching. They also wish to support members of the black community by presenting the plays to all audiences with a true "realistic" picture of who they are, and moreover, to demonstrate the "sameness" that was common to both races. The difference between them is the harsh reality that whites are the perpetrators of crimes against the blacks. The dramas serve as "affirmations and validations" for African American men and women by presenting characters who exhibit strong moral values, integrity, and proper decorum under difficult circumstances.

There are additional goals for writing the anti-lynching dramas: to encourage the government to establish legislation that would ultimately bring an end to the violence against African Americans; and to combat the myth of the black male rapist, while

identifying the complicity of white women in prolonging the myth by refusing to speak against it (Perkins, Stephens 7).

Characteristics:

The characteristics of the genre set-forth by Kathy Perkins and Judith Stephens are presented in these ten dramas in varying degrees. The home is the primary setting in both the black and white plays, representing the private, safe, peaceful, loving location for the characters. The authors juxtapose the calm and safety of home with the rude and frenzied intrusion of outsiders. The privacy and the safety of the home are quickly disrupted by individuals or members of mobs announcing an attack on an individual (Perkins, Stephens 9). The plot moves to the hunt or incarceration of the alleged perpetrator; the anguish and concern of the family is expressed; and the inevitable lynching takes place. The remaining living characters (women and children), experience the tragic loss and a sense of helplessness because they are unable to protect their family member. They are left alone to deal with the memory of the event. This is a common plot line for the majority of these anti-lynching plays.

In the opening scenes of the dramas by both black and white authors, the principal characters are engaged in daily chores related to their specific roles, such as cooking or reading, or working on tools. This is a deliberate effort on behalf of the dramatists to present the African American and / or white families as normal adults participating in common activities. Because many white women authors did not begin writing the anti-lynching dramas until the 1930s, this may be an explanation for the similarities in writing plot lines, in establishing home settings, and in the use of similar character types.

Characters:

In two dramas, the determination of a strong woman changes the lives of three young men. Corrie Crandall Howell, a white author, dramatizes the life of a white family whose behavior is dysfunctional in *The Forfeit*. The parents are rude and insulting to each other, and they are overly-indulgent with their son, Bud, who proves to be an irresponsible adult. Fanny, the mother, is a cruel woman and an instigator in the death of an innocent black teenager. She designs a plan to save her own son from a noose, knowing that he is guilty of attacking a young woman. When her black errand boy arrives to work, she knows who will be accused and taken away. Her son will be saved. This scenario is in direct contrast to the dramas written by black women authors, who represent their African American families and individuals as loving, caring, morally upright and respectful of each other and yet, they have no ability to protect their sons if a lynching becomes a threat. They have no options for personal protection, only the noose.

In *The Awakening* by white author Mary White Ovington, an African American character, Caesar Smith, is accused of attacking a young woman. He pleads his innocence, but is quickly arrested by the sheriff who has chased him North. Smith is aided by a young woman who works for the NAACP . With the organization's lawyer and local authorities (who truly work for the people), the man receives a fair trial in the North and is saved from a lynching death.

The Awakening (1923) and *Black Souls* (1932), are the only two dramas where African American males and females are able to stand-up against white male supremacists, and do so without reprisal. Both of these plays are written by white women authors, and both present a sophistication in settings by moving from a domestic location

to a more “public” locale. *The Awakening* moves from a home, to an office, and then to a courtroom, giving the drama an extended length, and an opportunity for more character development. *Black Souls* is set in a boarding school which serves as a home for the instructors, but includes scenes in an assembly room and a garden as well. *Black Souls* also demonstrates a more “current” setting, costume design, character growth and plot development. The play creates a “positive movement forward” for African Americans. The African Americans are portrayed as educated and upwardly—mobile young adults who work with the NAACP, and whose efforts succeed in saving a man’s life. The play’s positive outcome provides a measure of hope for all audiences: there is an organization working to end the violence and to make lynching a topic on the national agenda.

A point of characterization should be made here: the young female characters are reasonably educated and speak their minds. I found this interesting because the nation and its women were at a time in history where women were gathering their own “power and identity.” This is especially true in the play, *The Awakening*, when the young, black graduate, Helen, speaks back to a white sheriff. He comments about her being “uppity” and finds himself facing a formidable foe. In the end, she ultimately wins her case against the lawless sheriff. By contrast, the elderly ladies who are characterized are treated well and respected by their families, but dismissed and insulted by others outside the family.

Corrie Howell and Tracy Mygatt, both white dramatists, portray white characters as more determined, vicious and more intent on destroying African Americans. Their dialogues are caustic and their prejudiced attitudes toward black characters, excessive. In the majority of dramas written by African American Women, however, the individual white characters, or the mobs who represent white supremacy and complicity, do not

appear to be as vitriolic, angry or as “intense,” and are not as frequently seen on the stage. The assumption underlying this observation is that black women authors are concerned not to appear too negative, too accusatory, or too critical of whites for fear of retaliation. They are writing about a very controversial and volatile topic by placing white characters in a very unfavorable light. Also, the African American women are still trying to gain a foot-hold in American society as “women.” All of the women authors (black and white) are courageous in presenting a realistic look at life that impacts various factions of the country negatively.

Diction:

In the majority of the plays, normal English is spoken. The plays that use a dialect do so with the elderly characters who either live with their families or in rural areas. These include: Rev. Moseby and Mam Sue in *Aftermath*, and Aunt Dowdy in *Lawd, Does You Undahstan* ? The characters most frequently have a minimal education and are feeble, but also have opinions about life and rules to follow and they express these to the young characters regularly.

Spectacle and Conventions:

In the body of this study, there is reference to each set design that is used for these plays. Nine of the ten plays are situated in homes with varying degrees of stage dressing. Since many of these dramas were not staged, it is hard to determine just how much / or how little was actually used on the stage environment. However, even if these are read by audiences rather than staged, it is wise to understand the set placement and time-frame of the play as a point of reference for the audience. This information tells a great deal about

the characters and their history even before a line is spoken or a character appears. In these anti-lynching dramas, certain authors specifically describe the sets, sounds, and aural conventions; others do not offer as much information. Chapters three-five offer descriptions of each play.

Application of Thematic Content

What follows are the eight themes that I have been tracing in this dissertation. This examination is determined by the elements of characterization: dialogue; actions; motivations; attitudes; and given circumstances of each play.

Supremacy:

The theme of white supremacy is represented by all women authors through the white male and white female characters. They are the mobs or crowds who assemble outside of homes or law offices preparing for a lynching, and these particular characters are rarely seen on the set. Instead, their “voices and noises” are heard through aural effects used by the dramatists. In addition, there are secondary characters (usually white males) who are prejudiced law officials. These officials arrest potential lynching victims and most often are complicit in the murders. Their scenes on the set are short and to the point. These men are sent to find the perpetrator of a crime, and it makes no difference to them if he is the guilty man or not. He is obviously a black man - so they will look for one. They have a job to do, and it is quickly discharged in order to subdue the growing crowd. Their dialogue is crude, harsh, insulting and without remorse. They represent the South’s racial hatred and make it obvious that they are in charge. Because their

information on the details of the crime is minimal, all that matters is that it “probably was a black man, ” and anyone will do.

These characters’ roles are for the purpose of informing audiences of the racist tactics used to terrorize and entrap innocent men and women for the crimes of others. Their attitudes and actions represent the cruelty, arrogance, and assumption of privilege, that is predominant in the white population. By presenting these character types to the audiences, the dramas become “teaching tools” for African Americans in terms of “coping mechanisms” if / or when faced with similar situations.

There are individual white characters who also represent white supremacy: Senator Verne in *Black Souls*; Fanny in *The Forfeit*; Stewart Landers in *Nails and Thorns*; Clay Houston in *The Noose*; and Sheriff Jones in *The Awakening*. Each of these characters uses his or her position of power to initiate and to condone a lynching, or to refuse to stop an impending one. Each demonstrates his prejudice against the inferior race, and feels no remorse in his or her lawless behavior. They are proud of their activities and see them as a normal part of their existence, since they have been reared under the ideology of white dominance. This theme is represented by more white men than white women.

Resistance:

The theme of resistance is expressed by both African American authors and white authors in each of these anti-lynching dramas. “Resistance” is defined in this study as “the impending or stopping effect exerted by one material thing on another” (*Oxford Dictionary* 682). For clarification purposes, it is the means by which various characters

try to avoid an occasion of death by lynching, either for themselves or for others. Much of the “resistance,” however, is demonstrated through the female characters – both black and white, rather than the male characters. Many African American male characters articulate their feelings of “resistance” but do not exhibit any physical action. This is not a surprise as much as an act of futility on the part of the African American men. In several of the dramas, rather than fight or physically resist the mob’s actions, the black men comply with the arresting officers and calmly walk to the lynching tree. The men know that to resist and create a scene could endanger their families. They also recognize that their fate is sealed once they are handcuffed and led away. In two of the dramas, African American male characters do challenge white supremacy. One is lynched in *Aftermath*, and another wins a court case in defense of his client, in *The Awakening*.

The various examples of resistance in these dramas are common to both the African American women writers and the white women writers. To avoid lynchings and lynch mobs, women would move from one location to another with their families. Men and women whose children are guilty of a crime protect (and resist) the child’s being taken to the lynching tree by hiding him, while another “innocent” victim is condemned. Alleged perpetrators of crimes are incarcerated and protected by law officials until such time as a trial is arranged, or until the accused might be “taken” from the jail by a mob.

