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“To Be Black and ‘At Home’”: Movement, Freedom, and Belonging in African  
American and African Canadian Literatures

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“To Be Black and ‘At Home’”: Movement, Freedom, and Belonging in African  
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B.A., Claflin University, 2004

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## Abstract

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American and African Canadian Literatures

By

Kim D. Green

“To Be Black and ‘At Home’” augments a relatively understudied area of African diasporic scholarship, comparative examination of African American and African Canadian literatures. I argue that African American and African Canadian novelists including Ann Petry and Austin Clarke provide nuanced representations of the experiences of people who persistently encounter discrimination because of their belongings to marginalized racial, gender, and class groups and show how movements such as national and transnational migration, educational attainment, and economic advancement can represent acts of resistance to inequitable treatment. The selected literary works also demonstrate how these physical, intellectual, and economic movements are affirmations of blacks’ right to access national ideals of freedom, equality, and justice in the United States and Canada. For example, the black female protagonists in Petry’s *The Street* (1946) and Clarke’s *The Meeting Point* (1967) exercise intellectual mobility to achieve their visions of economic prosperity, which are commensurate with ideals of freedom and equality that govern the nations in which they reside. As marginalized members of their national communities, they learn that they do not equally benefit from these ideals, but this lesson does not prevent them from gaining education and using other types of mobility to demand access to opportunities for economic success. Their employments of movement therefore become acts of resistance to discriminatory treatment and affirmations of their right to achieve ideals of freedom and equality in the nations they call home. Although I focus primarily on African American and African Canadian literatures, I assert that themes of belonging, movement, and freedom have the potential to unify diverse literatures and cultures throughout the African diaspora. Racism, for example, has specific manifestations in particular nations and cultures. However, people throughout the African diaspora grapple with the inhibiting consequences of belonging to marginalized racial groups. Therefore, I argue that literary works, historical analyses, and other diasporic texts provide important knowledge about ways in which particular belongings affect opportunities for freedom and various types of mobility in multiple national locations.

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## Introduction

### **“To Be Black and ‘At Home’”<sup>i</sup>: Movement, Freedom, and Belonging in African American and African Canadian Literatures**

“To Be Black and ‘At Home’” emerges from a critical question that is pivotal to blacks’ historical experiences in both the United States and Canada: What does it mean to belong to a nation, or call a nation home, but have other categories of belonging such as racial, class, and gender belongings inhibit opportunities for movement and freedom in that nation? In both the United States and Canada, black people have historically struggled with various levels and types of marginality because of their racial, class, and gender belongings and therefore have not been able to fully attain principal American and Canadian national ideals of freedom, equality, and justice, ideals to which both nations guarantee its citizens access. Blacks in both nations expect to attain benefits— such as opportunities for economic mobility— that respective national ideals promise. In many instances, however, these national ideals do not become tangible realities for black citizens who are treated as marginalized members of American and Canadian national communities because of their racial, class, and gender belongings. The discrepancies between national ideals and the realities that many blacks experience call into question the meanings of national belonging for people who are not treated as equal national community members and therefore cannot fully access opportunities for mobility and freedom.<sup>ii</sup>

In both nations, literature is an important cultural vehicle to pinpoint and confront these discrepancies as well as some of the adverse consequences that discriminatory treatment has for mobility and freedom. The persistence of concerns with belonging,



movement, and freedom is continually evident in African American and African Canadian literary representations, and the novels I have selected for examination attest to the significance of these concerns.<sup>iii</sup> These texts— Ann Petry’s *The Street* (1946), Austin Clarke’s *The Meeting Point* (1967), Gloria Naylor’s *Linden Hills* (1985), and Mairuth Sarsfield’s *No Crystal Stair* (1997)—illustrate some of the varying and complex ways in which African American and African Canadian literatures consider intersections of movement, belonging, and freedom. These African American and African Canadian literary depictions engage some of the experiences of people who persistently encounter discrimination—an infringement on their rights as free citizens— because of their belongings to marginalized racial, gender, and class groups and show how movements such as national and transnational migration, educational attainment, and economic advancement can represent acts of resistance to the inequitable treatment of people who belong to marginalized groups. The selected literary works also demonstrate how these physical, intellectual, and economic movements are affirmations of blacks’ right to access national ideals in the United States and Canada.

Although I focus primarily on African American and African Canadian literatures, I also consider the implications of my comparative analysis for other diasporic literary studies of representations of themes of movement, belonging, and freedom because these themes impact diverse literatures and cultures throughout the African diaspora. For example, while racism or discriminatory treatment based on racial belonging has distinct manifestations in particular nations and cultures, a commonality African diaspora people share is their struggle with the inhibiting consequences of belonging to marginalized racial groups.<sup>iv</sup> Literary works, historical analyses, and other

diasporic texts are therefore important vehicles to illuminate how particular belongings affect opportunities for freedom and various types of mobility in diasporic places, including the United States and Canada. My comparative analysis of themes of belonging, movement, and freedom in African American and African Canadian literatures contributes to this aspect of diasporic study because my work is a partial examination of some of the ways these themes reflect the experiences and concerns of people throughout the African diaspora.

African American and African Canadian scholars of literature and a range of other disciplines usefully pinpoint some of the ways that issues of belonging are central to black people's experiences in the United States and Canada. Like historians and cultural critics in African Canada, African Canadian literary scholars such as Rinaldo Walcott explicitly recognize belonging as a regular concern. Walcott, in "Rhetorics of Blackness, Rhetorics of Belonging: The Politics of Representation in Black Canadian Expressive Culture," engages some of the ways that "...the politics of belonging is mapped, charted, and articulated by Black Canadians" (4). He also situates black Canadians' exploration of the politics of belonging within the context of the historical exclusion of blacks from Canadian national imaginations. Walcott's engagement with belonging therefore pinpoints the reciprocal dynamics of belonging: black Canadians have historically asserted a Canadian national belonging, but their claims of national belonging have to be seriously recognized before they are treated as significant—not marginal— national community members. His analysis also indicates that ideas about the perceived inferiority and inequality of people who belong to marginalized racial groups have to be transformed in order for marginalized peoples to be treated as equal national community

members. The issues of belonging that Walcott discusses also echo the concerns of other black Canadian scholars. Works such as Bina Toledo Freiwald's "Identity, Community, and Nation in Black Canadian Women's Autobiography" and "Cartographies of Be/Longing: Dionne Brand's *In Another Place, Not Here*" and Andrea Davis' "Diaspora, Citizenship and Gender: Challenging the Myth of the Nation in African Canadian Women's Literature" further show the persistent concerns with maltreatment that results from marginalized racial, class, and gender belongings in Canada.

African American scholarly discussions of issues of belonging in the United States do not often employ the term "belonging," but the identity-related concerns that these scholars address are essentially concerns with belonging. For example, scholars such as Patricia Hill Collins, bell hooks, and Carole Boyce Davies engage some of the ways that categories of belonging such as racial, class, and gender belongings operate in the United States and other places in the African diaspora.<sup>v</sup> Rather than describing these intersecting issues in terms of belonging, they more often speak in terms of categories of identity. Nevertheless, the conflicts they describe are ones that result from individuals' belonging to or identification with marginalized groups who do not receive treatment equal to that of members of more privileged groups. Like scholars who explicitly discuss belonging, these African American scholars confront the adverse consequences of racist, sexist, and classist behavior in local, national, and international communities.

Discussions of adverse effects of marginalized belongings also intersect with another important framework for this project: freedom. Restrictions and discriminatory treatment based on categories of identity or belonging also inhibit or deny freedom. For

example, Carole Boyce Davies, in *Moving Beyond Boundaries: Critical Dimensions of Black Women's Writing*, notes multiple intersections of belonging and freedom:

The boundaries we propose to move beyond are those erected to impede our movements and activities, curtail our necessary growth, and interfere with our realizing freedom. These are boundaries of geographical location, national constructs, language, race, gender, sexuality, ability, ethnicity, history, class, politics, social and cultural locations, domination, aesthetics, standards and so on (xv).

Davies usefully pinpoints the multiple categories of belonging that potentially inhibit freedom and emphasizes the necessity of transcending inhibitions of freedom. Her analysis is useful to my discussion of the affects of selected categories of belonging (e.g. race, gender, class, and nationality) on individuals' opportunities to achieve ideals of freedom in the United States and Canada. Further, her analysis informs my discussions of both physical freedom and nonphysical inhibitions of freedom that occur when oppressions such as racism, classism, and sexism infringe on blacks' rights as free people.<sup>vi</sup>

To further engage the above-mentioned intersections of freedom and belonging, I examine, with special attention to changes, literature across time periods and cultures. A formulation that is useful for this analysis of literary representations of freedom appears in Carol Henderson's "Freedom to Self-Create: Identity and the Politics of Movement in Contemporary American Fiction." Henderson says,

'A central quest in American life is for pure motion, movement for its own sake or as a means of freeing oneself from a prior mode of existence.' Indeed much of

American life revolves around finding one's *own* place in a world intent on relegating one to spaces and places chosen by others. This tension—between individuality and homogenic existence—provides fertile opportunity for the investigation of *imaginative movement* in American literature (998).<sup>vii</sup>

Henderson usefully highlights multiple inhibitions of freedom that individuals experience. Her illumination of certain elements of freedom present in imaginative movement also helps to provide insight on African American and African Canadian imaginative representations of ways in which movement serves as a form of liberation from marginalization and discriminatory treatment.

Henderson's discussion of tensions between "individuality and homogenic existence" is also useful. Although Henderson references a general "American" experience, tensions she pinpoints are relevant to both African American and African Canadian literatures. Both literatures represent some of the connections between individuals' identities and their experience or inexperience with forms of freedom. Both literatures also show how restrictions on people's exercise of various forms of freedom are premised on people's "duty" to the priorities of groups to which they belong.<sup>viii</sup> Additionally, these literatures depict ways in which persons are stigmatized, discriminated against, and inhibited from exercising freedom because of groups to which they belong (e.g. racist or sexist treatment). The complicated interconnections between individual identity and group belonging are therefore implicit in freedom discourses that register in African American and African Canadian literatures.

In line with Henderson's assertion, Robert Cummings Neville, in *Cosmology of Freedom*, identifies a complex relationship between personal and social rights and

important convergences and divergences between the individual and the communal in discourses of freedom. As Neville pinpoints, the individual has to contend with desires for personal freedoms and the dictates that the social and political systems to which he or she belongs place upon freedom. Therefore, societal demands temper the individual's ability to exercise his or her concepts of freedom. By highlighting complex relationships between personal and social rights, Neville ultimately shows the fluidity of concepts of freedom. Like Davies' and Henderson's formulations, Neville's formulation is useful to my discussion of multiple and changing concepts of freedom that emerge in selected literary texts.

In addition to the aforementioned scholarship, historical contexts inform my discussion of African American and African Canadian literary representations of complexities of freedom. The historical contexts for African American and African Canadian literary representations of freedom are rooted in the early histories of the United States and Canada. The beginnings of African American literature occurred during the period of African American enslavement, and from its beginning, African American literature has contended with freedom. During slavery, the period in which quests for physical freedom seem central, African Americans, enslaved and free, articulated a desire for other forms of freedom. For example, Frederick Douglas and Henry Bibb strove to attain intellectual freedom, Josiah Henson worked toward economic freedom, and Maria W. Stewart and Frances E. W. Harper paved ways for women to achieve freedom from gender restrictions. After emancipation, formerly enslaved African Americans recognized the nominal freedom achieved by abolition and knew they

had to confront that limited freedom. African Americans' conceptions of freedom continued to change, to evolve, and to multiply as circumstances required.

Since its early stages, African Canadian literature has also continually responded to questions of freedom, which were also influenced by the practice of slavery. Scholars such as Robin Winks date the first recorded presence of blacks in Canada as early as or perhaps even earlier than 1628, when the first known slave, Olivier Le Jeune, was brought to Canada (ix).<sup>ix</sup> While the practice of slavery gradually declined by the end of the eighteenth century, slavery was not officially abolished in Canada until the 1834 abolition of slavery in all of the British Empire. After the abolition of slavery, the ideologies grounding physical enslavement limited other African Canadian freedoms, as later occurred in the United States. Additionally, many enslaved African Americans escaped to Canada for freedom and established longstanding communities in Canada. Therefore, vestiges of experiences of physical enslavement in the U.S. and Canada and inhibitions of freedom in Canada register in African Canadian literature, as in African American literature.

In the passage below, George Elliott Clarke, an African Canadian literary and cultural scholar, discusses emergences of these vestiges:

“Africadian literature was born in urgency. It originated as a rebuke to the American Revolution and its pure, internal contradiction, namely, chattel slavery. Thus, when the nearly 3,400 African Americans who supported the Crown during the Revolutionary War were exiled *post-bellum* to Nova Scotia in 1783, these Black Loyalists continued to castigate slavery and its tortures...” (107-108).<sup>x</sup>

As Clarke asserts the centrality of freedom to a segment of early African Canadian literature, he also pinpoints longstanding connections between African America and African Canada; the writers he cites as early Africadian writers include exiled African Americans, and the freedom with which they are concerned, according to Clarke, includes that of African Americans. The significance of their African American identity becomes evident in their intense scrutiny of chattel slavery in the United States. That significance heightens when one considers black Loyalists' decision to focus on concerns of African Americans in the United States while they [Loyalists] also contended with race-related adversities in Nova Scotia. Ultimately, Clarke's illumination of the overlap between African American and Africadian identity and Africadians' concerns with blacks' experiences in the United States and Nova Scotia shows historical contexts out of which complex African Canadian literary responses to issues related to freedom emerged.<sup>xi</sup> The histories of African Canada and African America also show ways in which marginalized belongings affected freedom in the United States and Canada in the past, and these histories help to illuminate the continuing ramifications of marginalized belongings.

These histories also demonstrate ways in which African Americans and African Canadians have attempted to attain freedom through movement and to use movement to counteract their marginalized belongings. For example, the Black Loyalists' decisions to migrate from the United States to experience freedom in Canada and detach themselves from their marginal positions in the United States illustrate some of the ways in which blacks used movement as a vehicle of empowerment. Although Loyalists did not achieve



the expected benefits of freedom, the movement itself is a symbol of resistance to discriminatory treatment and an affirmation of their right to experience freedom.

While movement has historically empowered blacks in the United States and Canada, movement has not always been an option. As Clarke pinpoints in the above passage, Black Loyalists were familiar with the tortures of chattel slavery, a system that required restrictions on physical, intellectual, and economic mobility. All three forms of mobility threatened the security of slavery; therefore, many enslaved blacks who attempted to achieve these types of movement faced harsh punishment. Additionally, black Loyalists knew that slavery's imposition of limitations on opportunities for mobility also had an adverse impact on blacks who were not enslaved, so even if blacks were no longer enslaved, they would still contend with restricted mobility. Therefore, Black Loyalists' decisions to escape the oppressiveness of the United States and their continued critique of this oppression after their departure illustrate ways in which their experience and witness of limitations on chances for mobility influenced their chosen form of movement. Hence, their movement simultaneously symbolized empowerment and freedom and evoked experiences of attempted disempowerment and enslavement.