In *The Awakening*, the NAACP organization is enlisted to protect an innocent man from an unlawful arrest and potential lynching. *The Noose* sees a determined and distraught white woman take their daughter and leave her husband who is complicit in lynching activities. In *Nails and Thorns*, a mother tries to prevent her child from experiencing Southern violence by inserting herself and her baby in the middle of a mob,

exacting drastic results. *A Sunday Morning in the South* presents a mother of a lynching victim who enlists the help of “friendly and influential whites” who might be able to stop her son from being killed. The most dramatic measure of “resistance,” however, is presented in *Safe and Lawd, Does You Undahstan?*. In these two dramas, the mothers are unable to see their children live with the potential of their own lynchings. Rather than exist with the constant fear of a false accusation and a death by mutilation, these women “resist” the murdering of innocents by the white mob and instead, quietly “protect” their children and themselves from the anguish and terror by strangulation and poisoning.

There is another type of “resistance” that is present in several of these dramas by authors of both races: the resistance to predatory, sexual assaults. In *Black Souls* by Annie Nathan Meyer, a white author, the character of Phyllis constantly refuses (resists) the predatory advances of Senator Verne. She is a married woman and was assaulted by Verne years before as a young girl. As an adult, she ultimately confronts him and is able to do so without reprisal.

In the same drama, David Lewis, a black soldier returning from the war, is pursued by a white woman, Luella Verne. David warns her that they cannot have a relationship in the south. She refuses to heed his advice and he resists her advances. One of the final scenes sees him being taken away for being with a white woman. He is innocent of any wrong-doing, and she is complicit in his murder for not defending him.

In Mary Burrill’s *Aftermath*, another returning soldier, John, learns that his father was lynched months before. John represents “overt resistance” when he becomes angry and is determined to fight back. He takes his guns and physically confronts the white men

who murdered his father. Overt resistance is a dangerous act for African Americans – men or women. To deliberately approach, threaten or challenge a white man is certain death. John and his younger brother are both lynched on that day for trying to defend their father's good name.

One of the most interesting aspects of the theme of “resistance” in these dramas is the lack of physical “resistance” by African American male characters. This observation is mentioned previously, but it is a curious aspect of these works. These plays are “realistic” theatre – showing life as it really existed, and “resistance” against the white population was dangerous. Perhaps the strategy of the African American authors is to make just that point – do not fight back or retaliate – save yourself. For the white authors, however, there is a “quiet” resistance in several plays: In *Black Souls*, David (a black man), resists the advances of Luella, (a white woman) but walks quietly to his death to save her reputation. Andrew and Phyllis, (relatives of David) and the African American teachers at a Southern school, verbally face Senator Verne with anger and hatred when he refuses to stop the lynching of their brother. They stand against his hypocritical actions and his racist attitude without fear. This was one of the first plays to offer a scenario of blacks resisting whites.

Aunt Doady in *Lawd Does You Undahstan?* written by Ann Seymour Link, also a white author, resists the mob's taking her grandson. Rather than have him be brutalized, she “quietly” poisons him herself. In *The Noose* and *The Awakening*, the two female characters (one white and one black) refuse to accept the beliefs of the Southern ideology of white supremacy and either move away or legally help to defend the lives of those who would be lynched.

The plays, themselves are a form of resistance. They are written as part of a larger campaign to bring attention to the evils of these senseless murders and to affect a change. Once these works (along with other literature of this campaign) were presented to the national public, and lynching became a part of the national agenda, the movement toward an end began. However, it was not until after the lynching of young Emmett Till (1955) that more people took notice. It was not until nine years later (1964) that a definitive act was legislated.

Hypocrisy and Complicity:

The themes of hypocrisy and complicity are often represented together through the characters of prejudiced law authorities, men in influential political positions, mothers who wish to protect their guilty sons from death, and through those characters who espouse religion and / or Christian values, but do not live by them. The most blatant examples of hypocrisy are seen in the dramas of three white women authors: Corrie Crandall Howell's *The Forfeit*; Tracy Mygatt's *The Noose*; and Mary White Ovington's *The Awakening*. One African American dramatist, May Miller, also conveys hypocrisy in *Nails and Thorns* through the character of Stewart Landers, a sheriff in a southern town.

In the dramas written by white women authors, the principal characters are hypocritical in the manner in which they live their lives. In *The Forfeit*, Fanny Clark, the mother of a white man, initiates a plan to save her reprobate son from jail and death when she discovers he is guilty of killing the town's teacher. She is hypocritical in that she has not reared her son well. She has been overly indulgent in his upbringing and refuses to see him suffer the consequences of his actions. Instead, she becomes complicit in the murder of an innocent black boy. She passes him to the lynch mob in place of her son.

Her hypocrisy is also apparent by the dramatist's use of "religious lithographs" that adorn the walls of Fanny's living room. There is nothing in her dialogue, mannerisms, or behavior that indicates she has any religious affiliation, compassion or concern for others – especially those who are black.

Tracy Mygatt's *The Noose*, offers hypocrisy and complicity through two characters: Clay Houston and his mother. Clay is a Southern lawyer who has always been a man of integrity, and is known to defend those less fortunate than himself. When it is rumored that he might be considered for a major political office, he recognizes that he will be required to uphold the Southern ideology of supremacy. He changes from a man of honor to a hypocrite and is complicit in the hanging of an innocent man. Along with Mr. Houston, is his elderly mother, also a Southern "lady," who reads her Bible daily, but who insults the hired help, insists that her daughter-in-law become more "southern" by participating in lynchings, and who expects all blacks to bend at her commands.

Mary White Ovington's character of Sheriff Jones is an extreme racist who treats all blacks with disdain. In *The Awakening*, he follows an African American to the North in order to return him to the South to be lynched. He is a hypocritical liar when he speaks about the South's care for prisoners, the fair trials, and the protection that is given to blacks. Everyone knows that he is lying and is eager to see Smith lynched. He is complicit in his desire to kill the accused if and when he can have him in his own power. Jones is found to be a fraud and a racist and is jailed for attempted murder of the attending District attorney.

A similar scenario is presented in *Nails and Thorns* where a white Southern Sheriff is elected to uphold the law, but in reality is hypocritical and complicit in the death of a young African American boy in his care. The sheriff deliberately permits a mob to gather in his town , and with his complicit deputies, sees the mob break open the jail and murder the victim. The sheriff does nothing to prevent the lynching, and he and his deputies continue to serve the people of the area – all of whom are complicit participants in unlawful murder.

In several of these anti-lynching dramas, the various dramatists speak of the residents of the communities as “ the good , church-going citizens.” This statement is an indictment of the numerous crowds who gather not only in the dramas, but in the actual towns where lynchings occur. Many residents viewed lynchings as entertainment without realizing their own complicity and hypocrisy by their attendance at the events.

In *Black Souls*, the decorated soldier, John, returns home to discover the death of his father. His father is an honest man and works well with his friends in the community. He attends church with those same men and women, but they are the very ones who argue with John’s father and ultimately lynch him over the dispute. Hypocrisy and complicity are rampant in this drama. John goes to war to defend his country, but when he returns home, his country denies him any rights. The nation that offers liberty and justice for all – does not offer anything to the black man. The men and women who kill his father are Christians, espousing the tenet of brotherly love. They are also hypocritical and complicit murderers.

In *Rachel*, the nation is once again accused of hypocrisy. The Loving family lives in the North. While their lives are not as oppressive as those still living in the South, they do live under the regulations of segregation. As a result, they are expected to maintain the decorum that “keeps them in their place.” The nation continues to deny them their full citizenship. Rachel, her brother, and her fiancé, John Strong, are educated adults, but the men are resigned to work as waiters in order to earn a small salary, a job for which they are overly-qualified. The school children in their neighborhood bully Rachel’s son and Mrs. Lane’s daughter –all perpetrated by the white teachers and administration. The Loving’s are considered second-class citizens because they are black, and the men see their efforts for better things as futile and difficult to acquire because of their color in the nation that doesn’t offer freedom to all.

One of the purposes of writing these plays was to debunk the myth of the black beast and convince white women to speak out against it. Before 1930 when the ASWPL started, the assault of white women was the most common reason for a lynching. In most cases it was a false accusation. White women, because they did not speak out against this falsehood, became complicit in prolonging the killings. Eventually, the ASWPL and other women’s organizations stepped forward and continued the work begun years before (1892) with Ida B. Wells. The dramas that represent this female complicity are *A Sunday Morning in the South* and *Black Souls*. In *Black Souls*, Luella Verne does not speak out about David’s innocence. She stands back and without a word on his behalf, she watches the men take him away to die. She eventually admits that he would be alive if she had spoken up. In *A Sunday Morning in the South*, the unidentified girl, with no name given in the script, is asked to identify Tom as the young man who hurt her. She is uncertain

and very shy, and does not admit her doubts. Her lack of an answer allows the sheriff to speak on her behalf – and he takes Tom away. He was not the young man who injured her, but he was a victim because of her silence.

Futility of Black Male Life:

In some of these plays, a full and productive life for African Americans – especially males – is not a certainty. There is a sense of futility in their daily living. African American men know that they do not have the ability to assert themselves as “real men.” They must be subservient to the white community and not appear to be aggressive or threatening. They do not have the possibility of proving their masculinity or their manliness. They are emasculated by the fact that they are considered less than men. In the difficult situations where African Americans (males or females) are insulted by their employers, accosted by predators, cheated of their wages, or when they try to defend themselves, they became targets for mob violence.