As these brief historical examples illustrate, freedom, movement, and belonging have historically intersected in both African America and African Canada. Consequently, these persistent concerns with interconnections between belonging, freedom, and mobility are integral to African American and African Canadian literary representations. Ultimately, both the similarities and distinctions in African American and African Canadian literary representations of these intersections provide insight into

ways in which literatures of both nations serve as vehicles to voice societal concerns with the impact of belonging on freedom and movement in the United States and Canada.

The above-outlined aspects of freedom, belonging, and movement structure my engagement with specific works of African American and African Canadian literatures. My method for examining these literary works is textual and contextual. I employ close textual analysis to examine pertinent aspects of texts that represent the complex intersections of movement, belonging, and freedom. I use historical evidence for context and comparison, and I use feminist theory to inform and nuance my discussions of literary works that are representatives of particular moments in literary, historical, and cultural change. This methodological approach therefore engages multiple disciplines that contend with the concerns of movement, belonging, and freedom that African American and African Canadian literatures address. My approach also illustrates how literature contributes to broader national and cultural conversations about the influences of belonging on mobility and freedom in past and contemporary eras.

Chapter One, “Freedom Moves: Historical Migrations in African America (United States) and African Canada, 1783- 1920,” demonstrates some of the historical connections between African America and African Canada that provide an important basis for comparative literary analysis. The primary focus of this chapter is historical ties between blacks in the United States and Canada, and I establish this historical foundation by focusing on significant African American and African Canadian migrations (1783-1920) that represent movements to attain belonging and freedom. I also briefly examine Lawrence Hill’s *Someone Knows My Name* (2007) and William Attaway’s *Blood on the Forge* (1941), books that capture the importance of movement, belonging, and freedom

in the first and last migrations discussed in chapter one, the Loyalist Migration and the Great Migration. This brief literary analysis provides an important transition between the historical focus of the first chapter and the more extensive literary analyses in the second and third chapters.

Chapter Two, “‘Contending Forces’<sup>xii</sup>: Transforming Discourses of Opportunity into Dreams of Mobility in *The Street* and *The Meeting Point*,” asserts that the working-class black female protagonists in Ann Petry’s *The Street* (1946) and Austin Clarke’s *The Meeting Point* (1967) use various kinds of mobility to resist denials of national belonging in the nations they call home. For example, they use intellectual mobility to gain access to opportunities for economic success that are not equally available to marginalized members of their national communities. Despite the adversity they encounter, they are determined to benefit from the ideals of freedom and equality that govern the nations in which they reside. As they use educational and vocational skills to pursue economic and social mobility, they are reminded of the debilitating forces of racism, sexism, and classism, but these protagonists continue to challenge their marginalization in their national communities.

Chapter Three, “Dynamic Convergences: Movement, Belonging, and Freedom in *Linden Hills* and *No Crystal Stair*,” argues that Gloria Naylor’s *Linden Hills* (1985) and Mairuth Sarsfield’s *No Crystal Stair* (1997) complicate representations of intersections between movement, belonging, and freedom by examining the important implications that multicultural and intra-racial concerns have for movement and freedom. For example, both novels illustrate ways in which intra-racial oppression hinders mobility and freedom. In *No Crystal Stair*, the protagonist experiences racism and sexism from

others but allows her own classism to interfere with the mobility of other black people. She eventually realizes that her classist practices, which stifle opportunities for others, share similarities with the racial and gender oppression she experiences. One of the protagonists in *Linden Hills* experiences and witnesses intra-racial class oppression that interrupts chances to exercise mobility and freedom. In both novels, then, people who experience discrimination also perpetuate it. Therefore, Naylor's and Sarsfield's representations of connections between intra-racial inhibitions and other forms of oppression illustrate complex ways movement, belonging, and freedom intersect. Ultimately, both novels show the importance of critiquing multiple levels of oppression.

In the final chapter, "Diasporic Dialogues: Transcending National and Literary Borders," I discuss how my study not only enriches comparative examinations of African American and African Canadian literatures, histories, and cultures but also provides a foundation for further study of movement, freedom, and belonging in national and international contexts. I use my comparative study of African American and African Canadian literatures and histories to formulate a more expansive discussion of the significance of persistent efforts to attain belonging and freedom in the United States and Canada. While national and cultural contexts shape the manifestations of racial, gender, and class oppression, some issues of oppression in the United States and Canada that African American and African Canadian literatures engage are also issues relevant to the African diaspora. Hence, I also discuss some of the ways that African American and African Canadian literary depictions of particular forms of marginalization can offer insight on the emergence of similar forms of oppression in other diasporic communities. Therefore, my last chapter shows how my comparative study of African American and

African Canadian literatures is also a partial analysis of representations of movement, freedom, and belonging in diasporic literatures.

Altogether, my study not only helps to illuminate understudied connections between African America and African Canada but also helps to show the significance of African Canadian experiences in African diasporic discussions. While my analysis of intersections of movement, belonging, and freedom in African America and African Canada offers important insight, my project nevertheless demonstrates the need for more extensive comparative examinations of African American and African Canadian literatures, histories, and cultures. My study also shows the importance of continued consideration of some of the ways African Canada helps to nuance and shape African diasporic imaginations. Therefore, I want my project to help motivate and propel additional comparative studies of African America and African Canada that can advance dialogues about some of the ways belonging influences movement and freedom throughout the African diaspora.

## Chapter One

### **Freedom Moves: Historical Migrations in African America (United States) and African Canada, 1783- 1920**

Between 1783 and 1920, people of African descent in Canada and the United States shared an important commonality: they migrated within and between the United States and Canada to resist discriminatory treatment and obtain opportunities for freedom. A number of their movements were not singular attempts but organized efforts by large groups of people. These mass migrations represented large-scale attempts to escape oppressive circumstances and seek new and better opportunities. This chapter therefore uses some of these African American and African Canadian migrations to engage historical connections between contemplated and executed desires for movement, belonging, and freedom. The movements this chapter highlights include Loyalist migration from the United States to Canada (1782-1783), Loyalist migration from Canada to Sierra Leone (1791-1792), African American migration and escape to Canada (1815-1850s), African American migration back to northern U.S. and southern U.S. post Civil War (1860s), migration from the United States to Canada (late 19<sup>th</sup> and early 20<sup>th</sup> centuries), and the Great Migration within the United States (1910s- 1930s).

This chapter also examines Lawrence Hill's *Someone Knows My Name* (2007) and William Attaway's *Blood on the Forge* (1941), two novels that centralize important historical migrations. The migrations these texts engage, Loyalist migration and the Great Migration, are the first and last historical migrations discussed in this chapter. These literary texts help illuminate the importance of movement, belonging, and freedom in these capstone migrations. In both novels, protagonists' physical movements are

interconnected with desires for freedom and belonging. While these movements do not yield the desired results, protagonists continue to pursue their ideals of freedom and belonging. Set in different time periods, *Blood on the Forge* and *Someone Knows My Name* illustrate the perpetual presence of desires for belonging and freedom in African America and African Canada. Through their engagement with historical moments, these novels also provide useful examples of interconnections between literature and history.<sup>xiii</sup> These interactions are significant to this chapter and important to my dissertation altogether because historical connections between African America and African Canada provide foundations for comparative study of African American and African Canadian literatures.

In the historical moments upon which this chapter focuses, migration is a response to the national exclusion indicated in racial discrimination. Migration, therefore, is indicative of a refusal to belong to places that explicitly deny particular groups equal rights and opportunities, and migration becomes a way of achieving freedom and belonging. Conceptualizing movement in this way shows that blacks were not merely victims who were denied belonging and freedom; rather they were also empowered people who decided to move when conditions were not favorable to the attainment of freedom and belonging.

Andrea Davis, in “Diaspora, Citizenship and Gender: Challenging the Myth of the Nation in African Canadian Women's Literature,” uses the concept of “migratory subjectivity” to discuss another element of the refusal to belong to particular places. The concept of migratory subjectivity comes from Carol Boyce Davies’ *Black Women, Writing and Identity* (1994). Davies’ concept of migratory subjectivity highlights black

women's multiple identities and emphasizes the importance of locating black women's writing in "myriad places and times" (36). This formulation not only recognizes blacks' diasporic connections but also considers the oppressive systems within national borders that make restrictive national identification even more undesirable. Andrea Davis extends this concept further and asserts that migratory subjectivity, like the concept of diaspora, attempts to capture the collective while also challenging "hegemonic patriarchal control of geographical, political, and cultural borders" (Davis 65). Through this formulation, Andrea Davis engages the conscious disavowals of national belonging that result from recognition of limitations of national borders and interconnected limitations on identity.

While it is important to note the elements of empowerment represented in the refusals of belonging that propel migration, it is also imperative to consider distinctions between voluntary and forced migration of people of the African diaspora. Forced migration refers to being both physically forced and "forced" by circumstances that arise from racial, gender, and class-based oppression. Therefore, even migrations that do not result from involuntary physical movement are potentially coerced by discriminatory treatment. However, there is a definite distinction between these types of coerced movements and involuntary physical movement such as the forcible transport of at least 12 million black people from Africa via the transatlantic slave trade between 1501 and the 1860s.<sup>xiv</sup> These differences are significant, but in both types of movement, migrants have a degree of agency or willpower in their movement.<sup>xv</sup>

The complicated circumstances surrounding migration and belonging are evident in migrations on which this chapter focuses. Despite the complexities and distinctiveness of these migrations, altogether, these selected moments show not only longstanding



relationships between African American and African Canadian communities but also long-lasting connections between movement, belonging, and freedom. In many of these migrations, movement theoretically offered new opportunities for belonging and freedom; places such as northern United States, Canada, and Sierra Leone were lands of opportunity for people seeking freedom from physical, economic, and social restraints. Migrants' dreams were not as easily achieved as they may have expected, but the prospects of migration continuously drove blacks to move.

The prospect of physical freedom influenced blacks' participation in the Revolutionary War and their subsequent movement to Nova Scotia during the first migration upon which this chapter focuses, the Loyalist migration. Many blacks joined British forces during the Revolutionary War because the British government offered emancipation to blacks willing to serve with British forces. Recognizing slavery as a major weakness of "rebellious" southern colonies, British government officials hoped this offer of emancipation would both provide labor and "strangle" the southern economy. Ultimately, fewer slaves than the British expected accepted this offer, but for those who did, their contribution to the war earned them an opportunity to attain the freedom they had not been able to experience in the United States. After the war ended, approximately 3,400 black Loyalists journeyed to Nova Scotia in 1782-1783 with the hopes of better life chances (Clarke 108-109; Winks 29-33).<sup>xvi</sup>

When black Loyalists arrived in Nova Scotia, they were no longer enslaved, but they did not escape slavery altogether. Slavery was practiced in Nova Scotia prior to Loyalists' arrival, and white Loyalists helped to perpetuate slavery. Scholars such as Linda Carty and Robin Winks locate the first recorded presence of African Canadians in

the seventeenth century, when the first slave was brought to Canada. Sylvia Hamilton, in “Naming Names, Naming Ourselves,” notes the entrenchment of slavery in Nova Scotia by the time of the arrival of black Loyalists. There were approximately 500 slaves in Nova Scotia at the beginning of the American Revolution, and that number tripled with the arrival of those enslaved by white Loyalists (Mensah 46). Ironically, black Loyalists used this opportunity to escape slavery, and their white Loyalist counterparts perpetuated this institution. This journey, therefore, became a paradoxical symbol of freedom and continued enslavement. While the practice of slavery gradually declined by the end of the eighteenth century, slavery was not officially abolished in Canada until the 1834 abolition of slavery in all of the British Empire.

Despite the racial oppression demonstrated by the enslavement of blacks, black Loyalists expected the same privileges as white Loyalists. However, those expectations did not come to fruition (Mensah 46; Abdi 51; Hamilton 21). For example, black Loyalists often received smaller allotments of land than whites, unless they served with the Black Pioneers<sup>xvii</sup> (a specialized company of the black Loyalists). Additionally, the land plots black Loyalists were assigned were often inconveniently located (Winks 35). Although black and white Loyalists served the British, these disparities made it clear that their service was not perceived equally. Their realization of economic freedom was therefore stifled by presumably racially motivated unfairness.

Black Loyalists also had to contend with manifestations of white Nova Scotians’ racial prejudice. Although relations between blacks and whites were relatively untroubled for the first year after black Loyalists’ arrival, the “harmony” was not long-lasting. In July 1784, hundreds of disgruntled disbanded white soldiers rioted because

they had difficulty finding employment in Shelburne County, where many black Loyalists resided. Shelburne employers preferred to employ blacks for lower wages, so these soldiers' opportunities for employment were limited. By rioting and other acts of violence, whites took their frustrations out on blacks who populated a section of Shelburne County called Birchtown (Winks 38-39; Hamilton 22).

Blacks affected by these riots were therefore violated on multiple levels. Employers made racially motivated decisions to strip blacks of their rightful wages, and disbanded soldiers, acting on their racial prejudice and financial desperation, inflicted harm on blacks. In both cases, blacks' racial belonging prompted their oppressors to stifle their freedom. Black Loyalists had gained their physical freedom, but their experiences in Nova Scotia showed multiple ways freedom can be inhibited. They were legally and physically free, but their coexistence with white Loyalists and white Nova Scotians reminded them that they were not considered equal members of Nova Scotian society and therefore hindered from achieving their ideals of freedom and equality.

Winks notes that the racial tensions experienced in Shelburne County were not mimicked in Annapolis County, another area in which black Loyalists settled. Many of the Black Pioneers settled in Annapolis County, and according to Winks, they commanded more respect than the "average" blacks. Hence, there were fewer racially motivated tensions. Despite the relatively better reception blacks received in Annapolis County, Winks argues that black settlement did not go well anywhere in Nova Scotia. He says misunderstandings about the nature and size of the land they had been promised, rather than segregation, was at the root of much of blacks' discontent (Winks 40-41). If Winks' assessment is accurate, black Loyalists' desire for land ownership further showed

their recognition of the importance of land to their ability to achieve the independence that was an important element of their economic freedom.

The inequitable land allotment provides one example of how blacks' desires and expectations did not come to fruition in Nova Scotia. As a result of the dissatisfaction with conditions in Nova Scotia, many blacks took the opportunity to move to Sierra Leone. A combination of forces made this journey possible. Blacks' discontent prompted Thomas Peters, a former leader of the Black Pioneers, to go to England to obtain an establishment for "competent" black settlement (Mensah 47). Granville Sharp (Sierra Leone Company) informed Peters of the need for black settlers in Sierra Leone. After the investigation of blacks' conditions in Nova Scotia, John Clarkson<sup>xviii</sup> was appointed to help with the move to Sierra Leone. Although Clarkson met some difficulties because of Nova Scotia Governor Parr's disagreement with allegations about the maltreatment of blacks, the migration eventually occurred (Winks 62-70).<sup>xix</sup> Approximately 1,190 blacks took the journey to Sierra Leone in 1792, with the hopes of distancing themselves from the disappointments of Nova Scotia (Hamilton 29; Winks 73).