The character of the soldier in *Black Souls* (David Lewis), also fought in Europe’s war. Like John, in *Aftermath*, when he returns home, he continues to be denied his civil rights and respect as an honorable man. David’s innocent relationship with Luella Verne eventually provokes his lynching. He does nothing but try to convince her that they cannot be together. Once he is seen with her, his fate is sealed. He is a black man – no questions asked, no trial, no concerns for his welfare. He is automatically looked at as a “black brute” who accosts women. He has no rights and no one to defend him or save him from death.

Futility of black life is very apparent even with women characters. The two mothers who take the lives of their young sons in order to protect them, realize that their boys' lives are in jeopardy simply because they are black. The mothers' psychological instability, caused by the sheer terror and thoughts that their children might be mutilated and burned for no reason (or for any reason), forces them to see the futility of raising black children in a world where human life is not respected. Who becomes responsible for these murders? Is it the mother - the one who protects her child, raises her child, and loves her child enough to "save" him? Is she responsible for this crime? Or is it the mob who mutilates a body while watching gasoline poured on the fire? Certainly, the nation is perpetrating the phenomenon by not legislating any permanent solutions. The country offers promises but doesn't deliver, and espouses one thing but practices another. These moral questions are difficult to answer, especially when the bondings of love and the protection of a mother for a child are involved. I make no attempt to answer the questions, except to say, they loved their children enough to try to protect them.

The African American men and women lived with constant threats and fears for their well-being and for that of their families. In order to survive, they had to abide by the rules – most of which forced them to live in repression and subservience. But even this was no guarantee that they would be safe from white hatred, hypocrisy and complicity.

The women dramatists have young men taken from their quiet homes by white men. Under suspicion of assault, they are accused of heinous crimes but with no proof to confirm their suspicions. The young men never return. The women authors also portray accused victims who are innocent but safely protected in jail. Shortly after their incarceration, the mob takes the accused away. The suspects know, that once behind bars,

their lives are forfeit because in many instances, the jailers are hypocritical and defend white supremacy.

There is very little hope to escape the tactics of white supremacy where African Americans are concerned. There are few organizations strong enough to plead their case, but this was improving. With women's groups, uplift organizations, influential men and women writers, and formal legislation against lynching, the tide would eventually turn, and African Americans would find safety and the opportunities for long and productive lives. The anti-lynching drama, *The Awakening*, offers hope on this subject. The play dramatizes the efforts of the newly formed NAACP in its fight against lynching.

Faith:

The theme of faith is most often represented through the elderly characters in these anti-lynching dramas. Both African American and white authors see religion as an integral part of the lives of elderly men and women who have seen much suffering in their lives. The majority of these elderly characters are African Americans rather than white characters. The characters of Mrs. Loving, Mam Sue, Reverend Moseby, Sue Jones and Aunt Doady, all represent their strong faith in a God through prayers, the reading of the Bible and the singing of hymns. They also use their faith to convince their children to depend on God, especially during the difficult times of their lives.

The young adults, especially the black characters, are not as convinced that religion is helpful to them. They are respectful of their parents' or grandparents' wishes for them to seek God, but they do not always comply with their wishes. Many of the young adults are educated and are independent in their own thinking. They listen to the

advice given to them, but they consider alternatives. Because they had more opportunities to associate in the “modern” world – more than their parents or grandparents, they feel empowered to follow their own paths – even when they are restricted by the prejudice of the white community. The character of John, the soldier in *Aftermath*, said it well: “. . . beyon’ a certain point prayers ain’t no good! The Lawd does jes so much for you, then it’s up to you to do the res’fu’yourse’f . . .” (Burrill 88).

Motherhood and Trauma:

These two themes are partnered together because in the majority of these anti-lynching dramas, it is the mother/ wife-figure who experiences the long-term trauma of lynchings. Six of these ten dramas have mother-figures who are traumatized by the lynchings of family members or acquaintances. As witnesses to the arrests, tortures, mutilations and finally, the recoveries of their loved ones’ bodies, the women are forced to live the remainder of their lives with the memories of the gruesome details of those deaths. Several of the women who suffer because of lynchings are creations of both African American and white women writers:

Mrs. Loving, in *Rachel*, watches helplessly as her son and her husband are led away at gun point and lynched on the tree near their home. The father is “guilty” of speaking against a recent lynching of another innocent man. His son, is only a boy. In an effort to protect his father and “resist” the aggressive and intrusive men, he is also taken away with his father. Mrs. Loving lives the next ten years harboring that secret until her other children are old enough to learn of their mother’s burden and trauma. When Rachel learns of her father’s and brother’s deaths, she gradually declines into a state of depression, and eventually she feels that she cannot bring children into the world only to

have them taken away from her . As previously mentioned, Georgia Douglas Johnson and Ann Seymour Link also create characters who follow in the path of Rachel. But they kill their children to prevent their being potential victims of the sadistic lynching rituals.

In *Safe*, the new mother, Liza, strangles her newly-born son after hearing the screams of a teenage boy calling for his mother on the way to the lynching tree. Liza knows the boy and is traumatized that such a good person is murdered for asking for his fair wage. Liza immediately recognizes that any young black boy might fall victim to the whims of a crowd. She cannot bear the suffering that a lynching would cause her or her child and protects her son by quietly killing him herself. Liza is so traumatized, she is capable of murdering the baby boy before he has a chance to live at all. Liza and the other mothers make decisions out of love. They know the torture that might follow their young, male children one day, and because they have no recourse, because they can do nothing to stop the mob mentality , and because they do not want their children to suffer by a savage beating and burning, they make the decision to protect them from future violence.

Aunt Doady, in *Lawd, Does You Undahstan?* also kills her grandson. She is traumatized by experiencing the lynching of Jim's father (her son), and lives in fear that Jim might meet the same fate. But Jim is a quiet boy and lives deep in the rough. He is safe away from crowds of people, until he is seen near an accident in the woods. He is quickly hunted by the "dogs" and Doady, vividly remembering the barking of the bloodhounds, poisons Jim before he can be taken away. She is unable to bear another lynching in her family. She does what she must to save Jim from the burning fire that took her son.

In *A Sunday Morning in the South*, *The Noose* and *Nails and Thorns* the mother figures see victims taken away under the pretense of assaulting white women. In one fashion or another, each mother-figure in these dramas is traumatized, depressed or anxiety stricken by the false accusations they hear, by the crowds that gather around their homes in preparation for lynchings, by the refusal of their husbands to respond to the unrest, and by the sounds and smells that surround the actual lynching. In the drama, *The Noose*, the mother, Margaret Houston, becomes hysterical when she learns that her husband attended a lynching with their young daughter. She is so enraged and stricken, she leaves him and returns to live with her elderly mother. It is learned later in the drama that her mother had been traumatized at age sixteen when she saw seven young men lynched at the same time.

Traumatic symptoms manifest themselves differently in the various characters presented by these women authors. What is consistent in the dramas of all of the authors is the fact that women are the “survivors” of these atrocities. The psychological manifestations of their trauma are different, but the audiences or readers assume that these characters manage to move forward. The only drama where trauma causes immediate death to a mother is *A Sunday Morning in the South* by Georgia Douglas Johnson. The elderly Sue Jones dies of a heart attack when her grandson is lynched outside her home. However, the mother-figure moves to a new area with her family, and she keeps secrets that will be divulged when the children are able to understand them. She will protect and love her child at any cost, and she will deny her own happiness when necessary. She is the person who suffers long after the burnings.

The dramatists wrote to teach their African American audiences how to cope with the realities of their lives around them. They also wanted their white audiences to see how the sadistic deaths of black men devastated - physically, emotionally and psychologically, the lives of the survivors - especially the women.

Cultural Histories of Women Integrated in These Works

The cultural histories of several women dramatists of this time period were integrated into their writings of the anti-lynching dramas:

Angelina Weld Grimké (African American)

The social activism of Angelina Weld Grimké influenced her to use drama for her literary propaganda. She wrote *Rachel* in 1916, a year after the release of the D.W. Griffith movie, *The Birth of a Nation*, that espoused the activities of the Ku Klux Klan and its terrorism against blacks. *Rachel* was Grimké's means to "enlighten the American people . . . to the lamentable condition of ten million colored citizens in this free Republic" (Hull 117). Grimké's intention was to present a respectable African American family whose lives were destroyed by racial prejudice. Her writing offers an appeal to white women to identify the problems that black women faced (Gavin 55).

Georgia Douglas Johnson (African American)

Georgia Douglas Johnson had a longing for a literary career and her purpose in writing was to affirm her own black culture, and to encourage her race to see themselves in her works. She wrote the majority of her dramas in the 1920s when the terrorism of the Ku Klux Klan was most severe, and the constant lynching of black men was attributed to their raping of white women. She was the first playwright to deal with the subject of

interracial rape, and it was because she chose to engage in writing about these controversial topics, and because of the barriers she encountered as a female author, that she briefly succeeded in having a few works published or produced . Her career in literature extended to her “at home salons” where gatherings of literary figures discussed current artists and their writings (Perkins, Stephens 100).

Ann Seymour Link (White)

Ann Seymour Link was a member of the Association of Southern Women for the Prevention of Lynching, a group she joined in support of African American women authors. Her private life led her to work with women’s groups in the Presbyterian Church, where she became known as a great humanitarian and advocate for racial equality. Her drama, *Lawd, Does You Undahstan?* expressed the most drastic measure taken by a mother-figure to protect her child from lynching (Perkins, Stephens 190).

May Miller (African American)

May Miller was a teacher who encouraged her students to read and learn more about their own culture and their own history. In an attempt to present this information to them, she personally wrote and directed plays that would offer a realistic picture of African American heroes, heroines and stories of their lives. She used this talent to write her anti-lynching dramas as well and to speak to the issues surrounding their lives and how to cope with them (Perkins, Stephens 174).

Tracy Mygatt (White)

Tracy Mygatt was a life-long peace activist who, along with her partner, Frances Witherspoon, devoted her life to issues of conscientious objectors, soldiers in War, peace and freedom, and women's suffrage. In her drama, *The Noose*, she presented a strong, white, Southern woman who bravely spoke against lynching. Known for her tenacity and dedication to peace initiatives and the citizens of Philadelphia, Mygatt transferred her determination and beliefs to her writing about outspoken, capable women characters ("Tracy Dickinson Mygatt" 1).

Mary White Ovington (White)

Mary White Ovington was one of the original founders of the NAACP. In addition, she was instrumental in founding the Greenpoint Settlement Home in New York, supported women's suffrage, and worked for inclusion of African American Women into the women's movement of the period. Her anti-lynching drama, *The Awakening*, presented a modern look at the workings of the NAACP and its ability to serve the African Americans when faced with potential lynchings (Lewis, "Mary White Ovington" 1).

Responses to Lynching by Men and Women

The responses to lynchings by white men characters and African American men characters in these dramas is definitive . It should be mentioned that few black men are in these dramas, but those who are present, are elderly family members or young men who become lynching victims. In the majority of these anti-lynching dramas, the white male characters are the perpetrators of the lynchings. In several of the dramas, these characters

are exceptionally “angry and racist.” These particular anti-lynching plays include: *The Awakening*; *The Noose*; *Nails and Thorns*; *The Forfeit*; and *Black Souls*. With the exception of *Nails and Thorns*, these dramas are written by white women authors. As was mentioned, the white women dramatists were more severe in their development of the white male characters’ personalities and attitudes against the blacks. These white characters are defined by their unwavering belief in their supremacy, and their power to kill the black man. The white women authors are making serious charges against their own race, and using the “stage” as a mirror for whites’ lawless behavior.

The African American male characters are portrayed as docile (by both black and white authors) in comparison to the white males. This fact might be attributed to the authors’ purposes of making the black male a solid role model for audiences. In addition, black citizens could not appear to be too aggressive in the “white man’s world,” and perhaps the authors are being sensitive to this issue.

It was imperative to demystify the African American males as the “rapists or beasts” they were seen to be. The African American male was devalued and emasculated by racism, and for decades he had been stereotyped as the buffoon, the dancing minstrel, the faithful slave, or the beast. These women dramatists wanted their audiences to identify with the “New Negro” who was a respectable, successful man. By portraying black male characters as hard-working, dependable citizens and family men, the authors were showing the world that African American men were deserving of their rights, and were not the criminals they were accused of being.

Unfortunately, the success and goodness portrayed by the African American males was not enough to protect them from white brutality. Black men were well-aware of their precarious position in a white man's world. They understood that their lives were forfeit if they appeared aggressive or too successful. Success of the black man often proved fatal since the white community considered the black man as a threat to its prosperity. As was the case in most of these anti-lynching dramas, the black male characters were innocent of any crimes, but were led away to die because the white citizens "assumed" their guilt, and were eager to rid themselves of "uppity" blacks. In comparison to the harsh, uneducated, sadistic white male characters of these dramas, the black male characters demonstrated courage, proper decorum, rational thinking, and self-control, in their lives and in their deaths.

The two principal, white women characters in the *The Noose* (Mrs.Houston) and *Nails and Thorns* (Gladys), are loving and caring women who are sympathetic to the plight of the African American. They are responsible for demanding that their husbands stand against the mob violence, and protect the African American boys who are accused of assault. When the men refuse to protect their charges, the women take it upon themselves to do something to stop the madness: Mrs. Houston leaves her husband and moves to another town in the North, free from Southern violence; Gladys in *Nails and Thorns*, decides to take her child into the crowd and see if she can stop them in any way. She is in an irrational and frenzied state. The intentions of these two characters are honorable, but unfortunately imperfect. Mrs. Houston and her family are separated and Gladys' baby is trampled and dies. They want the violence and the race prejudice to end, but as individuals, are unable to be agents of change. Instead, their families suffer along

with the lynching victims and their families. *Nails and Thorns* is written by May Miller, a black author; *The Noose* by Tracy Mygatt, a white author.

There were two white women who were not as honorable or sympathetic to the blacks - Mrs. Clay, the elder, in *The Noose*, and Fanny in *The Forfeit*. These two women are hardened and prejudiced against blacks. They are completely comfortable in their complicity to lynching and in one instance, berate others who do not comply or agree with their actions. Both of these dramas are written by white women authors.

The African American female characters are portrayed as modest, intelligent, devoted to family, responsible, educated, cultured and loving. Except for one character , Lucy in *Lawd, Does You Undahstan?*, all of the African American women are portrayed in a good light, which make them role models for their race. Most of them have experienced , in some fashion, a lynching. There are those who learn that a family member has been lynched in the past. Others hear or see the frenzied crowd gathering outside their homes and fear the outcome of the mob violence. Each scenario has its particular complications, but the end result leaves these women devastated and traumatized long- term. The men who are killed are their husbands, sons, grandsons, brothers or friends. When their loved ones are murdered in the brutal rituals of a lynching, these women are helpless to do anything. They are unable to watch the torture but can often hear the screams of the victims against the jeers of the crowds. These memories stay with them. When the torture ends for the victims, it is the woman – the mother or the wife – who must remove the mutilated body to a safe place. She then becomes the “survivor” victim, the one responsible for those still living and trying to

move forward. To be a woman meant one must be strong for others. To be a mother meant one must sacrifice personal happiness for peace and safety.

Conveying Trauma and Terror

In terms of conveying trauma, this was expressed equally well with both black and white authors. Grimké's *Rachel*, Johnson's *Safe*, and Link's *Lawd Does You Undahstan?* present the most disturbing examples of trauma for women by their refusing to have children or by infanticide. These mothers resorted to the most extreme form of "protection" for their children. Their question is implied: could they bring young children into the world only to see them tortured and killed because of their color? Mothers, even those who did not resort to such drastic measures, live with the mental visions of cruel death. The pain was constant and the memories haunted them. In all of the plays, there is a sense of helplessness, great loss and no resolution to the problem. All of the plays, even in *The Awakening*, where a lynching is averted, a mother gives a dramatic retelling of her son's lynching of years before.

After Rachel learns of her father's and brother's deaths, she becomes traumatized by the fear of what the outside world means for her, a black woman, and for her son and family. Once she leaves the comfort of her home and her family, she is thrust into the world of black against white. She knows her place, but like a child, she doesn't understand how people can treat others in such a cruel manner. She is herself a naïve child who will not face "reality." She has a son who loves her, and while the threat of a lynching is "out there" she cannot stop living while waiting for something to happen. She shuts herself off from people in the family and others who would love and care for her. She seems to live in a child's world rather than live as an adult and face life. While she is

definite about not marrying John Strong and having her own children, the play offers an ambiguous ending about Rachel's future. When Jimmy cries at the end of the play, she tells him, " I'm coming, Ma Rachel loves you so" (Grimké 78). Does she continue to be his mother and care for him, or does she do something to "protect" both of them from the world ? The answer is subject to interpretation.

Terror is also well presented by several authors of both races with use of aural media (such as sounds, voices, noises, music) to enhance the presentations, however, other scenes that capture this terror (and serve as a hint of foreshadowing) most frequently are those where a family member is tardy in returning home from work or school, and those at home wait to understand his fate. Additional scenes of terror are those in which a young man is wrongfully accused of committing a crime and is unable to prove his innocence. In these scenes, the family tries desperately to protect the son from being taken from them, but to no avail. The terror that is created is enhanced by anxiety in the dialogue of the family, the voices of frenzied, shouting, gathering mobs, the barking of bloodhounds near the home, or the angry knocks at the door. All of these aural conventions increase the tension of impending doom in the scenes. They do not, however, take precedence over the plot or character developments. Several of the dramas that utilize these conventions are: *Lawd, Does You Undahstan?*; *Safe*; *Black Souls*; *A Sunday Morning in the South*; *The Forfeit*; *The Moose*; and *Nails and Thorns*.

Changes that Developed in Dramas Between 1916-1936

The only significant changes identified in these dramas over the years were the advancements in character development, the addition of staging locales, the lengthening and sophistication of the plays, the graphic descriptions of the lynchings, and the attitudes

of audiences who saw or read the works after 1930. It should be noted, however, that the final play, *Lawd Does You Undahstan?* was written in 1936, but the two main characters were the most “rustic.” The play was set in the very rural area of the South and the entire drama was one of the most “unsophisticated” in terms of setting, dialogue, and character development. The two most sophisticated were *The Awakening*(1923), and *Black Souls* (1932), both written by white women authors.