Misrepresentations of opportunities for black Loyalists in Nova Scotia had led to the dissatisfaction that prompted migration to Sierra Leone. Ironically and unfortunately, John Clarkson also misrepresented conditions in Sierra Leone. For example, he was not truthful about the rents settlers would be charged. Disagreement over this rent and blacks' refusal to pay it eventually led to rebellion in Sierra Leone in 1800 (Winks 67; Mensah 47). In addition, intra-group factions complicated life in Sierra Leone. According to Winks, black Nova Scotians did not think of themselves as Africans, and

they thought the earlier liberated Africans and native groups were inferior (Winks 76). Ultimately, these social dynamics as well as untruthful representations of Sierra Leone contributed to the disappointment and frustration felt by those who migrated from Nova Scotia to access better opportunities.

Altogether, this movement to and from Nova Scotia illustrates the impact of different manifestations of issues of belonging and freedom. Black Loyalists fought in the Revolutionary War to reap the reward of freedom and potentially better opportunities in Nova Scotia. Their hopes of better life chances were hindered by racial discrimination, discrimination that stifled opportunities for independent survival and provided evidence of their outsider status. The movement to Sierra Leone was a response to the conditions of Nova Scotia. However, experiences in Sierra Leone, like those in Nova Scotia, were disappointing to migrants who had hoped that a return “home” would offer more chances for belonging and freedom from oppression.<sup>xx</sup>

An overarching deterrent to blacks’ realization of freedom and belonging was the disregard for the best interest of blacks that recruiting agents in Nova Scotia and Sierra Leone exhibited. British officials recruited black Loyalists to increase the chances of a British victory in the Revolutionary war. Since their primary motive was to win the war, they created an image of life in Nova Scotia that would persuade blacks to join forces with them. When black Loyalists arrived in Nova Scotia, however, their experiences were not commensurate with the promises they had been given. Additionally, other factors such as the existence of enslaved and free black populations and resistant native Nova Scotians created racial conflict that exacerbated the conditions black migrants experienced.

The Sierra Leone Company's interests in helping blacks migrate to Sierra Leone were also questionable; at the time of their support for this migration, they needed hewmen for the Sierra Leone colony. When Thomas Peters travelled to England to express black Loyalists' desires to relocate to access better opportunities, representatives from the Sierra Leone Company used this visit as a chance to recruit settlers for Sierra Leone. The Sierra Leone Company's motives become more suspect when one considers the misinformation representatives gave to black Loyalists about practical things such as rent settlers would be charged in Sierra Leone; the misrepresentation of the prospects of Sierra Leone gives the impression that the interests of the Sierra Leone Company superseded the expressed desires of black Loyalists. Ultimately, these inaccurate representations led to conflict between Sierra Leone inhabitants and the Sierra Leone Company about the agreements made between these two parties as well as conflict between black Loyalists, other migrants, and the Sierra Leone Company over unfulfilled promises.

While migration had previously been a solution to unfavorable conditions, in Sierra Leone, blacks' dissatisfaction erupted in rebellion. Many members of this population of blacks had moved from the United States to Nova Scotia and Sierra Leone to access better opportunities. They had been disappointed multiple times and therefore reached their breaking point. Although this rebellion did not result in better conditions, the act of defiance symbolized their frustration with their inability to attain ideals of freedom and belonging.

Ironically, Maroons, who had been exiled from Jamaica and also disappointed by Nova Scotia, were used to quell the uprising of black Loyalists (Mensah 48; Hamilton

30).<sup>xxi</sup> The Sierra Leone Company therefore used another group of frustrated migrants to serve their own interests. Further, the Sierra Leone Company opted to use physical force as a temporary solution and sidestepped the opportunity to address the implications that black Loyalists' rebellion would have for the black Loyalists as well as the Maroons. The rebellion ended, but desires for equal opportunities to prosper continued to loom over settlers of Sierra Leone, including Maroons. Mensah notes that migrants from Nova Scotia and Maroons eventually established a coalition and bonded around their desire to be free from "white domination." Not surprisingly, these unified efforts frustrated the Sierra Leone Company, and Mensah speculates that this frustration contributed to the Sierra Leone Company's request for the British government to take responsibility for the colony (48).

In *Someone Knows My Name* (2007), Lawrence Hill uses a range of literary, historical, and cultural sources to provide contemporary literary depictions of Loyalist migrations to Nova Scotia and Sierra Leone as well as portrayals of other intranational, international, and transatlantic movements of people of African descent.<sup>xxii</sup> Grounded in these historical materials, *Someone Knows My Name* leads us through the various movements of its protagonist, Aminata Diallo. The physical movements include her transatlantic transport to British colonies (United States) in 1756-1757 after her kidnapping from the West Coast of Africa, her movement to New York, her migration with Loyalists to Nova Scotia (1783), her return migration to Africa (Sierra Leone) in 1792, and her movement to her final residence in England (1802). For readers, following the migrations of Aminata Diallo is a journey in itself. The journey readers

undertake not only places us in these historical moments but also prompts consideration of the historical and contemporary implications of these movements.

Like the “real-life” figures who faced continuous restrictions because of their race, Aminata faces confinements in each of her migratory destinations. Whether physically enslaved or physically free, she persistently seeks to transcend limitations imposed by these confinements. Even while enslaved, she continually indicates that she does not internalize her captivity. When she first arrives on St. Helena’s Island, Aminata struggles to figure out exactly what it means to be owned. She contemplates, “How did it come to be that he owned me, and all the others? I wondered if he owned me at all times, or only when I was working for him. Did he own me when I slept? When I dreamed?” (Hill 134). She later comes to terms with what it means to be a slave. As she looks at a group of slaves on the auction block, she says, “I could do nothing to change their prospects or even my own. That, I decided, was what it meant to be a slave: your past didn’t matter; in the present you were invisible and you had no claim on the future” (Hill 189). Aminata chooses to reject those parameters of enslavement; she opts to *remember* so that her past would matter for her present and her future.

Her decision to remember and not be “robbed of her past” is representative of important components of her rejection of slavery: her consciousness of her capacity for mental freedom and her ability to maintain that freedom. Sam Fraunces, the bar keep in New York who helps her escape, articulates the mental freedom Aminata has been asserting through her actions; he uses this formulation to further convince Aminata to escape in New York. As Sam recounts his ability to survive in New York, she reminds him that he came to New York physically free. In response, Sam tells Aminata, “And



you are already free where it matters most, in your mind” (Hill 248). This articulation and recognition of mental freedom serves as a precursor to Aminata’s escape from physical enslavement. Although Aminata’s actions have already indicated her refusal to submit to the demands of slavery, this verbal affirmation of her mental freedom propels Aminata to act on her desire for physical freedom.

This attainment of physical freedom in New York becomes a stepping stone to her ultimate goal, to return home to Bayo (her home village in Africa). Before she is able to journey to Africa, however, she learns of a plan to take black Loyalists to Nova Scotia. She, like many blacks, wants to leave New York before it is overtaken by slave owners and therefore chooses to take advantage of the chance to migrate to Nova Scotia. After migrating to Nova Scotia, Aminata learns that the promises of Nova Scotia are not commensurate with the realities. In addition to limited land opportunities, blacks face racial discrimination and violence at the hands of angry, unemployed whites. These tragic events lead to the fictionalized Thomas Peters’ venture to inform British parliament about landless blacks and the perpetuation of slavery in Nova Scotia. His quest is successful, and the Sierra Leone Company arranges blacks’ journey from Nova Scotia to Sierra Leone. Although the experiences in Nova Scotia become tragic on many levels, this disappointment in Nova Scotia turns into an opportunity for Aminata as she is now able to return to her homeland. For Aminata, her return home is a chance to satisfy her longing for home and to alleviate her outsider status in the United States and Nova Scotia. Although she would stop at nothing to fulfill her desire to return home anyway, this decision to migrate again is indicative of her refusal to submit to the adverse

experiences that are products of the exclusionary treatment she experiences in the United States and Nova Scotia.

Unfortunately, her journey to Sierra Leone and eventually to her home village results in disappointment because she realizes that she does not “belong” in Africa, even though she is born there.<sup>xxiii</sup> After her residence in Sierra Leone and before her journey to Bayo (her home village) Aminata expresses sentiments that foreshadow the disappointment and outsidership she experiences in Bayo: “Personally, I concluded that no place in the world was entirely safe for an African, and that for many of us, survival depended on perpetual migration” (385). Despite this assertion, her rootedness in Bayo clouds her vision about how she would be received at her return and how much change occurred in her absence. Aminata is warned that she should not attempt to go back to Bayo, but she needs to make the journey to realize that the Bayo of the past no longer exists. In this instance, a sense of belongingness and rootedness almost becomes detrimental to Aminata because after she returns to Bayo, one of the villagers attempts to sell her. While Aminata desires “home” and a sense of belongingness, the reality is that she is a perpetual outsider after she is kidnapped from her home village. It is not until she has returned to her home village that she fully realizes the import of her assertion about perpetual migration: constant movement and outsidership can foster a beneficial sense of caution about both unfamiliar and seemingly familiar people and places. Aminata’s experiences in Bayo confirm this lesson because her nostalgia for home and consequent lack of caution almost end in tragedy. Fortunately, however, she escapes a tragic outcome and is able to use her experiences in Bayo to gain perspective on the advantages of perpetual outsidership.

Aminata's experiences also show the impact that communities and societal structures can have on an individual's ability to bring their ideals of freedom to fruition. Although she asserts her right to freedom and desires belonging in her homeland, she often finds adverse reactions to her assertions and desires, and these reactions ultimately hinder her ability to achieve her ideals of freedom and belonging. Altogether, Aminata's migration to her homeland as well as her other movements show the difficulties of attaining ideals of freedom in places from which and to which people migrate. Whether she is in South Carolina, Sierra Leone, Bayo, or Nova Scotia, Aminata is constantly confronted with limitations on her freedom and belonging, and these are limitations other people impose.

In "Bodies on the Move: A Poetics of Home and Diaspora," Susan Friedman's engagement with "home" resonates with Aminata's conceptualization of home and her difficulty achieving a sense of belonging. Friedman uses an array of literary texts, anecdotes, and adages to complicate notions of home and belonging. A series of questions she asks illuminate the intricacies of concepts of home: "Is home a place? A memory? An ideal? An imagined space? The black hole of desire?" (195). The texts she selects answer these questions in different ways, but these questions point to convergences and divergences of physical and imaginative concepts of home. Ultimately, the various texts Friedman incorporates in this essay illustrate the multiplicity of concepts of home and the range of connections between concepts of home and belonging.

The series of questions Friedman poses in regard to "home" help to illuminate Aminata's changing concepts of home. Initially, home is a physical place where Aminata

longs to return. When she returns, however, she realizes “home” is just a memory. The *place* she remembers has transformed, so all she has is the *memory* of the place she once knew. Although she is disappointed at this realization, the memory still allows her to maintain a sense of rootedness. She can no longer experience the physical place, but the memories of her early life, family, and culture in Bayo remain with her and shape her perspectives on belonging. Her memories, therefore, allow her to carry “home” with her wherever she goes. This ability to transport home empowers Aminata before she returns to Bayo, and it continues to strengthen her after her final departure from Bayo. Her roots in Bayo help her to become assertive and strong-willed, and both characteristics are central to her conceptualization of mental freedom and her desire for physical freedom. Aminata’s home-spun ideals guide her as she continues her journey to attain freedom for herself and others.

Fortunately, Aminata is able to persevere and triumph, despite efforts to limit her freedom and belonging. In addition to her escape of physical enslavement, Aminata’s story is sought as a contribution to the abolitionist cause. She therefore has an opportunity to take on a role she cherished in her home village, that of djeli (storyteller). Ultimately, this role allows her to use a piece of her “home” culture, the art of storytelling, as a way to help secure the freedom of others. Through this storytelling, she is also able to relive and recreate home and remember a time in which she did feel a sense of belonging. This role is therefore not only significant to the achievement of freedom for those enslaved but also important to her attainment of a sense of belonging through her memories of home.

Her recognition of the significance of her role as storyteller and of the movement/dissemination of her story emerges in her persistent attempts to tell her story accurately. Despite abolitionists' continual attempts to have Aminata alter her story to fit the needs of the abolitionist cause, Aminata is determined to tell her story in her own way. The preservation of her story allows her to claim ownership of her life experiences and maintain control over her important role in an urgent abolitionist cause. Her story, as she decides to tell it, will reflect her quests for freedom and belonging and support the efforts of those who wish to achieve their own ideals of freedom and belonging (Hill 103).

As a literary depiction of historical moments and events, Hill's *Someone Knows My Name* provides significant insight about Loyalist migrations. By engaging these historical movements to and from Nova Scotia, he addresses important issues regarding freedom and belonging that people who endured these migrations confronted. More specifically, his novel provokes pertinent questions regarding freedom and belonging as they relate to the native and the outsider as well as the enslaved and the free. Additionally, Hill's work helps to illuminate connections between various migrations of people of African descent. Some of the movements he portrays were forced and some were voluntary, but the commonality in the movements he represents is migrants' persistent attempts to attain freedom from physical, mental, economic, and social restrictions.

Hill's representations of these historical movements are also important because he, like many other African Canadian writers, recognizes the importance of representing African Canadian history. George Elliot Clarke, in the introduction to *Eyeing the North*

*Star* (1997), contends that African Canadian writers are forced to act as historians because of the neglect of African Canadian history in Canada (xx). African Canadian scholars such as Joseph Mensah, Ali A. Abdi, and Peggy Bristow also pinpoint the neglect of African Canadian history and echo the need to write black Canadian history. Hill's work therefore makes an important intervention because it shows not only the interconnections between history and literature but also the significance of these intersections to the recognition and perpetuation of African Canadian historical narratives. Ultimately, novels like Hill's work to combat the marginalization of African Canadians that occurs through historical exclusion.

Hill's fictional representation captures some of the realities of history, and his portrayal of continuous efforts to move reflects choices of many blacks in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries who chose migration as a step toward advancement. Despite the adverse experiences of blacks in Nova Scotia, which are documented in historical sources and depicted in *Someone Knows My Name*, blacks continued to migrate there, either on their own accord or with the help of the British government. After the Loyalist migration, another mass movement of blacks occurred in the four decades prior to the passing of the Fugitive Slave Act, which was passed in 1850 (Mensah 49; Winks 142).<sup>xxiv</sup> According to Winks, blacks who went to Nova Scotia without the help of the British government were well received into the 1830s. However, by the 1840s and 1850s, they were "distinctly unwelcome" (Winks 142). Winks speculates that blacks' services that were needed in frontier communities (e.g. felling trees and laying roads) in the 1820s were not needed in more mature communities in the 1840s and 1850s. Winks also notes that in the 1840s, Irish workers provided labor for comparable wages and did not raise the

complicated social questions that were raised in regard to blacks (144). If this speculation is accurate, this is another example of ways black migrants' frustrations, fears, and vulnerabilities were capitalized on. As noted in my discussion of British officials during the Revolutionary War and representatives of the Sierra Leone Company during black Loyalist migration to Sierra Leone, the ulterior motives of Nova Scotians superseded their interest in the well-being and success of black migrants.