The Awakening offers several staging areas and is divided into four acts. It presents a modern look at the NAACP, and the efforts of the organization to aid African Americans confronted with a lynching threat. It also presents well-developed, credible characters, who are role models for their audiences, and who work within a plot structure that moves well from one complication to another. The principal African American male and female characters successfully defeat white supremacy in their attempt to lynch an innocent man. This is the only anti-lynching drama in this analysis that has such an outcome.

Black Souls also offers six scene changes and a variety of credible characters – both black and white. The African American characters, as well as the white characters , are middle-class, professionals in education and politics. The plot revolves around the constant need of the African American characters to defer to the white citizens who are potential financial backers for their building projects. The outcome of this drama is unfortunately the same as many others – a lynching of an innocent man. However, in terms of plot development, sophistication in creation of realistic characters and language, the play demonstrates a definite move forward from the rustic settings or simple one-act

settings. In both of the above mentioned plays, the themes are well established through the dialogue and actions of the characters.

The audiences for the African American dramas were primarily directed at Black audiences. Angelina Weld Grimké, however, directed her *Rachel* to white audiences. After 1930, when white authors joined the campaign against lynching, Southern white women presented their dramas to mixed audiences in an effort to “inform and change” the status quo. The opinion of white women changed over years. They were originally accused of prolonging the myth of black men’s assaulting white women. When the white authors finally began their own dramatic writing, they were intent on erasing the myth of the black rapist against white women, and aided in proving the “alleged reason” was not true. They became allies of the African American Women’s groups in writing and in drama specifically.

The Impact of Anti-Lynching Dramas

It is doubtful if these anti-lynching dramas alone had great impact on the nation as a whole in terms of affecting change. Since the extreme terrorism did not stop until the middle of the twentieth century, this seems a reasonable claim and legislation for ending lynching was basically neglected or ignored. The lynching of Emmett Till in 1955 and the Texas lynching of the early 2000s, proves that the threat is still alive and deadly.

With few exceptions, the dramas were not often presented as stage productions for large audiences. In addition, many of these specific anti-lynching dramas were not published in magazines and therefore, it is uncertain if great numbers of readers were introduced to them. For the audiences who did experience the dramas, the impact of these

works would have been to serve as “affirming and validating” agencies for the African Americans, and “educational agencies” for the white population. African American audiences would identify with the characters and their dilemmas, and learn better coping strategies. For the white audiences hearing or seeing these anti-lynching dramas, there was an opportunity to gain an understanding of the horrors of lynchings, and the consequences of trauma that resulted for families of victims. The dramas were intended to educate and arrive at a solution to end the murders. Their inclusion under the umbrella of the larger writing campaign offered a unique medium for getting the message to the public. But under the circumstances of lost plays, difficulties in getting works published, the volatile topic and women as authors, it seems reasonable to assume that they did not have a profound impact on the curtailment of lynchings. The larger campaign brought attention to the country because of more visibility through other forms of daily literature. It should be mentioned, however, that these anti-lynching dramas did offer an archival insight to the world of African Americans during the turn-of-the-century and may have in some cases, influenced a response for the cause.

The end of lynching never arrived until 1964 when the Civil Rights Act was passed. During the late years of the nineteenth century and the early decades of the twentieth century, various anti-lynching bills were passed in the House, but never passed the Senate due to the filibuster of white Southerners. There was the passage of the Civil Rights Act of 1875, but it was ignored. During the years 1921 through 1924, the Dyer anti-lynching bill was introduced and debated in the House. It was immediately defeated each time it was proposed. The Costigan-Wagner bill of 1935 and the Wagner-Gavagan bill of 1940 came to the same end. From 1882-1968 approximately two hundred anti-

lynching bills were introduced in Congress, but only three passed the House (Franklin, Moss 392-93).

No anti-lynching legislation was ever passed by both the house and the Senate. By the year 1964, nine years after the impact of the Emmett Till murder, the sympathies of the country were slowly moving toward protecting the African American citizens. The Civil Rights Movement took steps to grow and gain full citizenship.

Finally, The Civil Rights Act of 1964 passed and was a comprehensive law in support of racial equality. Power was given to protect all against discrimination and segregation in voting, education, and the use of public facilities. (Franklin, Moss 538-39). But, even with this new legislation, violence broke out in various States during that summer, and Civil Rights continued to be denied total citizenship – especially at the voting booth (541).

Jonathan Markovits, in his *Legacies of Lynching* gives credit to the cumulative Anti-Lynching Campaign that wrote hundreds of pamphlets, articles, editorials, speeches and dramas between the 1920s and the 1940s as “creating a political climate in which lynching was widely seen as unacceptable . . . few would deny the importance of the anti-lynching movement in fostering this change of mind” (29).

The lynching of African Americans (and others) in the nation, however, continued into the middle of the twentieth century. The Ku Klux Klan Act of 1871 saw a decrease in the terrorism that was leveled on blacks; however, the reincarnations of the organization in 1915, 1921 and following World War II, saw increases in the group’s activities. Not until 1964 when the Federal Bureau of Investigation began infiltration of

the Klan, did their terrorism subside and their group become fragmented. Finally, on Monday, June 13, 2005, the U.S. Senate approved a resolution apologizing for its failure to enact anti-legislation decades before. “ One hundred and five years after the first anti-lynching bill was proposed by a black congressman, senators approved by a voice vote, Resolution 39, which called for the lawmakers to apologize to lynching victims, survivors and their descendants . . .”(Thomas – Lester 1).

ENDNOTES

¹ A quote of Edmund Rhett, an advocate of slavery, in a letter to A.L. Burt, October 15, 1865. See: Williamson, Joel. *After Slavery*. Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1965. P. 75.

² “**peonage**” – the condition of a peon; the system by which debtors or legal prisoners are held in servitude to labor for their creditors or for persons who lease their services from the state. Agnes, Michael, ed. *Webster's New World Dictionary*. Cleveland: Wiley Publishing. 2002, p.1067

³ “**home rule**” – government of a region by its own citizens. *Oxford American Dictionary*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002. P.374. Print.

⁴ Anastatia Sims described the condition and position of women in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. See: *The Power of Femininity in the New South*. Columbia: University of South Carolina Press. 1997. pp.7-9

⁵ Quote of Ida B. Wells from *Southern Horrors and Other Writings*. p.4. Edited by Jacqueline J. Royster

⁶ “**Summary justice**” . . . prompt and without formality; without a trial; hasty and arbitrary. Justice in lynching rituals was rendered without a trial and often in a mob environment. *Webster's New World College Dictionary*. Wiley Publishing, Inc., 2002. p.1433. Print.

⁷ First verse of the song, “Strange Fruit” sung by Billie Holiday in 1939. This is taken from an original poem by Abel Meeropol in 1939. This title also refers to a play (1939) and a novel (1944) both written by Lillian Smith. It served as an inspiration for a ballet, “Southland” presented in 1953.

⁸ Eric Foner in *Forever Free: The Story of Emancipation and Reconstruction*, explains that the Ku Klux Klan wore no standard costumes and their familiar white robe and headdress were a twentieth century invention (p.173). Other reference sources such as *Ku Klux Klan: Its Origin, Growth and Disbandment* by Walter Fleming, (p.11).

⁹ Elizabeth McHenry, literary historian, is discussed in Koritha Mitchell's book, *Living With Lynching*. She describes the family pastimes of reading out loud or memorizing lines and presenting them as entertainment. This was known as “communal literacy” and was a technique used in the presentation of lynching dramas and other literary works between the 1830s to the 1990s. p.40.

¹⁰ The true story of Sam Hose (a name substitution of Hosea was used in the drama) gathered much attention in the 1890s, when the young man was suspected of killing his boss after a dispute. Details of the lynching included gruesome facts of mutilation to the victim, including having his knuckles displayed in a store window in Atlanta. For additional information see *Living With Lynching* by Koritha Mitchell p. 161.

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APPENDIX

Permission has been given by Dr. Barbara B. Lewis for the use of information from her dissertation: PUBLIC DEATH: LYNCHING DRAMA IN THE YEARS OF ITS GENESIS 1858-1919. (UMI Number 9969707) City University of New York, 2000. (see p. 7 of dissertation – “the purpose of lynching.”)

Synopsis of Mary Burrill's *Aftermath* (1919)

Elderly Mam Sue sits by the fire and watches a log fall into ash as it burns. She reads this to mean “some big doins’ going to happen tonight” (Burrill 83). She remembers the last time she watched a log fall and burn – her son was lynched. The family is waiting for brother, John, to return from the war. John is in France fighting for his country, and he is anxious to get back home and to be with his family. In his letter to his family he explained how much he enjoyed his time in France. “It was the first time he felt like a man . . . the French people treated him with respect and honor and appreciated his efforts” (84). It remains to be seen if his native country, for whom he is fighting, will offer him the same courtesies.

What John does not know is that during his deployment, his loving, gentle, and devout father was lynched. The family decides not to tell him about the tragedy while he is fighting abroad. Now that he is returning, they must decide who will break the bad news and when.

When John arrives, he asks for his father, but before anyone can speak, they are interrupted by the neighbor, Selena Hawkins, who comes to welcome him home. She innocently divulges the family's secret when she says to John, "Too bad your daddy isn't here to see this" (Burrill 89).

Millie explains how "them w'ite devuls come in heah an'dragged him"(90). John, shocked to hear that his father was lynched, goes into an angry rage, and asks why someone didn't help his father. John swears that it is not fair that he should fight for freedom for this country when no black man has protection or rights. He takes the pistols that he has been taught to fire, and he proceeds to take his brother, Lonnie, to fight the men who killed their father. His grandmother pleads with him not to fight, knowing full well that this might be the last time she will see either of her boys again. She has already experienced a lynching in the family, how can she live with another? John, followed by a reluctant Lonnie, runs out of the cabin to his final battle, leaving his sister and his grandmother to endure the lynchings of two more innocent men.

Synopsis of Annie Nathan Meyer's *Black Souls* (1924)

Andrew and Phyllis Morgan establish the Magnolia School for African Americans just after World War I. For years they struggle to get funding and patrons to keep the school operating. Andrew gains the patronage of Senator Verne who has also agreed to serve as Chairperson of the Board of Trustees. Phyllis is not fond of the Senator, but Andrew feels obliged to honor him for his assistance.

Phyllis' brother, David Lewis, arrives from France after serving in the war, and he decides to help in the operations of the school. Phyllis notices that he is not happy since

arriving, and they determine that David's artistic nature and lack of true freedom will cause him to abandon his teaching position.

The school is hosting a reception to introduce the Senator to the school's families, and Andrew acknowledges that the Senator's daughter, Luella, will be attending. David admits that they met in Paris and became good friends, and it would be nice to see her again (Meyer 144). However, David knows that their interracial relationship cannot continue in the South, and he is determined to remind Luella of that fact. He hopes that she will understand his situation as a black man.

On the afternoon of the reception, Luella finds David sitting in a wooded area writing poetry, and she insists that he read to her. He urges Luella to leave and return to the school before anyone sees them together. In a short time, a group of guests arrive at their site, and David realizes that in order to save her and her reputation, he will need to ruin his own life. In an attempt to protect Luella, David pretends to assault her. He is immediately taken away and lynched while she stands by and says nothing in his defense.

The final scene of the drama finds Andrew crying over David's death and discovering the Senator's intentions for the school are bogus. Andrew proceeds to tell Senator Verne that the man who was lynched that day was his brother-in-law and his daughter, Luella, had a relationship with him. This news incenses the Senator who is a racist and who is unable to accept the story. In hysterics, Luella describes the mutilation and burning that David endured and questions how men can be such fiends. She is contrite and admits her love for David at which point, her father disowns her. (Meyer 173-75). The operations of the school continue without David's presence or the Senator's

involvement. Andrew and Phyllis are determined to continue to work for the improvement of their school and for the good of their students even with the racial problems that surround them.

Synopsis of Angelina Weld Grimké's *Rachel* (1916)

The Loving Family, Mrs. Loving, her daughter, Rachel, and her son, Tom live in a modest apartment in the North. Mrs. Loving is seated at her sewing machine completing a repair for a customer when young, energetic Rachel enters and blames her tardiness on her "playing with little Jimmy," a three-year old boy who lives in her building. She is an energetic, idealistic young adult who loves children and hopes to be a mother one day: "I think the loveliest thing of all the lovely things in this world is just being a mother!" (Grimké 33).

Rachel asks if she may invite Jimmy to meet her family. When Rachel brings the child to the apartment, she notices that her mother abruptly becomes ill. Rachel and Tom suspect that something is bothering their mother, and they convince her to explain her situation. Mrs. Loving confesses that their father and their brother were lynched ten years ago on that very day. When she sees the young boy, Jimmy, she remembers her son and she is overcome. Now she feels that her two children are old enough to understand the truth about their family. Each year on this day, Mrs. Loving relives the horrific incident that tore her family apart. The story stuns the two young adults, especially Rachel. Being a sensitive girl, she gradually begins to show signs of depression, anger and the psychological trauma that results from shock. The girl who is happy and extroverted becomes reserved and quiet.

The play moves forward and Rachel is now caring for young Jimmy. His parents died of small pox and she becomes his adoptive mother. She continues to live with her mother and brother, but she is in a continual decline concerning life, love, and children. Her Jimmy becomes a victim of bullying at school, and a neighbor confides in Rachel that her young daughter is being mistreated by others. In addition, Rachel, Tom, and a friend, John Strong, are unable to find suitable employment because of the color of their skin. The prejudice and hatred eventually cause Rachel to become more depressed and uncertain of a future for herself and her adopted son. She becomes aloof and detached from her family and seems to give up on living even though her life is not totally destroyed. She considers these incidents as hopeless, but in fact, she is not willing to fight back and make a better life for herself. She has a son - a reason to live – and also people who love her. She fails to see the blessings of her life but instead, she dwells on the problems of daily life.

Her depression forces her to refuse an offer of marriage to Mr. Strong, and eventually, when she learns that young black men continue to be victims of lynchings, she sees life as futile for black male children and ultimately, she refuses to have children of her own. Her decision rests on the premise that a male child, (including her Jimmy), might not have an opportunity to live a full, rich life. Rachel admits: “It would be more merciful to strangle the little things at birth” (Perkins, Stephens 23). She will remain celibate and deny herself a life of happiness in marriage and the joy of having other children.

It is unfortunate that Rachel decides not to marry. Her anxiety leads her to make a rash decision that denies her and Mr. Strong a life together with a family – something she

always hoped to have. The history of the period identifies the seriousness of the lynching epidemic, but who can say that the future would not improve and any children she might have wouldn't be safe? She experiences restrictions and incidents related to racial prejudice, but being that she lives in the North, her specific situation is better than many others. Rachel may be viewed in several ways as far as themes are concerned: she is "weak," and incapable of standing against those who would deny her a happy life, so she gives-up (a form of futility); She is a very "strong" woman who denies herself her life's desires as "resistance" against those who might hurt her (or her child) again in the future (resistance); she is a mother, who truly loves her son and does not wish to bring more children into the world and have them hurt or killed by race prejudice (motherhood).

Synopsis of Georgia Douglas Johnson's *Safe* (1929)

Liza is nine months pregnant with her baby and lives with her husband and her elderly mother. The family receives news that a young black boy, Sam, is arrested after he and his boss have a fight over wages. When his boss strikes him, Sam reacts and strikes back. Hitting a white man automatically puts him in a precarious position. Such acts are not tolerated by the white community, and Sam suffers as a result. Liza hears the screams of Sam as he is hauled away to the lynching tree, and she becomes traumatized. No fair trial or legal actions are in order for the young man. He retaliated against a white man and he will die. The futility of the situation greatly disturbs the family – especially Liza who unexpectedly goes into labor. The doctor arrives to deliver the baby and Liza asks, "Is it a girl or a boy?" When the doctor congratulates her on having a son, she immediately strangles the baby before the doctor can help to save his life. Liza admits, "now he's safe from the lynch mob" (Johnson, *Safe* 110).

Synopsis of Ann Seymour Link's *Lawd, Does You Undahstan?* (1936)

Aunt Doady, an elderly African American woman, sits quietly on her porch as a young boy, Fruit Cake, runs ahead of his mother and friends who are on their way to church. Fruit Cake tells his family that he is frightened by a bird that screeches at him three times, and he runs as fast as he can to get away from the owl. Aunt Doady warns him about screeching birds “that’s bad luck – it means death” (192). Doady is waiting for her grandson, Jim, to return home and eat his supper. The family asks why Jim never wants to work and why he always collecting bugs. Doady excuses Jim’s strange habits by admitting this is his work. He makes money collecting bugs for a local professor at the college. Doady admits that Jim doesn’t hurt the bugs, he drops them into the “cyanide pizen” and they just go to sleep (192).

Jim returns home, out of breath and in an anxious and nervous state. Doady asks him if something is wrong, but he dismisses the question. In the background, however, the sound of barking dogs is heard and they are coming closer to the cabin. He is offered dinner, but refuses to eat saying “I don’t have time” (Link 196). Doady realizes that Jim is in trouble and the dogs are blood hounds coming after him. Jim tells Doady that he has done nothing but try to help Mr. Watkins, a white man who was shot and bleeding in the woods. When he found Mr. Watkins, he heard the men and dogs behind him and he ran through the river to divert his scent.

Jim decides to escape to Louisiana until the culprit is found. The blood hounds’ barking grows louder and closer to Doady’s cabin and she yells, “I can never forget that sound – the night they came for your pappy . . .” (Link 197).

Doady remembers the horrible night her son was taken away, and she knows that Jim will never be able to escape. She warns him “they will never let you escape, go to the shed and get the shotgun” (197). She makes the excuse that before he leaves, he must rest and drink some warm coffee. Doady is determined not to let Jim be taken like his father. “God, dey cain’t take my Jim” (Link 198). While he searches for the gun and Doady’s hidden “travelin’ money,” she goes into the cabin and makes him a cup of coffee, returns to the porch and the poison jar where the bugs are kept, and talking to herself confesses the sin she is about to commit: “If I kill him, I also kill myself . . . Lawd, Does You Undahstan?” (198). When the men and the dogs arrive, they ask for Jim. Doady simply says, “Jim is dead.” The drama ends with the real perpetrator of the crime turning himself in, and Doady praying for forgiveness from God. She must try to survive now, knowing that she killed her grandson as a means of protecting him. In her words, “there are crueler things in life than death” (200).