Mary Ann Shadd Cary, a prominent nineteenth century African American educator, editor, and lecturer, also documents blacks' mid-nineteenth century migration to Canada, and she particularly addresses the role of the Fugitive Slave Act in propelling movement of blacks, enslaved and free.<sup>xxv</sup> Shadd Cary's *A Plea for Immigration to Canada West* (1852) supplements Winks' historical account of mid nineteenth century migrations and escapes and offers a slightly different picture of Canada through her descriptions of Canada West, which is currently Ontario.<sup>xxvi</sup> In the very first paragraph of this travel guide, Shadd Cary discusses the influence of the Fugitive Slave Act on her migration, African American migration generally, and on her decision to create this guide. Because of this legislation, Shadd Cary is cognizant of the urgency of this migration. Therefore, to facilitate blacks' migration, Shadd Cary offers practical information (e.g. climate, land, crop production, employment, etc.) about Canada West and details what she deems the most important information for those attempting to migrate.

Throughout the guide, she adds her own social and political commentary to her cataloguing of important practical information. For example, Shadd Cary emphasizes the lack of racial discrimination in churches, schools, and employment. The language she

uses aims to indicate the harmonious relationship between whites and blacks in Canada West. However, the picture of Canada West that she portrays is contrary to the historical account Winks provides. According to Winks, by 1850, Canada West and Nova Scotia were two major areas of black settlement and had established separate schools, which is an indication that racial harmony did not govern interracial relationships (144).<sup>xxvii</sup>

Mary Ann Shadd Cary's investment in motivating blacks to migrate to Canada West might have clouded her depictions of the realities of life in Canada, but her ultimate goal was to persuade blacks that Canada offered more opportunities to thrive socially and economically and blacks generally experienced fewer limitations on freedom. Shadd Cary's plea is even more urgent because of the imminent threat of the Fugitive Slave Act, so when considering her portrayals of Canada West, one also has to consider how the urgency of this critical historical moment shaped her assessments. Nevertheless, Shadd Cary's (mis)representations of Canada West added to the misinformation blacks received about prospective lands of opportunity.

Despite all of the complications blacks experienced in Canada, migration between the United States and Canada continued through the remainder of the nineteenth century and into the twentieth century. Mensah estimates that twenty-thousand blacks migrated to Canada between 1850 and 1860. For example, some blacks from western parts of the United States such as California settled in prairie provinces (Manitoba, Alberta, and Saskatchewan) and British Columbia.

Mensah contends that although the people who migrated to western Canada faced some racial discrimination, generally, they fared better than their counterparts in the east. The mass migration in the 1850s strained eastern Canadian economies such as Ontario's.



Additionally discrimination increased, and some even complained that there was more prejudice in Canada than in the United States. The discriminatory treatment ultimately influenced migration back to the United States. After the outbreak of the Civil War, a substantial number of blacks also migrated back to the United States to fight with the Union Army (Mensah 50). By the end of the war, many blacks had returned to the United States (Mensah 50).

Nevertheless, even with migration back to the United States, migration from the United States to Canada persisted through the end of the nineteenth century. By the turn of the twentieth century, blacks in the United States still grappled with inhibitions of freedom and discriminatory treatment and therefore continued to seek new opportunities in Canada in the twentieth century. For example, in the early twentieth century, blacks from Oklahoma migrated to Saskatchewan, Manitoba, and Alberta; this early twentieth century migration was the first large-scale migration of blacks to the prairies of Canada. In 1909, approximately 200 blacks migrated to Saskatchewan. In 1910, at the invitation of some railway companies and provincial governments, about 300 blacks migrated to Alberta. These migrants, like migrants to Nova Scotia, were promised land but given poor land allotments. Additionally, racial prejudice surfaced. Blacks in prairie communities survived, but their settlements did not grow substantially because prairie governments, business establishments, and residents eventually prevented the influx of more blacks (Mensah 51-52).

Between 1910 and 1911, Calgary (Alberta), Edmonton (Alberta), and Winnipeg (Manitoba), all passed resolutions that called for the ceasing of black immigration (Abdi 53). In 1912, the Superintendent of Immigration publicly asked blacks not to come to the

Canadian west because opportunities for them were better in the warmer climate. These active efforts to inhibit blacks' migration altered many blacks' perception of Canada as a land of opportunity; therefore, many blacks decided to return to the United States to forge new paths for prosperity and freedom. By the eruption of World War I, blacks from Oklahoma who had migrated to Canada sought out opportunities in the northern United States (Winks 303-313). Like blacks in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, blacks attempting to better their lives by migrating to Canada in the twentieth century faced racially motivated inhibitions from legal and social systems. While this twentieth century illustration of the adverse experiences of black migrants in Canada shows a long-lasting trend of disappointment for black migrants, it also demonstrates a persistent effort to use movement as a path to attain ideals of freedom and belonging.

The movement of Oklahoma blacks from Canada to the northern United States in 1914 coincides with the last mass migratory moment I want to discuss in this chapter: the period in which blacks participated in what has been dubbed the Great Migration. During the Great Migration, blacks from southern states in the United States sought opportunities in the North during World War One and continued to migrate north after the end of the war. Between 1915 and 1920, approximately 500,000 African Americans migrated to Philadelphia, Detroit, Cleveland, Chicago, St. Louis, and other industrial cities (Roark 859). A series of economic and social issues served as impetus for this mass movement: a decrease in wages as a result of depression in the South in 1914 and 1915, the damage the boll weevil caused to cotton crops in 1915 and 1916, an increased demand for laborers in the North coupled with a decrease in immigration of workers from foreign

countries, injustice in southern courts, disfranchisement, segregation, and lynching (Dodson and Diouf 115-117).

Although all of these factors intersected and formed an impetus for blacks' mass movement, it seems a principal factor was blacks' subjection to acts of terror. Both Marks and Dodson and Diouf cite the sentiments of one black woman who explained why she migrated: "I left Georgia because I wanted better privileges." When she was asked whether those privileges consisted of "mixed schools, white churches, and association with white people in their homes generally," she replied, "No, I don't care nothing about that, but I just want to be somewhere where I won't be scared all the time that something is going to break loose" (in Marks 184; in Dodson and Diouf 119). The interviewer reveals his/her presumptions about motives for moving north, but this woman clearly indicates that imminent danger propelled her movement. She, like many blacks, feared for her safety and well-being. Their awareness that this threat of physical danger was racially motivated and would probably persist in the foreseeable future indicated that some form of action was necessary. For a considerable number of blacks, that action was movement.

Although many desired to move north, migration was not a simple endeavor. Dodson and Diouf note the trials of movement during the Great Migration. For those whose trip was not paid for by employers, migration was expensive, so it was rare that entire families migrated together. Young men between the ages of eighteen and thirty-five were usually the first to migrate, and they were to send for their families after they had gained economic sufficiency (Dodson and Diouf 121). Additionally, many migrants had to employ a step by step migration; they stopped off in places along the way to work

and earn enough money to continue their journey (Dodson and Diouf 121; Marks 186). Black migrants were aware of the sacrifices they would have to endure to reach the North, and the prospects freedom in the North served as impetus for their endurance.

The news received about the North also created excitement about potential opportunities. People who had already migrated sent letters to families and friends to disseminate information about jobs and housing (Dodson and Diouf 120; Hahn 467-468). Newspapers such as the *The Chicago Defender* strongly advocated African American migration north. This newspaper published exclusive information such as advertisements from employers. Eventually, those who exploited blacks in the south perceived *The Chicago Defender* as a threat, and police in a number of cities confiscated copies of the newspapers. Nevertheless, copies of papers were smuggled through rural areas and disguised in the contents of other mailed packages (Dodson and Diouf 120-122). These efforts are evidence of blacks' determination to encourage other blacks to migrate north. The attempt to curtail the distribution of *The Chicago Defender* and prevent blacks' migration illustrate that even as blacks were attempting to forge new paths for freedom outside of the South, some whites tried to inhibit those attempts. Despite these hindrances, blacks were determined to take advantage of the promises of the North.

While blacks had relatively better opportunities in the North, there were also many disappointments including unfair wages, higher housing prices, dilapidated houses, overcrowding, racism, and racially motivated violence (Dodson and Diouf 123-127). As more southerners migrated, these issues became more pronounced. Racial conflict erupted in lynching, riots, and other forms of violence. These conditions exposed black migrants to conditions that were not that much different than those in the South.

After the end of World War I, many African Americans lost their jobs, and racial conflict persisted. This conflict resulted in the Red Summer of 1919, a summer in which mob violence against blacks and numerous riots occurred across the country (Dodson and Diouf 129).<sup>xxviii</sup> This summer of heightened conflict created national hysteria. The fact that this was a national problem further shows that blacks' mistreatment and societal position did not differ drastically from region to region. Although blacks migrated north to escape societal ills in the South, those problems manifested in adverse ways in the other places as well. The severity of violence and general inhibitions of life and liberty in the North illustrated how the plague of racial prejudice permeated the mindsets and actions of people in the North and South.<sup>xxix</sup>

The unfortunate experiences of black migrants are not surprising considering the conditions under which opportunities for blacks were opened in the North. Employers sought substantial black labor only after European immigrants became unavailable (Grossman 3). For northern employers, blacks were a source of labor and therefore not necessarily perceived as equals in social or political settings. Therefore, the need for their labor superseded efforts to welcome them in their respective environments and help them secure a sense of belonging. In many instances, there were conscious efforts to demonstrate the opposite: they did not belong and were not welcome.

John Grossman's description of "lessons" of the North in *Land of Hope* (1989) illustrates how blacks' economic opportunities were ultimately hindered because of discrimination: "What they would eventually learn was that access defined as mere entry was not enough. Jobs did not mean promotions or economic power...seats in the classroom did not set their children on the road toward better jobs or places of respect in

the city” (8). Their role as mere laborers who were primarily filling spots for which others were preferred meant that opportunities for advancement were not readily available. Additionally, perceptions of inferiority extended beyond the work environment and beyond their individual realities. As Grossman points out, the discrimination migrants experienced would have ramifications for their social atmosphere and for their children’s futures. In some ways, these consequences would be negative, but in other ways, the decisions parents made to attain better lives for themselves and their families would help to transform blacks’ positions of marginality in the United States.

Despite the violence, strategies of dissuasion, and disillusionment, the Great Migration continued through the 1920s. Grossman estimates that one million more blacks migrated north during the 1920s. He also contends that despite the adversities blacks experienced, the North still held promise for many blacks (Grossman 3-4). Considering the southern environments from which many had migrated, northern cities offered relatively better opportunities for advancement.

Ultimately, the period of mass movement known as the Great Migration is important for many reasons. It represented a large-scale effort to resist racial, social, economic, and political oppression. Black migrants faced the trials of the movement and the aftermath of that movement to attain better social, political, and economic opportunities. For those who had witnessed the atrocities of the South and saw them re-emerge in the North, oppression was inescapable and therefore had to be confronted if they and their descendants were to access the rights and opportunities granted to other Americans.

The Great Migration also significantly changed the demographic landscape of the United States. With regard to the ramifications of this mass movement, Steven Hahn, in *A Nation Under Our Feet* (2003), asserts,

Once overwhelmingly southern, the African-American population would become national; once overwhelmingly rural and agricultural, it would become urban and industrial; once overwhelmingly subject to formal and informal repression, coercion, and exclusion, it would find precious new space for civic and political activism. The results would be seen not simply in the extension and reconstitution of black communities, but also in the changing social and political face of the country as a whole (465).

As Hahn rightly points out, the Great Migration helped shape future social, economic, and political developments in African American lives. The refusal to remain members of southern communities that denied blacks equal rights and opportunities indicated a frustration with persistent injustice. Migrants' employment of movement as resistance to injustice established a lesson and legacy for future generations of blacks who would have to grapple with manifestations of the problems faced in earlier periods. Further, as Hahn notes, the change in demographic distribution that resulted from the Great Migration, would allow blacks to more effectively use the political system to combat various forms of oppression.<sup>xxx</sup> The courage and determination of those who participated in the Great Migration transformed their immediate environments and contributed to the concerted efforts that future African Americans would undertake to continue to attain ideals of freedom. While migrants' ideals of freedom may not have been fully achieved, they paved a way for future generations to attain some of their ideals of freedom.

The historical importance of African Americans' migrations is also evident in literary engagement with migration. For example, in *Who Set You Flowin?: The African American Migration Narrative*, Farah Griffin identifies the migration narrative as one of the dominant forms of twentieth century African American cultural production (3). She uses four pivotal moments that are central to the migration narrative to organize her analysis of a variety of literary, musical, and visual works that serve as examples of migration narratives. These four moments follow:

- (1) an event that propels action northward, (2) a detailed representation of the initial confrontation with the urban landscape, (3) an illustration of the migrant's attempt to negotiate the landscape and his or her resistance to the negative effects of urbanization, and (4) a vision of the possibilities or limitations of the Northern, Western, or Midwestern city and the South (Griffin 3).

The pivotal moments Griffin outlines help structure engagement with migration narratives such as William Attaway's *Blood on the Forge* (1941), a novel that captures the last migration I discuss in this chapter, the Great Migration.

Attaway offers an historically-based, fictional account of the promises and trials of the Great Migration. This novel is set in 1919 and pivots around the lives of three brothers, Mat, Melody, and Chinatown, who participate in the Great Migration to escape a crime Mat commits, their impoverished conditions, and racial discrimination. Although their migration results in a rise out of the poverty they had previously known, the conflicts over circumscribed freedom and belonging culminate in unfortunate outcomes. These outcomes call into question the net benefit of their migration.



Although poverty is a major factor in their migration, Mat's assault of his riding boss "propels" the Moss brothers' movement north. When the Moss brothers arrive in Allegheny County, they immediately draw comparisons between Kentucky and Allegheny County. The barren land and "bad white men" in Kentucky are preferable to the large-scale lack of vegetation and "iron monster" (steel mill) in Allegheny County (Attaway 44). Additionally, according to the Moss brothers' collective contemplation,

A man don't git to know what the place where he's born looks like until he goes someplace else. Then he begins to see with his mind things that his eyes had never been able to see. To us niggers who are seeing the red-clay hills with our minds this Allegheny County is an ugly, smoking hell out of a backwoods preacher's sermon (Attaway 45).

Here, the seemingly stark contrast between this industrialized landscape and Kentucky's rural landscape overwhelm them and trigger a nostalgia for home. Some of the things that are taken for granted are appreciated now that they are faced with this new environment; the availability of clean, minimally polluted air, for example, is a quality of home that they remember and desire upon their arrival in Allegheny County. There is no denial about the problems of home, but the initial desire to be home instead of in this unwelcoming place alludes to the power of belonging. Although they were impoverished, experienced racial discrimination, and had other hardships in Kentucky, home is the place they know and the landscape they know. Belonging to home and knowing the landscape of home offers some sense of stability and comfort, which are not present when they near their destination of Allegheny County.