Synopsis of Georgia Douglas Johnson’s *A Sunday Morning in the South* (1925)

Tom is a responsible nineteen-year-old boy who helps to support his grandmother and younger brother, Bossie. He hopes that one day he will better himself by attending night school, where he will learn a trade and be able to do more for his family. As the group sits for breakfast, Liza, a neighbor, visits and explains that the sheriff is looking for a black boy who allegedly attacked a white woman the night before. Tom responds that “the people are too quick to judge” and wonders what he would do if he should be accused of a crime he didn’t commit (Johnson, *A Sunday Morning in the South* 105).

The possibility of this scenario frightens him because he knows of similar situations that occurred in the past, and the results always meant a lynching. As the

family continues to discuss the dilemma, an angry knock is heard at the door. It is the sheriff coming to find his suspect, and he immediately begins questioning Tom: "Where were you last evening?" (Johnson, *A Sunday Morning in the South* 105). Tom and his grandmother explain that he was home early and in bed before the sun went down. In a condescending and insulting manner, the sheriff dismisses all of their comments and gives no credence to anything they say: "You keep quiet old woman . . . Shut up . . . Your word's nothing . . ." (Johnson 105).

Minutes later, the sheriff's deputy rudely enters the home with a white girl who is there to identify Tom as the perpetrator. She is shy, unsure, and hesitant about Tom's being the man who attacked her and admits this to the sheriff: "I – I'm not sure . . . but he looks something like him . . ." (Johnson, *A Sunday Morning in the South* 106). Clearly, she is not convinced of Tom's identity, but with an air of superiority and certainty that he has the culprit, the sheriff tries to convince her that "this is the man" and she haltingly says "y-e-s" (106). The sheriff arrogantly admits : "We got it all figgered (sic) out" (106).

The officers take Tom off to jail while his distressed family watches him being dragged away. They try desperately to enlist the help of a sympathetic white family who might intercede for them, but time runs out before anything can be done. The mob is quick to respond to the crime without due process or concerns for the boy or his family. Tom is lynched that morning while his family is left to live in anguish, knowing that the mob killed an innocent, loving and caring boy.

Synopsis of Corrie Crandall Howell's *The Forfeit* (1925)

Tom and Fanny Clark are a white couple who live in a Southern rural community. As the play opens, they are seated at a table – Tom is whittling an axe handle while Fanny is piecing a quilt. They discuss their son's tardiness and complain that Bud is probably playing craps in the neighbor's loft. Tom insists that their work at home can't be done in a timely fashion because Bud is "a good fer nuthin lout!" (Howell 95).

A knock is heard at the door along with muffled voices outside, making Tom wonder who would visit so late in the evening. As he opens the door, he notices a group of men and women with lighted torches standing in front of his house. Tom immediately runs to the mantel, grabs his gun, and returns to the door. Fanny asks what is happening, and Tom responds: "Thars gwine ter be a hangin in Hell . . ." (Howell 95).

The door is then violently pushed open by Woodrow, a boy of thirteen, who rushes in and admits that there is to be a hanging. "Twas teacher . . . Ole man Berry found her jest before dark, as he wuz comin home from Dobbeses Mill. He brung her ter ther Doctor's and then he cum over ter ther store ter tell Paw and ther rest . . . they don't know who done it, but they's huntin . . . she can't talk none . . . but she ain't ded" (95).

Fanny quickly realizes that her son, Bud, is in the same area as the assaulted woman, and she knows her son well enough to suspect that he is the perpetrator. However, she is not about to let him be caught and murdered. Instead, she gives Woodrow a half dollar and tells him to bring her some information: "Tell me just as soon as she dies ef she sed ennythin and don't let on I give hit ter yer or Tom'll git us both" (Howell 96). Woodrow leaves the house when Bud quietly and nervously returns home.

He reluctantly sits to eat dinner but reacts nervously when he hears the bloodhounds heading toward his home. Fanny sees his reaction and begs him to tell her if he has done anything. She stands frozen in her place when she discovers his guilt. She decides she must do something quickly to protect him from the mob.

Jeff Sparks, an African American farm hand, arrives to deliver potatoes. As soon as Fanny sees him, she quietly shoves her son behind a door for safety. Jeff, as is his usual custom, asks if there is anything to eat. Fanny obliges by offering him “a heap of cold vit’els in the kitchen . . . ”(Howell 97). As soon as Jeff goes to the kitchen, Fanny closes and bolts the door against him. Jeff is trapped inside screaming, “I haint done nuthin! I haint done nuthin at all” (98). Tom calls the men inside his door and tells them the murderer is in their kitchen. “We’s gwine ter teach all yer black niggers to leave white women alone . . . (98). As Jeff is led out screaming for mercy, and Bud is hiding safely behind a closet door, Woodrow runs in to tell Fanny, “She’s ded, Mis Fanny! Maw sez she nevr sed nuthin at all” (98). The curtain falls as the audience is left to imagine Jeff’s lynching and Fanny’s relief.

Synopsis of May Miller’s *Nails and Thorns* (1933)

Stewart Landers is the white sheriff of a small Southern town where he lives with his wife, Gladys , and their infant son. The town is unsettled due to the assault of a white woman by an African American man. Landers is unable to get accurate information concerning the incident, but it is rumored that a mentally challenged black man, Lem, was seen in the area of the assault. In order to protect him from any mob action, Landers places him in jail for protection until more evidence is confirmed. The injured white girl

is a Miss Davis, from a prominent family in the town. She is unable to speak to the authorities due to her serious injuries.

Gladys, in a nervous and agitated state, insists that Stewart go into town and be certain that there is no trouble around the jail. She also encourages him to call the Governor and have the militia intervene. Stewart refuses her wishes assuming that no citizens in this town will consider breaking into the jail to harm the inmate. He has established extra deputies to be certain there is no trouble.

Annabel, their African American servant, is late for work. When she arrives, she is frightened and upset over the rumors that are spreading through the streets. People are gathering and talking about “ a burning and a necktie party” for Lem (Miller 181). Stewart, still unconvinced that anything will occur, leaves home and goes to the jail to ease his wife’s nervous state. Gladys witnessed a lynching in the past, and the idea of such an event in their town causes her emotional distress. She does not want to bring up her son in this violence. When Stewart is late in returning home, Gladys becomes increasingly irrational and decides that she must go into the town and tell the “mob” that her son and theirs are the future of the town. People must stop what they are doing, or everyone will suffer. In an impulsive move, she takes her new son into town and decides to stop the mob at the jail. The crowd is so large that she is pushed, crushed, and knocked to the ground. Her baby falls from her arms and he is trampled to death. She is carried back to her home, devastated and injured, while the baby is taken away by the local Doctor. When Landers sees her, he recognizes her unstable condition due to the stress of the events she has experienced. She tells him , “The baby is dead . . . and I’m glad . . . the

mob lynched my baby along with Lem . . . He'll never have to see a lynching" (Miller 185).

Synopsis of Mary White Ovington's *The Awakening* (1923)

The Awakening was written in 1923, when Mary White Ovington was working to establish the grounds for the NAACP. She was one of the original founders, and it appears that her personal experience served to offer the plot of her story as well as the setting. This four-act anti-lynching drama moved from a residential home in an unspecified Northern city, to the offices of the NAACP, to a courtroom, and ultimately, back to the original residence setting.

The NAACP was in its infancy during the early years of the twentieth century, and its few members were trying to enlist others to join their cause. The drama opens as several young people are gathered for a meeting of the Caldwell Social Club. The majority of the group prefers to talk and socialize - this was, after all, a social club! Helen, however, an idealistic young black woman, is bored with wasting time and wants the group to do something "significant" to help their race. Her fiancé, Edward Marston, is a recent graduate of law school, and he sees a bright future ahead of him. He wants to keep a low profile, practice his craft, and keep away from any organizations that might be problematic for his future. Helen accuses him of "selling out his fellow man" (Ovington 16).

Helen encourages the group to join the NAACP, and to support those African Americans in the South who are living in fear of the mob lynchings. Edward stands against her wishes and as a result, Helen breaks their engagement. In time, Helen and

several friends do join the NAACP, and their enlistment campaign becomes a success as a result of an event that Helen experiences.

After the members of the Social Club leave that evening's meeting, Helen remains to rearrange the room and tidy the kitchen. She is startled when she hears the back door slam and a bearded, dirty man, Caesar Smith, appears inside the hall. "Please, don't gib me up, De's after me" (Ovington 19). He proceeds to tell her that he has been running from the South for several days. He is accused of attacking a white girl but he is innocent. He explains that the The Ku Klux Klan comes to his home and break in. He manages to get his own gun and fire back injuring two of the intruders. The white-hooded men are injured but not killed. Once in the home, they demolish the inside then burn the home and its contents to the ground. "I had a right nice li'll place . . . and I owned it, too . . . Dey didn't like dat!" (Ovington 20). He is grateful that his wife and children are away or they might have died in the fire. He is certain that he is going to be lynched and he fears "de fire dat burns slow . . . while dey sits around to watch an'hear yer scream" (20).

Smith continues his story by telling Helen that he followed the North star, meeting good people along the way who helped him with food and shelter. He knows, however, that the sheriff is on his trail. Helen assures him that she is a friend and she will help him, when suddenly, Sheriff Jones enters the house and proceeds to arrest Smith. Helen blocks his entrance and immediately calls the local police. Jones is appalled that a young, black woman will stand up to him, a white man. "I'll be damned . . . What sort of a nigger wench is this?" (23). Helen explains to the sheriff that "We won't let him go back to be lynched" (23). When the local police arrive, they take Smith to jail for protection and assure him, and the sheriff, that the courts will help him. Helen is a

member of the NAACP, and with the organization's assistance, she will find a lawyer who will take Smith's case.