Although the Moss brothers' initial reaction is to landscape, this assessment or premonition of sorts about this "smoking hell" sets the stage for the adversities they experience in Allegheny County because this "smoking hell" literally and figuratively represents their experiences at the steel mill. The Moss brothers initially reap the economic advantages of migration, but this economic advancement comes with the physical danger of working at the mill and other downfalls that accompany their existence in their new environment. The Moss brothers' experiences provide useful examples of the complicated nature of their migration and subsequent experiences. In line with the third and fourth moments in Griffin's formulation, these experiences also show the differences between their expectations of life in the North and the realities they encounter.

Ultimately, central motives for the Moss brothers' migration, hopes of economic advancement and escape from racial prejudice, are not fully achieved. The economic advantages of the North do not result in their increased prosperity because they spend their money on alcohol, gambling, prostitutes, and other distractions to numb themselves and survive the demanding working conditions in the steel mills. The mill provides them opportunities for economic advancement, but because they waste their money to cope with the unfavorable working conditions in the mill, the mill is also the source of their depleted financial resources. Melody and Chinatown spend their money carelessly almost immediately after their arrival north, and Mat also eventually indulges in numbing mechanisms in which his brothers and other mill workers participate. They all sabotage one of the primary purposes of their migration, financial gain.

The other central motive for their migration, desire for relief from southern racial prejudice, does not fully come to fruition. Their experiences in the South haunt their lives in the North, and the North has its own share of racial prejudice. When they arrive in the North, they are greeted with hostility from other ethnic minorities. They eventually learn that blacks are used as strikebreakers; therefore, the mill workers view them with disdain because their arrival indicates an attempt to dismantle strikes. After the Moss brothers become acclimated to the mill community, they face few incidents of racial prejudice; by the end of the novel, however, these prejudices resurface. This reemergence indicates an underlying sentiment that had never fully dissolved. Therefore, the North provides very little reprieve from the racial discrimination they experienced in the South and hoped to escape.

In addition to these instances of racial discrimination in the North, the Moss brothers' encounters with racism in the South continue to haunt them. The southern racism they faced instilled a sense of fear in them that informs their experiences in the North. The persistence of these haunting experiences is even more evident when the Moss brothers' fears surface at the end of the novel. Preceding a strike, Bo, the only black supervisor in the mill, is assaulted because he is thought to be a "stool pigeon." Melody and Mat encounter him badly beaten in the streets. They help him, and as they take him to safety, the narrator describes their feelings, "They were frightened deep inside. That fear did not stem altogether from what happened [to Bo]. It had roots in mob-fearing generations of forebears in the South" (Attaway 174). Even though they had been removed from the Kentucky for a while, their memories and knowledge of these mob-like situations shape their sense of urgency in carrying Bo to safety. The eruption of

this violence against Bo triggers those memories and the coinciding reactions. Therefore, despite their physical distance from the experiences of the South, the Moss brothers' memories keep them figuratively close to those experiences. Like their desire for the economic benefits of migration, their hope that migration would allow them to escape racial discrimination does not come to fruition.

While their inescapable experiences of racial discrimination become disadvantageous, these experiences are also useful because they inform their present and help them develop insight on their futures and the futures of other black migrants in Allegheny County. As they witness the arrival of a new set of black workers from the South, they foresee a continuation of racial prejudice. Describing Melody and Mat's thoughts about this "cargo" of black men, the narrator says, "They knew all of those men herded in the black cars. For a minute they were those men—bewildered and afraid in the dark, coming from hate into a new kind of hate" (Attaway 178). Given their experiences north and south, Melody and Mat have a sense of the fate of these new arrivals who have hopes of gaining better opportunities. Mat and Melody now know the prospects and the realities, and one reality is that the racial prejudice they experienced in the South will manifest in a different fashion in the north. Their grim outlook on the experiences of these newcomers shows their own disillusionment.

This disillusionment is also represented in their continued desire for "home." This desire is ironic because "home" is the place from which they had escaped for better opportunities, but because they cannot access the opportunities they expected, they have nostalgic memories of home and indicate a desire to return. They do not return but use a

symbolic journey home as a coping mechanism for their trials in Allegheny County.

Describing Mat's walk through the hills near their house, the narrator says,

He took to walking in the hills. Like his brothers, symbolically he was going home. In his trouble his spirit was near home. So the song of the mills was muted, and all that he saw had another air. The sky sometimes took on the colors of planting time. He did not see the smoke and slag of the mills (Attaway 169).

In some ways, the realities they experience in Allegheny County hinder them from detaching themselves from their nostalgia for home or at least the symbolism of home. Even in this moment, as the novel nears its conclusion, the Moss brothers indicate desire for home or, more specifically, the serenity of the natural world of their home.

Additionally, the Moss brothers' disillusionment and disappointment are tangibly represented in Chinatown's loss of eyesight, Melody's injury to his playing finger and subsequent inability to play the guitar, and Mat's murder. After these incidents occur, Allegheny County, the place to which they had migrated for better life chances, is no longer livable for Melody and Chinatown. Just as they migrated to Allegheny County to free themselves from poverty and racism, they leave Allegheny County and journey to Pittsburg to forge new opportunities for freedom and belonging.

At the novel's end, we get a sense of Melody and Chinatown's future prospects. The description of the place where blacks live in Pittsburg gives the sense that the living conditions are not superior to those in Allegheny County. However, for Melody, the misfortune of Allegheny County is inhibiting, so even if the destination of this movement is not materially better, it is better because it removes Melody and Chinatown from the suffocating experiences of Allegheny County.

The novel ends while they are en route to Pittsburg, so we do not know the outcome of this movement, but we do get the sense that Melody intends to make the best of this move. He seems optimistic about their ability to find a place to live and employment and maintain their freedom from the poverty they had known in Kentucky. Melody also seems confident that he and Chinatown will be able to forge some sense of community in Pittsburg. After all, he is relying on blacks who inhabit Pittsburg to show him the way to gain employment:

Many Negroes had gone to Pittsburg before them; many were castoffs from the mills. They had settled in the bottoms of that city, making a running sore at those lowest points. But a man had told Melody where to live: the Strip, a place where rent was nearly free and guys who knew how to make out would show them the ropes (Attaway 235).

Like Melody and Chinatown, the people who preceded them to Pittsburg experienced situations that propelled them to the next destination. They could therefore empathize with Melody and Chinatown's movement for better opportunities. The confidence in these people's willingness to show Melody the "ropes" indicates that common experiences in the mill and in migration could potentially help establish a communal bond between the inhabitants of this Pittsburg town.

If these people, who reside in the "bottoms" of the city where resources are not necessarily abundant, are still willing to assist fellow migrants, their willingness would heighten a sense of community. If this is the case, Melody and Chinatown's inability to earn money in the same way they did in Allegheny County would be mediated by a sense of belongingness and inclusion in this Pittsburg community that is willing to extend its

limited resources to newcomers. These communal ties could potentially help alleviate their longing for “home” and help them bring some of their desires for belonging and freedom from racial oppression to fruition.

Ultimately, Attaway’s representation of the Great Migration offers a complex perspective on this mass movement. While *Blood on the Forge* pinpoints the discrepancies between the promises of migration and the realities migrants experienced, it also illuminates some of the ways this movement attempted to counteract the severe racial discrimination in the South. The experiences he depicts highlight the strength and determination of masses of people who refused to accept maltreatment, but this literary representation also shows the detrimental and long-term impact this maltreatment can have. All of the Moss brothers are unable to escape their past experiences with racial discrimination, and their additional encounters with racism contribute to their inability to take advantage of some of the limited opportunities the North does offer. The complexities of their experiences therefore provide examples of the difficult physical and personal journeys of blacks who participated in the Great Migration.

*Blood on the Forge* and *Someone Knows My Name* reinforce the knowledge that people of African descent in the United States and Canada continued to move with hopes of attaining their ideals of freedom and belonging, even when their realities were not commensurate with promises of migration. Both literary works illustrate ways in which movement offered a viable solution to the adversities resulting from racial discrimination and provided a sense of empowerment for those who faced inhibitions of freedom and belonging. Additionally, these literary representations demonstrate that, for many blacks, movement was only a vehicle utilized to find a place of stability, belonging, and freedom.

Many migrants embraced the power of movement but hoped that experiences and reception in their destinations would not necessitate continued movement.

The movements for freedom and belonging depicted in *Blood on the Forge* and *Someone Knows My Name* and shown in historical representations of black peoples' migration within and between the United States, Canada, Jamaica, and Sierra Leone also demonstrate a broader, human impulse: to demand equal access to opportunities for freedom and belonging. Individuals and communities that participated in these movements implicitly and explicitly voiced their right to be treated as important and respected members of national and international communities, members whose desires for economic and social mobility and freedom did matter. The small-scale and large-scale migrations or physical movements that offered vehicles for these proclamations also symbolized black people's determination to escape oppressive places such as the U.S. South and journey to places that would allow opportunities to achieve ideals of freedom and belonging. Ultimately, these historical movements provided important forms of resistance that worked to transform discriminatory behaviors within local, national, and international communities.



## Chapter Two

### **‘Contending Forces’: Discourses of Opportunity and Dreams of Mobility in *The Street* and *The Meeting Point***

*National cultures are composed not only of cultural institutions, but of symbols and representations. A national culture is a discourse—a way of constructing meanings which influences and organizes both our actions and our conception of ourselves. National cultures construct identities by producing meanings about “the nation” with which we can identify; these are contained in the stories which are told about it, memories which connect its present with its past, and images which are constructed of it (Hall 613).<sup>xxxi</sup>*

Hall’s apt characterization of national culture as a *constructed* discourse informs my discussion of some of the ways conflicts emerge in processes of national identity formation. Since any type of construction inevitably entails acceptance and rejection of certain materials, the “stories” and “memories” that are included in the process of constructing discourses of national identity may be the stories and memories of a select few rather than the majority. Hence, there are aspects of national identity with which those who claim belonging to respective nations can identify, and there are also aspects that do not reflect the experiences of all national community members.

In line with Hall’s assertion that “national culture is a discourse,” I use the phrase “discourse of opportunity” to identify *constructed* national discourses within the United States and Canada that represent them as countries in which national community members have equal chances to achieve economic mobility. Multicultural policies in Canada and equal-opportunity legislation in the United States are examples of what I characterize as discourses of opportunity. These discourses, in their multiple manifestations, provide the theoretical or conceptual basis for dreams of upward mobility

in both nations, and they persistently inspire beliefs in the possibilities for mobility. However, as previously implied, these discourses do not have the same implications for all members of respective nations. In many instances, more privileged members of these nations are better able to benefit from discourses of opportunity that are ostensibly accessible to all national community members.

Chapter One implicitly engages discourses of opportunity in the United States and Canada that propelled various important migrations in the eighteenth, nineteenth, and early twentieth centuries. Here, I examine African American and African Canadian literary representations of the incongruities between discourses of opportunity and chances for mobility in the mid-twentieth century. Therefore, this chapter continues discussion about some of the ways black people contend with discrimination that ultimately prevents them from accessing discourses of opportunity in the nations they call home. While this chapter demonstrates some of the ways inequitable treatment persists in the mid-twentieth century, it also pinpoints the unwavering fight of blacks who are determined to benefit from the opportunities that are ostensibly available to national community members.

Portrayals of discriminatory treatment that contributes to incongruities between discourses of opportunity and chances for mobility abound in both African American and African Canadian literatures. However, Ann Petry's *The Street* (1946) and Austin Clarke's *The Meeting Point* (1967) offer distinct representations of the emergence of this discrimination in the mid-twentieth century; both novels use the lenses of working-class black mothers to provide insight about reasons people who belong to marginalized groups have difficulty transforming discourses of opportunity into economic advancements and

other tangible forms of mobility.<sup>xxxii</sup> Oppressive forces such as racism, sexism, and classism stifle protagonists Lutie's and Bernice's quests for economic mobility and other chances to materialize discourses of opportunity. These interconnected oppressions therefore allow complex engagement with the compound effect that protagonists' intersecting categories of belonging have on their opportunities for advancement.<sup>xxxiii</sup>

Historical contexts for the emergence of discourses of opportunity in both nations help illuminate the difficulties Lutie and Bernice experience when they attempt to achieve these discourses. Founding principles of the United States—liberty, equality, and justice—shape interrelated discourses of opportunity that buttress all Americans' abilities to benefit from these principles. Ironically, part of the written foundation for the early nation, the Constitution, also set precedents for the inequitable treatment of some members of the national community. Subsequent legislation in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries attempted to overturn the discriminatory and oppressive treatment of underprivileged groups including black people and women. While these strides for equality were relatively successful, disparities remain. Discriminatory treatment toward particular members of the United States national community continues to challenge conceptualizations of the United States as a nation governed by liberty, equality, and justice.

Despite the inequities that have existed, discourses of opportunity in the United States are inevitably linked to the concept of the American Dream, the belief that essentially anyone can thrive economically in the United States if they work hard and exercise thrift. Benjamin Franklin's principles for economic success—frugality, strong work ethic, and prudence—often emerge in discussion about basic tenets for the

American Dream.<sup>xxxiv</sup> During Franklin's lifetime (1706-1790), these traits seemed essential for people who wanted economic mobility, and for many, these traits still seem necessary for fulfillment of the American Dream. In an introduction to *Poor Richard's Almanac*, David Larson makes a case for the continued significance of Franklin's contribution to the development of American identity and perception of that identity in other countries:

Benjamin Franklin's *Autobiography* is the most frequently translated literary work of non-fiction that has come from the United States. For readers of many nations it defines the American self and culture. For those who live in the nation that its author helped create and in the culture his writings helped shape, it is an inescapable text (720).

While Franklin is still recognized as a forefather who helped to develop an American identity, his principles for economic progress are still sources of conflict for many individuals who claim an American identity.<sup>xxxv</sup> Many people born in the United States in past and recent periods have not been able to attain the American Dream, even when they enact the strategies Franklin emphasizes. Discriminatory treatment, which is a result of belonging to marginalized groups, hinders individuals' achievement of their dreams, so many people have to refashion their dreams to account for potential obstacles that result from their multiple belongings. Their conceptualizations of the American Dream therefore differ from Franklin's rubric and challenge notions that every American has a chance to attain the discourse of opportunity known as the American Dream.<sup>xxxvi</sup>

In Canada, discourses of opportunity are also critical to national identity. Despite claims about the ambiguity of Canadian national identity and the undefined nature of a

corresponding Canadian Dream<sup>xxxvii</sup>, there is one point on which many cultural critics agree: Canada is currently portrayed as a nation that embraces multiculturalism as part of its national identity. The ostensible centrality of multiculturalism in Canadian national identity implies an acceptance of cultural difference and a willingness to promote the success and mobility of members of the Canadian national community.<sup>xxxviii</sup> In many ways then, claims to Canadian multiculturalism are discourses of opportunity about the options available to members of Canadian national communities.

Canada's multicultural policy (1971) and Multiculturalism Act (1988) are important foundational elements of current claims to Canadian multicultural national identity. These "official" multicultural policies demonstrated Canada's ostensible commitment to a multicultural nation and helped to establish the ideals that would govern the creation of this type of nation. However, as Jim Cummins implies, the more difficult task was and is the implementation of these policies. Twenty years after the official adoption of multiculturalism in Canada, Jim Cummins notes the contradictions between the ideals of multiculturalism and the practice of racism in Canada.<sup>xxxix</sup> He also pinpoints the gaps between the ideal and the real in other national communities. In "Lies We Live By: National Identity and Social Justice," Cummins asserts,

For 20 years within Canada the process of defining national identity in terms of "multiculturalism" (the mosaic versus the American melting pot) has served as much to deflect attention away from institutionalized racism as it has served to combat racism (See Cummins and Danesi 1990). It becomes almost "unthinkable" that Canadian school practices could be racist because "by definition" Canadian education is "multicultural."

This process is clearly not in any sense uniquely Canadian. Virtually all countries build their national identities on a foundation of lies that “by definition” become immune from critical scrutiny (151).

Within this criticism of the inadequate implementation of multiculturalism, Cummins implicitly highlights ways in which Canadian multiculturalism, a discourse of opportunity, does not translate into changes in oppressive, mobility-stifling treatment of people of marginalized groups. By internationally contextualizing the incongruities between discourses of opportunity and the tangible benefits of these discourses, he also illuminates the impact these incongruities have on a broad range of people in different national communities.

Although the attempt at “official multiculturalism” occurred in the late twentieth century in Canada, the roots of discourses of opportunity existed prior to formal policies and acts associated with multiculturalism. These roots are apparent in Canada’s appeal as a land of opportunity for people of African descent during multiple periods preceding “official multiculturalism.” As discussed in the first chapter, blacks from the United States migrated to Canada during different times in the eighteenth, nineteenth, and twentieth centuries because they and others perceived Canada as a place of relative freedom. In the twentieth century, one of the times that Canada was appealing as a land of “opportunity” was the period in which Canada recruited Caribbean women through the West Indian Domestic Scheme (1955), the plan under which the protagonist in *The Meeting Point* migrates from Barbados to Toronto.<sup>x1</sup> Although this scheme relegated Caribbean women to domestic jobs, it also provided them an opportunity to earn money

and offered them some hope of mobility. However, like blacks who migrated to Canada in earlier periods, black women who migrated as domestics realized that discriminatory practices, which are ramifications of their belongings, circumscribed their opportunities for betterment. Their experiences challenge perceived benefits of Canadian discourses of opportunity in the mid-twentieth century, and these experiences help support Jim Cummins' assertions about discrepancies between theory and practice.

In both *The Street* and *The Meeting Point*, protagonists face discriminatory treatment that hinders their access to national discourses of opportunity that are the basis for their desires for economic mobility. They have to consider the impact of these hindrances as they reshape their strategies for achieving economic mobility and other potential benefits of these discourses. Although their racial, gender, and class belongings inhibit them from receiving full theoretical advantages of national discourses of opportunity, they assert their right to benefit from the discourses of opportunity that are privileges of their national belonging. Through their persistent attempts to enjoy the fruit of these discourses, Bernice and Lutie also shed light on the difficulties other marginalized peoples encounter when they attempt to obtain tangible rewards associated with discourses of opportunity.<sup>xli</sup>

Bernice's and Lutie's consciousness of their surroundings and persistent contemplation of their positions in their respective communities emerge as early indicators of their engagement with the national discourses of opportunity that drive their dreams of mobility. The physical spaces they occupy and the social dynamics in these environments come to the forefront early in the works and help to fashion their dreams. For Lutie, 116th Street reminds her that her marginalized identity as a black working-

class single mother limits her access to her dream of mobility. The poor structure of her apartment building and the trash accumulation around the exterior of her building are some of the many daily signs that remind Lutie that she has not achieved her ideals of economic advancement. As she realizes the persistent obstacles— such as racism and sexism— that hinder her dreams of mobility, 116th Street becomes a reminder that she is a marginalized member of the society in which she lives.

While the poor living conditions on 116th Street frustrate Lutie, the immaculate living conditions on Marina Boulevard agitate Bernice. Marina Boulevard is a symbol of success. However, this success is an indicator of the wealth of the street's landowners and employers, not a marker of success for Bernice and other domestic workers on Marina Boulevard. As a domestic live-in, Bernice constantly observes wealth all around her that is not her own. From her vantage point, her hard labor and low wages contribute to her employers' comfortable lifestyle, but her hard work does not satisfactorily propel her mobility. The disparities between her labor and the wages she earns on Marina Boulevard remind Bernice of difficulties she will experience as she tries to advance economically and benefit from Canada's discourses of opportunity.

bell hooks, in *Belonging* (2008), and Larry Andrews, in "The Sensory Assault of the City in Ann Petry's *The Street*" (1995), identify important intersections between belonging and environment that illuminate *The Street*'s and *The Meeting Point*'s representations of these intersections. Both hooks and Andrews highlight some of the ways that inhibiting environments compound adverse ramifications of belonging to marginalized groups. For example, in reference to consequences of environment in *The Street*, Andrews asserts, "The city, then, and particularly the ghetto streets and buildings,



can create a disoriented perception that combines disastrously with the psychic imbalance created by other more abstract forms of oppression through class, race, and gender” (201). While these particular conditions are not representative of *The Meeting Point*, the interconnections between environment and belonging that Andrews pinpoints have implications for Bernice’s predicament because the physical aspects of Marina Boulevard also trigger feelings of frustration and anger about her stifled mobility. Like Lutie, her environment reminds her of her experiences of oppression. These environments therefore help shape both protagonists’ perspectives on connections between their multiple belongings and their ability, as members of marginalized groups, to achieve their respective dreams.

For example, the opening scene of *The Street* pinpoints the forcefulness of the natural environment and provides an indicator of how environmental forces impact Lutie’s quest for mobility. The novel opens as heavy winds obstruct Lutie’s attempt to look for housing. She has to fight the wind to avoid falling, and because of the wind’s affect on her vision, she has difficulty accomplishing her task of finding an apartment, a task that she marks as a step toward her goal of upward economic mobility. The wind not only assaults Lutie’s body but also makes Lutie aware of poor living conditions on 116th Street (e.g. the trash that the litters the street becomes even more evident as the winds blows it about). These slum-like conditions, which the strong wind intensifies, provide impetus for Lutie’s contemplations about the connections between the environment in which people on 116th Street live and their outsider status. She knows that these people are relegated to this street because they cannot afford and are not welcome in better neighborhoods; windy days like the one at the beginning the novel serve as a reminder of

the difficulty of her quest and a reminder that her movement to 116th Street is a temporary step in her journey to economic mobility.<sup>xliii</sup>

Environmental factors also influence quests for mobility in *The Meeting Point*. In this novel, the characters reiterate the coldness of Canadian winters. The climate makes the characters' sense of exclusion and marginality more brutal because the potential ramifications of exclusionary treatment, such as joblessness, seem much worse in this cold place. For example, the thought of joblessness in a Canadian winter scares Bernice. Ostensibly, this fear emerges because the coldness worsens conditions that potentially accompany unemployment such as hunger and homelessness. However, because Bernice knows someone who is jobless for a substantial amount of time, this fear also arises from the close reality of facing a Canadian winter without a job and being subject to racial prejudice when finding another job. In both *The Meeting Point* and *The Street*, then, a sense of outsider status in respective national spaces is not only connected to racial, class, and gender belongings but also linked to physical environments protagonists inhabit. In addition to having to contend with the adverse consequences of belonging to marginalized groups, the characters in both novels have to face environmental factors such as physical space and climate that remind them of their exclusion from their respective national communities. The daunting natural forces with which they contend, cold and wind, symbolize the challenges they face as they navigate their respective national communities and try to access discourses of opportunity.

Lutie desperately wants to escape impoverished streets like 116th Street because the poor living conditions there are contrary to images she associates with achievement of the American Dream. However, she realizes that her racial, class, and gender belongings

hinder her ability to move away from 116th Street, and this hindrance symbolizes the difficulties she will face as she tries to enact her dream of economic mobility. Lutie's realization causes ambivalence throughout the novel, but she continually regains hope in her American Dream. It is not until the end of the novel, when her son, Bub, gets into trouble and she has to use violence to defend herself against rape, that Lutie finally comes to terms with the near impossibility of attaining the American Dream as a black working-class single mother. The barriers that obstruct Lutie's path complicate her quests to transform the American Dream, a discourse of opportunity, into a tangible reality. Ultimately, by pinpointing these obstacles, Petry critiques the limited accessibility of American discourses of opportunity to marginalized national community members.

The trajectory leading to Lutie's moment of realization is useful for considering the complexities of Lutie's perspectives on the American Dream. When the Chandlers first expose Lutie to their version of the American Dream, the concept seems foreign to her. After listening to the Chandlers' conversations about everyone's ability to "make it," she initially describes the Chandlers' world as one of "strange values." However, her perspective eventually changes: "After a year of listening to their talk, she absorbed some of the same spirit. The belief that anybody could be rich if he wanted to and worked hard enough and figured it out carefully enough. Apparently that's what the Pizzinis had done" (Petry 43). She applies this spirit to her situation and believes that she and her husband had not "made it" because they had not "tried hard enough, worked long enough, and saved enough" (Petry 43). She even applies these principles of prudence, strong work ethic, and frugality to the Pizzinis' success (she had previously pondered how these Italian storeowners, who were illiterate, could be successful). This formula

for achievement of the American Dream seems great in theory, especially since the Pizzinis have enacted this theory. However, Lutie does not really grasp the nuances of this seemingly practical formula until she tries to implement it to attain her dreams of mobility.

Early in the novel, Lutie indicates her plan to use educational tools to achieve her plans for economic mobility. She pursues education to achieve the qualifications that are necessary to ascend from laundress to file clerk, but she still does not earn the finances to achieve her American Dream. After she realizes that her educational attainment is still not enough to yield the financial benefits she desires and that she would have to devote more time to education to ascend from her status as file clerk, she loses hope in the use of education as a tool for mobility. Despite her disappointment in her inability to parlay educational attainment into her desired economic mobility, she continues to embark on her quest to sidestep the negative consequences of residing on 116th Street.

She loses hope numerous, but she continually rebounds with renewed belief that she can overcome the odds against her. By late in the novel, however, Lutie has a more complex perspective on her prospects for upward mobility. For example, after Lutie learns that Junto, a white man, is interfering with her compensation for singing at the club, she contemplates whether she would ever escape the street:

Her thoughts returned to Junto, and the bitterness and the hardness increased. In every direction, anywhere one turned, there was always the implacable figure of a white man blocking the way, so that it was impossible to escape. If she needed anything to spur her on, she thought, this fierce hatred, this deep contempt, for white people would do it (Petry 315).

Although Lutie has previously expressed contempt for white's people's complicity in the plight of blacks (Petry 206), this moment is more pronounced because she has gained more tangible evidence of her beliefs. This moment is an indication of her sense of entrapment, her feeling that white people are literally and metaphorically blocking her attempts at movement. These sentiments, then, illustrate Lutie's difficult quest for upward mobility; this quest is not just dependent on her willpower or her prudence, frugality, and hard work. Rather, it is dependent on whether people who contribute to her marginality will stop blocking her path.

Despite her recognition of these obstacles, she still maintains some hope to "spur her on." However, she continually experiences disappointments that create doubt about her dreams of mobility. As she processes her experiences, she compares her relegation to 116th Street to acts of racial violence in the South: "Streets like the one she lived on were no accident. They were the North's lynch mobs, she thought bitterly; the method big cities used to keep Negroes in their place" (Petry 323). Here, Lutie pinpoints ways in which the discrimination she faces is part of a systemic attempt to remind blacks of their "place." The comparison between northern and southern tactics of oppression indicates that, at this point, Lutie's ambivalence about her prospects for upward mobility has nearly turned into disbelief.

Lutie's disappointments, which contribute to her state of disbelief, are linked to race as well as gender. The people who obstruct her movement are not only white people who commit acts of racism but also men who treat her as a sexual object. Two of these men—Jones and Boots—complicate her attempt to escape 116th Street. Both men try, unsuccessfully, to overpower and rape her, and both rape attempts are indicative of their

false and problematic sense of entitlement to Lutie's body. The language of entitlement that both Jones and Boots utilize and their attempts to overpower Lutie indicate some of the ways that gendered notions of women's weakness and passivity contribute to their belief that they can "have" Lutie. They operate with warped notions that she should submit to their advances and are angered when she does not. The actions they commit in anger trigger a series of events surrounding and connected to their rape attempts, and the results of these events ultimately make Lutie despondent about her dream of mobility.

After Jones realizes he cannot "have" Lutie, he decides to harm her through her son, Bub. He tricks Bub into committing a crime and ensures that Bub is arrested. After Bub's arrest, Lutie needs money for a lawyer and decides to ask Boots for a loan. When she is in Boots' apartment, he hits her and attempts to rape her because he, like Jones, is determined to "have" her. Lutie, however, is determined to not be overtaken. Lutie has to regain her composure after Boots strikes her, but when she does compose herself, all of her rage about the circumstances and people who contribute to her entrapment on 116th Street propel her to fight Boots' rape attempt:

He [Boots] was the person who had struck her, her face still hurt from the blow; he had threatened her with violence and with a forced relationship with Junto and with himself. These things set off her anger, but as she gripped the iron candlestick and brought it forward in a swift motion aimed at his head, she was striking, not at Boots Smith, but at a handy, anonymous figure—a figure which her angry resentment transformed into everything she had hated, everything she had fought against, everything that had served to frustrate her (Petty 429).

Here, Boot's actions catalyze Lutie's strong reaction against him and every person who has obstructed her path, and her act of self-defense results in Boots' death. Ultimately, this unfortunate incident, which illustrates how gender also has an impact on Lutie's attempts to attain economic mobility, becomes another deterrent to her dream. Bub's predicament and her own situation confirm her observations about the inescapability of the street and demonstrate how racial as well as gender oppression hinder her movement and by extension, her ability to access American national discourses of opportunity.

As the novel ends, Lutie, despondent about Bub's predicament and her own, makes one of her final observations about the adverse affects of marginalized belongings on her ability to benefit from discourses of opportunity. Lutie concurs with her grammar school teacher's sentiment, "I don't know why they have us bother to teach your people to write" (Petty 435). Lutie questions, "What possible good *has* it done to teach people like me to write?" [*italics mine*] (Petty 436). This contemplation of the futility of teaching people "like her" to write indicates that she is grappling with some of the ways that her belongings prevent her from reaping the benefits of learning to write or, more broadly, obtaining an education. Although Lutie initially believes education is a tool for mobility, education does not allow her to achieve her dream of mobility. Like other components of her American Dream—frugality and strong work ethic—education does not assist Lutie in gaining economic mobility. She learns that her race, gender, and class prevent her from being a full beneficiary of the presumed freedom of every American to attain the rewards of the American Dream.