During the days leading up to the court proceeding, Helen and her friends are busy in the NAACP office enlisting men and women to join the organization. Edward Marston (Helen's former fiancé), is assigned to be Smith's lawyer. Marston and members of the community work to see justice done because they know that if Smith is returned to Georgia, he will be lynched without a fair trial – or any trial at all.

Sheriff Jones continues his efforts to have Caesar Smith return to Georgia. He finds resistance at every turn from both the blacks and the whites of the community. Jones finds fault with everyone who gets in his way, and in an argument with Marston, shoots and wounds him. The local police take Jones to jail and continue to protect Smith until his trial. When the trial starts, Caesar Smith explains the scenario of that day at his home. He also explains that he is innocent and doesn't want to go to Georgia for fear of being lynched. When Sheriff Jones takes the stand, he is asked about Smith's safety if returned to Georgia. "State to the court what assurance you have that you can keep your prisoner safe from a mob if you return with him" (Ovington 47). The stage directions read: "*Jones puts his hand to his hip and draws out a large revolver. He runs his hand lovingly along it*" (48). The judge immediately has the weapon taken from Jones who is under bail for shooting Edward Marston.

Edward presents his case to the court with a story of a lynching that took place in Georgia fifteen years before. The horrid details of the lynching, and the complicity of the men in the mob, shock the court. Edward identifies the victim as seventeen-year-old Jerry

Landers, an only son to a widowed mother. As he speaks he hears a reaction from a woman in the courtroom. It is Landers' mother listening and reliving the death of her son. She has an opportunity to tell what the men in Georgia did to her young son and what will happen to Smith if he is sent back. When Mrs. Landers finishes telling her story, Marston rests his case. He knows that her story will impact the jury more than anything he can say. Smith is found innocent and continues to live in the North with his family.

Synopsis of Tracy Mygatt's *The Noose* (1929)

Mrs. Clay (the elder), sits comfortably in her fashionable living room while Pete, the black help, arranges the wood in the fire. Mrs. Clay speaks to him in a civil but cool manner. He is, after all, the help. She proceeds to explain that he no longer can play with her young granddaughter, Jeanne, "because of what happened today" (Mygatt 4). Pete discovers that a young black boy was lynched for assaulting and allegedly killing a white girl, Nannie. Pete fears for his own safety because he knows the mob wants revenge, and he asks if he can stay and hide in the attic of the Clay home. Mrs. Clay responds, "Not in my house" (Mygatt 4).

Margaret Clay, Mrs. Clay's daughter-in-law, arrives home from a trip to visit her own mother. Margaret ask for the whereabouts of her husband, Houston, and their daughter, but Mrs. Clay gives a feeble excuse and dismisses Margaret's questions. Mrs. Clay knows that her son attended and participated in a lynching and had his young daughter with him. She is certain that Margaret will not approve of this situation. Years before, Houston, a white lawyer, defended the rights of all men to live in freedom and peace, but only recently get caught-up in the mob mentality that infected the town. Margaret, who is very sympathetic to the African American citizens of the town, is

unaware of the day's recent hanging, and will never believe that her husband could participate in these brutal murders.

Earlier in the day, a letter was delivered to their house indicating that Houston had been nominated as the next Governor of the state due to his "participation in tying the noose"(Mygatt 37). Margaret discovers his complicity in the latest lynching and asks if the story is true. She is appalled to learn that he joined the mob and even permitted his daughter to witness the murder while sitting with neighbors. Margaret says that she no longer knows the man she married and cannot continue to live with him. In addition, she is outraged that he allows their child to see such an event. Margaret leaves her husband and takes her child North where she will not be a witness to these violent murders. As she leaves the house, Margaret hears Houston singing with neighbors who come to congratulate him on his nomination. Ironically, his actions cause him to lose his wife and child – while at the same time, make him a political hero for committing murder.

CURRICULUM VITAE

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EDUCATION

2004 - Present **Ph.D in Interdisciplinary Humanities** :: UNIVERSITY OF LOUISVILLE,
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*Research focusing on slavery, lynching, and Black Theater of the early
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of Black and White American Women Dramatists of the period
(currently completing Dissertation)*

1989 **English Certification::** University of Louisville

1976 **Master of Arts in Theater** :: VILLANOVA UNIVERSITY, VILLANOVA,
PA

1968 & 1970 **International Summer Programs in French Studies** :: LAVAL
UNIVERSITY, QUEBEC, CANADA

1969 **Bachelor of Science in Speech and French** :: CLARION UNIVERSITY
OF PENNSYLVANIA, CLARION, PA

ACADEMIC EXPERIENCE

ADMINISTRATIVE

1994 - 2006 **SACRED HEART SCHOOL FOR THE ARTS** :: EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR ::
Louisville, KY

- > Managed all facets of financial budget including school-wide
hiring of faculty/staff

Doubled school enrollment to capacity of 500 students

- > Initiated and completed the Southern Association of Colleges and Schools (SACS) Accreditation Process for Sacred Heart School for the Arts as a *Supplemental Education School*, 1998 – 2000: *first in the state of KY*
- > Initiated and developed long and short-term strategic planning, including involvement in renovation planning, equipment and furniture purchasing, and organization of school-wide move to new facility in 2000
- > Lead and supported ongoing curriculum development for all disciplines
- > Initiated and supported a comprehensive arts program including : Classic Ballet Program, Modern Dance & Tap Programs, Creative Dance Program for Young Children (ages 3 – 6), and Visual Arts Program for Elementary School-Aged Children
- > Initiated and supported the Suzuki Programs for Violin and Piano for Young Children (ages 5 – 8)
- > Coordinated all Fine Arts Programs and Events for the Year-Round School, including Music, Dance, Drama, and Visual Art
- > Initiated and directed an annual adult musical production, 1995 - 2005
- > Enlisted speakers and activities for Professional Development
- > Created all print materials relative to all school events and programs

TEACHING

1989 - 1994

**SACRED HEART MODEL SCHOOL :: INSTRUCTOR OF LANGUAGE ARTS
:: Louisville, KY**

- > Language Arts Instructor for grades 7 and 8
- > French Instructor for grades 7 and 8
- > Religion Instructor for grades 7 and 8
- > Advisor to School Paper, Yearbook, and Middle School Speech League

- > Coordinator for Festival of Foreign Language, and Theater Assistant for Spring Concert

1969 - 1979 **CLARION AREA JUNIOR-SENIOR HIGH SCHOOL :: INSTRUCTOR OF LANGUAGE ARTS :: CLARION, PA**

- > Language Arts Instructor for grades 10 and 11
- > French Instructor for grades 9 – 12 (levels 1 – 4)
- > Public Speaking Instructor for grade 12
- > Theater History Instructor for grade 12
- > Advisor to Drama Club, and Director of Annual Spring Musical

CREATIVE EXPERIENCE & COMMUNITY AFFAIRS

1994 - 2006 **SACRED HEART SCHOOL FOR THE ARTS :: THEATRICAL DIRECTOR OR ASSISTANT DIRECTOR FOR OVER 100 PRODUCTIONS :: Louisville, KY**

- > *Musical Productions include* : 42nd Street; A Funny Thing Happened on the Way to the Forum; Annie; Bye, Bye Birdie; Cinderella; Do Black Patent Leather Shoes Really Reflect Up?; Fiddler on the Roof; Hello, Dolly; Into the Woods; Jesus Christ Superstar; Li'l Abner; My Fair Lady; No, No, Nanette; Oklahoma; Oliver; Pinocchio; South Pacific; The Fantasticks; The Gondoliers (Gilbert & Sullivan); The Pajama Game; The Wiz; The Wizard of Oz; Tommy; West Side Story
- > *Plays include* : Barefoot in the Park; Bell, Book and Candle; Cactus Flower; Ladies in Retirement; Lie, Cheat & Genuflect; Love, Sex, and the I.R.S.; Murder Among Friends; Night of January 16th; Playing Doctor; Plaza Suite; Same Time Next Year; Spinoff; Ten Little Indians; The Absence of a Cello; The Amorous Flea; The Beverly Hillbillies; The Crucible; The Foreigner; The Lottery; The Nerd; The Odd Couple (Female); The Odd Couple (Male)

2009 -2010 **IRISH HERITAGE FESTIVAL :: THEATRICAL DIRECTOR :: Louisville, KY**

1986 - 1992 **EAST END PLAYERS :: ARTISTIC DIRECTOR & PRODUCER ::**

Louisville, KY

1981 - 1983 **LANGHORNE COMMUNITY THEATER :: DIRECTOR ::** Langhorne, PA

1972 - 1981 **CLARION COMMUNITY THEATER :: PRESIDENT ::** Clarion, PA

HONORS, AWARDS, & ACCOMPLISHMENTS

Current Kentucky State Teaching Certificate : French, English, Theater : Grades
7 - 12

2006 Golden Key International Academic Honor Society, Member, sponsored
by University of Louisville

2006 Heart Award for volunteer work on behalf of young women, presented
by Sacred Heart Academy

2004 Francesconi Integrity Award for Demonstration of Dedication to School
& Profession, presented by Sacred Heart Schools, Louisville, KY

2000 St. Angela Merici Award for Represented Service, and Charity to Co-
Workers, presented by Sacred Heart Schools, Louisville, KY

References Available Upon Request

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