The centrality of the American Dream in *The Street* is explicit, but as my analysis indicates, Lutie's ambivalence about her ability to achieve that dream is a little more

difficult to gauge. Gayle Wurst, in “Ben Franklin in Harlem: The Drama of Deferral in Ann Petry’s *The Street*,” Michele Crescenzo, in “Poor Lutie’s Almanac: Reading and Social Critique in Ann Petry’s *The Street*,” and Keith Clark, in “A Distaff Dream Deferred: Ann Petry and the Art of Subversion,” all highlight the importance of the American Dream in Ann Petry’s *The Street*. In their analysis of the *The Street*, they assert that Lutie takes the American Dream at face value, and this naiveté results in her ultimate failure. Crescenzo goes further to argue that Lutie naively relies on the American Dream instead of embracing her heritage and communal bonds. In making this assertion, Crescenzo implies that Lutie forsakes her racial belonging for a dream that is not intended for *her* to actualize.

While Lutie’s initial grasp of the American Dream (as forwarded by the Chandlers) is optimistic, Lutie soon realizes that her identity as a black working-class single mother affects her ability to achieve the American Dream. She repeatedly considers the consequences of her marginalized identities as she refashions her dream into one that combines material success, respectable living, and comfort. Therefore, Lutie’s continual contemplation of the consequences of her identity and her attempts to reshape her strategies for mobility overturn contentions that Lutie blindly accepts the American Dream. Further, I argue that Lutie’s refusal to give up on her dream is indicative of her sense of national belonging rather than a sign of her naiveté. Her actions and thoughts illustrate her belief that she, as an American, is entitled to the fruits of the American Dream, even if this dream was not conceptualized with people like her in mind.



Additionally, Lutie's awareness of the influence of her belongings challenges assertions like Michele Crescenzo's claim that Lutie lacks double consciousness (233). In fact, her consciousness extends beyond racial and national belonging and accounts for her gender, class, and role as a single mother. Lutie is not only conscious of the impact of her belongings but also aware of the consequences particular belongings have for others in her neighborhood. As she contemplates reasons numerous black single mothers live in the deplorable conditions that characterize 116th Street and reasons for the relegation of black and poor people to this street, she realizes that her limitations reflect systemic discrimination against black people, poor people, and women, all of whom also have difficulty accessing American national discourses of opportunity.

Kouamé Sayni, in "History and Social Mobility in Ann Petry's *The Street*," investigates Lutie's reliance on the American Dream from the lens of history, and Sayni's observations also conflict with Lutie's indications of her understanding of the difficulties of being a black, working-class, single mother. In this essay, Sayni distinguishes between national history and personal history. In line with the American Dream, national history presumes the possibility of success for all members of the national community. Personal history, however, accounts for oppressive forces, such as racism, that interfere with success. Essentially, Sayni contends that Lutie's tragedy results from her reliance on national history rather than personal history; she asserts that Lutie does not factor in ways that race, rather than competence, relates to economic and social success.<sup>xliii</sup> In Sayni's observations, therefore, Lutie's ignorance and naiveté about her own oppression emerge, once again, as reasons for her failure. However, this assessment of Lutie's lack of success simplifies Lutie's struggle and does not account for Lutie's modification of the

American Dream to account for her marginalized identities. Lutie eventually realizes that her predicament and the conditions of other black single mothers on 116th Street are indicative of systemic oppression. Therefore, she knows that her battle to escape the street will have to entail more than the simple formula for economic success that she learns from the Chandlers. She is aware that she will have to employ more than hard work and frugality to achieve her American Dream.

Sayni's assertion also minimizes Lutie's reflections on her personal history and use of that history to shape her perspective. For example, when the Chandlers' friends and family assume she could be easily swayed into having sex with white men, Lutie recalls lessons her grandmother taught about ways white men historically exploited black women. Thinking angrily the assumptions of the Chandlers' friend and family, Lutie says to herself,

Of course, none of them could know about your grandmother who had brought you up. And ever since you were big enough to remember the things that people said to you, had said over and over, just like a clock ticking, 'Lutie, baby, don't you never let no white man put his hands on you. They ain't never willin' to let a black women alone'... Something that was said so often and with such gravity it had become a part of you, just like breathing, and you would have preferred crawling in bed with a rattlesnake to getting in bed with a white man" (Petty 45-46).

This passage represents a moment when Lutie directly establishes her connection to the history of black women, the personal history Sayni identifies and claims Lutie does not utilize. Her connection to black women's history ultimately shapes her actions, including

her attempts to attain economic mobility. For example, later in the novel, Lutie expresses repulsion at the implication that she would have to provide sexual favors for Junto, a white man, to gain additional finances. Her knowledge of the history of white men's sexual exploitation of black women informs her disgusted reaction to this proposition and contributes to her rejection of this proposal. Although Lutie desperately wants to achieve economic mobility, she is not willing to compromise her integrity or disregard her history for that achievement.

Lutie is not only cognizant of the lessons of history but also concerned about the implications of the past and the present for the future of her community. She considers future blacks who will experience discriminatory treatment because of their racial belonging. For example, Lutie links negative impacts of racial belonging with something as seemingly basic as nutritional sustenance available in stores in her neighborhood:

She thought about the stores again. All of them—the butcher shops, the notions stores, the vegetable stands—all of them sold the leavings, the sweepings, the impossible unsalable merchandise, the dregs and dross that were reserved especially for Harlem.

Yet the people went on living and reproducing in spite of the bad food. Most of the children had straight bones, strong white teeth. But it couldn't go on like that.

Even the strongest heritage would one day run out (153-154).

Lutie's concern that there would be degeneration of future generations because of poor means of sustenance indicates her comprehensive understanding of the present and future implications of racial and class belonging. In many instances, it seems that she is

concerned only with her own success and her son's well being. This moment, however, illustrates her awareness of some of the ways that racial and class belonging impact the long-term well-being of individuals within her community who also desire to achieve economic mobility and escape conditions on 116<sup>th</sup> Street.

Lutie returns to her concern for the well-being of members of her community when she reads about a young black boy who is killed in a bakery. The "thin, ragged" boy becomes a "burly Negro" in the eyes of the reporter, and Lutie asserts that perception of this young boy depends on one's viewpoint. For Lutie, if "...you thought of colored people as naturally criminal, then you didn't really see what any Negro looked like. You couldn't, because the Negro was never an individual" (Petry 199). In this instance, the result of racial belonging is generalization about all members of the race based on actions of individuals considered members of that race and based on perceptions that non-members disseminate. In this incident and in her contemplation of the poor quality of the food available on 116th Street, Lutie situates the limitations on her ability to attain her dream of mobility in terms of the maltreatment of groups to which she belongs.

*The Street* provides numerous examples of negative consequences of racial belonging, but it also highlights positive aspects of racial belonging. While Lutie laments her racially-based relegation to 116th Street, she also finds comfort in being in Harlem, with people who allow her to feel human. When she is on the downtown streets, she has to contend with the "hostility in the eyes of white women" and the "openly appraising" eyes of white men (Petry 57). As a result, Lutie expresses eagerness to return to Harlem after work. Lutie's generally negative view of 116th Street overshadows this positive aspect, and it is ironic that her dream of upward mobility requires her to escape the very

place that grants her humanity and a degree of belonging to place. Despite her desire to move away from 116th Street, it is evident that Lutie understands her connections to others in her community who also suffer from systemic oppression that hinders their ability to achieve American discourses of opportunity.

Bernice, the protagonist in *The Meeting Point*, is also influenced by discourses of opportunity in Canada. These discourses inform her Canadian Dream, which primarily consists of her desire for economic mobility. Like Lutie, Bernice's upward economic movement entails both physical and intellectual movement. While Lutie wants to move away from her street to attain her dream, Bernice moves to the street that is supposed to help her realize her dream of economic mobility. On Marina Boulevard, Bernice earns money to contribute to her goals of economic advancement, and she also learns lessons that shape her dream. In one instance, she says that she uses her employer, Mrs. Burrmann, as a model for her aspirations. In a letter to her mother, Bernice says,

I following the lead of my mistress, and trying to improve my mind. She gone back to school, taking lessons. She is this big, rich Jew woman. So, I figure there must be something very special in doing that. That is why I subscribe to two nice magazines which I reads every night after work. I am convince there is something in learning, Mammy....This lady, Mrs. Burrmann, have learning already, and money too. I don't know yet which road to follow. But I intend to follow both; and get some of both (Clarke 22).

While Bernice is uncertain about which road to follow, she believes that both paths can be lucrative for her because she has seen Mrs. Burrmann's success. For Bernice, Mrs. Burrmann's desire to obtain education, even though she is already rich, is an indicator

that education is an important tool for her (Bernice's) success. Bernice says she is not ready for a "formal" education, but she does read magazines as an initial step toward her attempt to "improve her mind." The substitution of magazines for "formal" education also illustrates one way that Bernice transforms her observations into actions that suit her life. This substitution is an indication that although Bernice views Mrs. Burrmann as a model of success, Bernice also knows that she will have to construct a path to mobility that is conducive to her position as a working-class, black immigrant who does not have access to the same advantages of people such as Mrs. Burrmann.

Later in the novel, Bernice continues to use her observations to contemplate methods for mobility and survival. In a pretend conversation with her good friend (Dots), Bernice shares her plans to appropriate the tools of oppression that have been used against her:

You have to learn how to use your head, Dots; and how to sit down at a window and think, and focus your attention and thoughts on things above; and learn how to out-smart them bitches and bastards, and use them the same way they uses you; and you have to learn how to use the same weapons they use on you; and you have to understand what them weapons is. Lemme tell you: them weapons is brainpower and brainwashing, and I know, 'cause I come across it in a magazine I got in Harlem... (Clarke 37).

Again, Bernice uses the products of her observation of the Burrmanns and people in Forest Hill to shape her ideals and her strategies for mobility. She also uses the knowledge gained from the unnamed magazine from Harlem to articulate the "weapons" that have been used against her. Since Bernice talks about her exposure to the literature

of Black Muslims in Harlem at different points in the novel, this unnamed magazine from Harlem is presumably associated with Black Muslims. Bernice's combination of knowledge from her immediate surroundings in Toronto and from a more distant point of reference, Harlem, illustrates her consciousness that she needs as much artillery as possible when trying to contend with the "weapons" that could potentially inhibit her opportunities for mobility. Bernice's application of tools from Harlem to her situation in Toronto also implies that blacks in Toronto sometimes face problems of racial discrimination comparable to those experienced in Harlem and could strategically use similar methods to counteract comparable problems.<sup>xliv</sup>

Like Lutie, Bernice's desire to create a better life for her son as well as herself motivates her determination to advance economically. Early in the novel, she asserts that her domestic labor is twentieth century slavery (Clarke 5). She evokes physical enslavement as she contends with the literal and figurative confinement she experiences as a domestic worker. Later in the novel, she puts her endurance of this servitude in context; in a letter, Bernice informs her child's father that she endures this slavery with the hopes that she can one day bring her son, Terence, to Canada and send him to the university because she recognizes that education is also important to her son's mobility. (Clarke 183).

Bernice's perception of the advantages of mobility also manifests in her obsession with having a bank account in the Bank of Canada and the "prestige" associated with this account (Clarke 97-98). She implies that her ability to have this bank account mediates some of the problems she experiences in Canada, and it is in connection with this "status symbol" (her bank account) that she claims a belonging to Canada:

Lord, don't matter how I cuss this place, Canada, no matter how I say Canada is this, and Canada is that, be-Christ, look! three thousand dollars, *three-ought-ought-and-ought!* thousands not hundreds; on my own personal chequing account cheque book... That is what Canada have done for me. This is my testimony to this place, called Canada. And Lord, I am glad as hell that I come here, that I is a Canadian (Clarke 97).

Although Bernice's excitement about her bank account shows her pride in financial mobility, her excitement also has an undertone of ambivalence about Canada. Bernice's wavering about the benefits of Canada is confirmed immediately after the above moment; the narrator states that Bernice's excitement does not stop her from "lambasting" Canada when she hears about housing discrimination.

Bernice's ambivalence about Canada is also evident in her contemplation of ways in which her bank is a reminder of her outsider status in Canada. Later in the novel, Bernice is angered because the Bank of Canada does not have any black employees. She threatens to take her money out of the Bank of Canada if they do not "smarten up" and hire a black person; she asserts that if black people are not "good enough" to work in that bank, then her "black money" is not good enough to be in the bank (Clarke 211). This situation provides a good example of the complexities of her mobility and belonging in Canada. Her bank account symbolizes her financial advantages in Canada, but her outsider status is also bound to this financial advantage. While Canadian discourses of opportunity help her to achieve financial mobility and the reward of having a bank account, the absence of black employees in the Bank of Canada indicates that those discourses are not expansive enough to fully include blacks as members of Canadian



national communities. For Bernice, the exclusion of black employees from the Bank of Canada, the institution that becomes symbolic of her economic mobility in Canada, contributes to her disillusionment about Canadian discourses of opportunity and inclusion. Although she does momentarily claim national belonging in connection to her bank account, the adverse ramifications of her racial belonging— such as racist practices of the Bank of Canada— inhibit her from feeling that she is truly a member of the nation.

Other indications of her marginality and the marginality of other blacks in Canada occur throughout the novel. For example, as the novel opens, she notes that people on Marina Boulevard continually remind her of her “place” or her marginalized status by, for example, treating her as a spectacle when she and the Burrmann children are outdoors together. The narrator notes, “A head would lean out of a passing car; or would draw back a window blind, to wonder and to consider the possibility that the two healthy-looking children belonged by blood to the woman whose hands they had entrusted their hands” (Clarke 6). Bernice recognizes that people are curious because the image of her, a visibly black woman, escorting two white children disconcerts those who recognize her black presence as an unfamiliar and unwanted presence. Later in the novel, Bernice laments the torture of riding on street cars because no one speaks to her, a silence she perceives as a racially-motivated slight.<sup>xlv</sup> In another instance, as she tries to find housing for her sister, she experiences housing discrimination multiple times. During one of her telephone inquiries about housing, a potential landlord treats her warmly and indicates the apartment is available, but when she meets the landlord in-person, the apartment becomes unavailable (Clarke 147). This particular incident is interesting because as Dots (Bernice’s friend) jokingly notes, the landlord and Bernice “belong” to

the same religion. However, the landlord's denial of housing to Bernice indicates that Bernice's racial belonging overshadows their Christian bond. These incidents, and others, constantly remind Bernice of her marginal position in Canada and the difficulties she will face as she pursues her dream of economic mobility.

Although racial discrimination adversely affects Bernice, she also embraces what she deems as beneficial elements of racial belonging. As a domestic, her position as outsider yet insider gives her a unique vantage point.<sup>xlvi</sup> She is treated as an outsider based on her race, but as a domestic for the Burrmanns, she accesses information about the Burrmanns and other Forest Hill families that counters perceptions of these families and makes her appreciate her racial affiliation. Bernice indicates her insider status when she describes the Burrmanns' house, "To look at this house from the outside you never will dream o' the things that takes place behind these expensive curtains and drapes" (Clarke 9). Privy to what goes on behind those drapes and curtains—including acts that she considers openly licentious—Bernice reiterates that she is glad she is a "poor, black, simple woman." She like, other domestic workers, knows that money allows the Burrmanns and others to portray crafted images to the outside world. As Bernice and other domestic workers criticize their employers, Bernice makes clear the disparity between image and reality.

Her contention that the Burrmanns cannot purchase "breeding" with their money and her assertion that "...they *only* have money" [italics mine] further show that even though the Burrmanns have more money, she does not think that they are superior to her (Clarke 103). Ultimately, Bernice's scrutiny of the Burrmanns demonstrates that she is not uncritically accepting of their success. Although she looks to Mrs. Burrmann's

example when she considers the importance of intellectual and economic mobility, she also knows that some elements of their lifestyle are not ones she wants to emulate. While there are sometimes negative consequences of her racial belonging, the missteps of the Burrmann's make Bernice remember the benefits of being a "poor, black, simple woman."

Even as Bernice embraces her racial affiliation, she also minimizes this gesture with particular actions and sentiments. For example, Bernice's assertions about black people marching for civil rights in Canada reflect her ambivalence about what it means to be black in Canada. Speaking to her sister while witnessing marchers in Toronto, Bernice says,

Child, they been marching down South, up South, up North, all over the States. Whenever you open a newspaper, whenever the summer come, whenever you turn on the damn television, all you seeing these days is a lot o' stupid black people marching 'bout the place. Black people praying, kneeling down all over the street, won't let traffics pass, making trouble. Praying and kneeling down, and when they tired doing them two things, they getting beat up all over the damn place. Christ! it sickens me to my stomach to see what this blasted world o' black people is coming to. And these niggers in Canada! Well they don't know how lucky they are (Clarke 220).

These disparaging remarks are ironic considering Bernice's own observations about racial discrimination in Toronto. Despite her awareness of racism in Toronto, Bernice is unwilling to compromise her perceived advantages to support the civil rights agenda of the marchers. While, for example, the reward of having a bank account in the Bank of

Canada does not dissuade her from confronting racial injustice in the bank, the prospect of compromising her life of relative comfort in Toronto does dissuade her from supporting those who want to change racial injustice in Toronto society. The public “embarrassment” the marchers cause is more than Bernice is willing to bear, especially if it will interfere with her Canadian Dream.

Ultimately, Bernice achieves moderate financial success but still does not feel a sense of belonging in Canada; she confirms this sentiment on more than one occasion when she notes that she feels like an outsider. Bernice’s sense of outsidership shows the limits of Canadian discourses of opportunity. She gains financial resources because of these discourses, but this material gain does not compensate for her exclusionary treatment in Toronto. Therefore, her experiences show that the success of discourses of opportunity is measured not only by national community members’ chances to achieve economic and other forms of mobility but also by their inclusion in the nations they call home.

The experiences of Henry and Boysie, who also migrated from the West Indies, further show the limits of Canadian discourses of opportunity. Henry and Boysie also experience the racial discrimination and exclusion that Bernice and other blacks experience in Toronto, but for them, this exclusion interferes with their economic sustenance. Both men are unable to find jobs and therefore unable to support themselves or achieve economic mobility. Ultimately, their circumstances pinpoint some of the varying ways that discourses of opportunity are inaccessible to marginalized individuals who choose to make Canada home.<sup>xlvii</sup>

Henry's and Boysie's inability to find employment also illustrates some of the ways that gender factored into opportunities for movement during the historical moment Clarke represents in *The Meeting Point*. Bernice and other women from the West Indies are able to partially access Canadian discourses of opportunity because they can find employment as domestics, a gendered job assigned to women.<sup>xlviii</sup> The availability of domestic jobs therefore allows black women restricted, and problematic, access to opportunities for economic advancement, but Henry's and Boysie's experiences illustrate some of the ways these limited job opportunities for blacks become detrimental. As men, they cannot work as domestics, and the climate of racism that limits their job options and consequently causes unemployment prevents them from providing for themselves. In this instance, gendered employment restrictions therefore inhibit their ability to at least minimally benefit from Canadian discourses of opportunity.

Both *The Meeting Point* and *The Street* demonstrate the complexities that marginalized peoples experience when they attempt to obtain tangible benefits from discourses of opportunity in the United States and Canada. While protagonists Bernice and Lutie have constructed dreams of mobility that are based primarily on discourses of opportunity in their respective nations, discriminatory treatment prevents them from gaining benefits of their national belonging. The consequences of their inequitable treatment are evident in the results of these protagonists' quests: Bernice partially achieves her dream of economic mobility, and Lutie perceives her quest to attain her dream of economic mobility as a failure. Both women work hard and try to employ tactics such as educational attainment to better their chances for mobility, but their marginalized treatment, which results from their racial, gender, and class belongings,

interferes with their ability to benefit from their work ethic and the advantages of their national belonging.

Lutie's and Bernice's stories powerfully capture some of the experiences of past and present black women, and black people, in the United States and Canada who navigate the intersections between movement, belonging, and freedom. As *The Street* and *The Meeting Point* demonstrate, the negative impact that black people's belongings have on chances for mobility and freedom illuminate the disparities between ideals and realities of discourses of opportunity in the United States and Canada. However, through the acts of determination Lutie and Bernice exhibit, these novels also provide examples of black people in both nations refusing to submit to inequitable treatment or marginalization; they show how black people have actively confronted adverse consequences of their belonging and demonstrated the power of resistance to discriminatory treatment.

While this individual commitment to change is important, works such as *The Street* and *The Meeting Point* also show that societal transformation requires more than individual acts of resistance; Lutie's and Bernice's experiences provide representations of some of the ways that systemic oppressive forces such as racism and sexism subsume individual attempts to counteract the adverse consequences of their belongings. Their experiences demonstrate the necessity of systemic transformation in the United States and Canada and show that this change requires the participation of all facets of the national communities in which individuals reside. Ultimately, this type of change, which *The Street* and *The Meeting Point* implicitly advocate, would challenge the United States, Canada, and other nations to foster conditions under which African Americans and

African Canadians and *all* national community members have equal chances to transform national discourses of opportunity into their chosen forms of mobility.

### Chapter Three

#### **Dynamic Convergences: Movement, Belonging, and Freedom in *Linden Hills* and *No Crystal Stair***

The previous chapter demonstrates some of the ways that *The Street* (1946) and *The Meeting Point* (1967) provide important mid-twentieth century representations of intersections between movement, belonging, and freedom in African America and African Canada, and the previous chapter also shows that these themes are significant to the historical periods in which both novels emerge. During the mid-twentieth century, the United States and Canada developed legislation and policies that attempted to make opportunities for mobility and freedom accessible to all national community members. As discussed in Chapter 2, civil rights legislation, which was created to help rectify the inequitable treatment of people who belong to marginalized groups, emerged in the mid-twentieth century in the United States. In Canada, multicultural policies that aimed to develop a national climate of multicultural inclusivity and counteract discriminatory treatment toward marginalized national community members arose during the 1960s. The strides for equality and justice that are made during the periods in which *The Street* (1946) and *The Meeting Point* (1967) are published and set therefore inform blacks' late twentieth century experiences as members of American and Canadian national communities who do benefit from mid-twentieth century anti-discrimination policies but continue to encounter marginalization because of their belongings; these are some of the experiences that the two novels I examine in this chapter, Gloria Naylor's *Linden Hills* (1985) and Mairuth Sarsfield's *No Crystal Stair* (1997), ask us to consider.<sup>xlix</sup>



While *Linden Hills* and *No Crystal* are late twentieth century novels that continue conversations about some of the ways racial discrimination impedes opportunities for movement and freedom, these novels move beyond simplistic critiques of racial politics that often emphasize divisions between black and white people. These novels engage intra-racial and multicultural dynamics that are also pivotal to blacks' experiences of belonging, freedom, and mobility in their respective national homes. For example, *Linden Hills* illuminates some of the ways that intra-racial class oppression limits blacks' opportunities for mobility and compounds interracial racism. *No Crystal Stair* offers examples of some of the ways that cultural backgrounds shape blacks' experiences with oppressions such as racism. Hence, both novels provoke contemplation about nuances in racial belonging and consequent complexities in the ways racial belonging influences and inhibits mobility and freedom. Ultimately, *Linden Hills* and *No Crystal Stair* require us to think more expansively about varied and intricate meanings of belonging to a particular race, ethnicity, class, sex, or nationality within diverse mid and late twentieth century communities that are seeking economic, social, and physical mobility as well as interrelated freedoms.

*Linden Hills'* and *No Crystal Stairs'* challenge to move beyond simplistic representations of belonging or identity—such as simplistic racial binaries—is one of the most significant interventions *Linden Hills* and *No Crystal Stair* make, and in many ways, this intervention dates both novels as late twentieth century texts. More specifically, the representations of identity in both *Linden Hills* and *No Crystal Stair* are interconnected with late twentieth century theoretical conversations about identity. For example, the complexity of these literary representations reflects the more nuanced

perspectives on identity that emerge in theoretical approaches such as postmodernism and poststructuralism, which emphasize the instability and complexity of identity . Both *Linden Hills* and *No Crystal Stair* demonstrate some of the ways that the issues central to these theoretical approaches are also critical to literary depictions; both novels propel reconsideration of essentialist and limited conceptions of race as well as class and gender. Therefore, while these novels represent identity politics through different lenses and time periods, together, they offer insightful critiques of simplified notions of identity and force us to examine multi-dimensional connections between belonging and mobility in the United States and Canada.

Gloria Naylor's *Linden Hills* provides snapshots of lives of the current and past residents of Linden Hills to illuminate the interracial conflict, intra-racial, class-based problems, and gender issues that are central to the novel. The complicated situations that the people in Linden Hills experience show that belonging has a range of ramifications for mobility and freedom, ramifications including intra-racial, classist and sexist oppression as well as more commonly discussed causes of oppression such as racial discrimination. The multiple experiences of marginalization with which Naylor's novel contends ultimately show some of the shifting ways that oppression affects black people's quests to attain economic and physical mobility and to enact their ideals of freedom. Naylor's representations of some of the conflicts that emerge at the intersections of movement, belonging, and freedom unsettle simplifications of the impact of belonging on mobility and freedom.

*Linden Hills* engages interconnections between belonging, mobility, and freedom primarily through the coexisting journeys of Willie Mason and Willa Nedeed, who

physically and figuratively navigate the middle-class black American community of Linden Hills during the 1980s. Willa lives in Linden Hills. Willie is a resident of a community that is located uphill from Linden Hills. Willa is the wife of Luther Nedeed, and the Nedeed family is one of the founding families of Linden Hills. Willie gains access to Linden Hills through his friend Lester, who lives in Linden Hills. To get to Linden Hills, Willie has to go downhill, and the physical descent that Willie has to undertake to enter Linden Hills foreshadows the events and behaviors he will witness during his journey. As he navigates Linden Hills, he realizes that its residents have achieved varying degrees of economic and social upward mobility but still have problems—such as identity conflicts, unquenchable desires for more wealth, and serious unhappiness—that preceded as well as those that resulted from this movement.

Although Willie initially has a relatively naïve perception of the relentless desire for mobility in Linden Hills, he eventually develops a more complex understanding of the implications this quest for mobility has for race and class. Early in the novel, Willie defends Mrs. White's (Lester's mother) unquenchable materialism by explaining his experiences with poverty and his consequent understanding of the desire to avoid impoverishment. To illustrate his point, Willie describes the abuse his mother endures because of her socioeconomic status, and he connects his family's experiences with Mrs. White's material aspirations:

She [Willie's mother] stayed because a bruised face and half a paycheck was better than welfare, and that's the only place she had left to go with no education and six kids. You think people should live like that, Shit [Lester]? Because these folks in Linden Hills didn't want that kind of life doesn't make them freaks. You

wouldn't want it. I don't think you would trade this big bedroom for the third of a studio couch I had most of my life (Naylor 58).

Willie's family experiences initially ground his defense of Mrs. White, but it is not until he can compare Mrs. White's perspectives to those of other Linden Hills residents that he realizes that desires for a better life does not justify Mrs. White's disconcerting, classist stances. For example, Mrs. White's association of Willie and other impoverished people with "scum" is an issue Willie later addresses when he notes that even people in his impoverished neighborhood behave better than those in Linden Hills. Willie knows the stereotypes attributed to impoverished people who live on the outskirts of Linden Hills, but as he learns some of the ways in which people in Linden Hills are not as superior as they claim to be, he better understands the problems with Mrs. White's assertions of superiority and her relentless materialism. The classism she and other Linden Hills residents exhibit shows Willie some of the ways that quests for economic mobility influence black people, who face racism, to exercise discriminatory treatment against other blacks and compound the racial discrimination they encounter. Mrs. White's behavior therefore provides Willie with an early example of some of the detriments of quests for mobility in Linden Hills, and his witnessing of her behavior contributes to his eventual assessment that people in Linden Hills compromise their racial belonging for upward economic mobility.

Willie's critical observations of other individuals and families in Linden Hills help him further realize some of the problems with compromising one's identity for economic and social mobility. More specifically, Willie's observations of two characters, Laurel and Winston, illustrate some of the ways he gains clarity on complexities of the quest for

mobility and material wealth. Willie becomes aware that Laurel achieves upward economic mobility, but she still feels a sense of emptiness that causes her mental deterioration. After her husband files divorce papers and Luther Nedeed informs her she will have to vacate her house, her deterioration culminates in suicide, and Willie witnesses this suicide. Willie later learns that Laurel experiences an emptiness that material wealth and mobility could not cure. Like other Linden Hills residents, Laurel's wealth allows her a degree of surface happiness, but internal conflicts eventually shatter that façade of happiness.

After Laurel's suicide, Dr. Braithwaite, the historian of Linden Hills, informs Willie that Laurel's situation is not an anomaly. Dr. Braithwaite asserts that Laurel's tragedy symbolizes the general deterioration of Linden Hills. Luther Nedeed draws a closer comparison when he contemplates the connection between Laurel and Winston, another character who also experiences identity conflicts despite his achievements. He is a successful lawyer and already lives in Linden Hills, but rumors that he is homosexual jeopardize his status. Although he is secretly homosexual, he fears the detriment that knowledge of his sexuality would cause and therefore marries a woman. While Luther Nedeed congratulates Winston on his marriage and rewards him with a house on the coveted Tupelo Drive, we later learn that Luther Nedeed is not fooled by Winston's marriage. As Nedeed contemplates the erosion of Linden Hills, he makes a mental note that Winston will soon have a fate similar to Laurel's. We do not learn any more about Winston's life after marriage, but the prospect of Winston's suicide further demonstrates the complexity of mobility because the implication of his situation is that in some instances, particular types of mobility can only be achieved by a heterosexual. Therefore,

in this situation, sexuality, intertwined with economic class and social stature, become determining factors in accessing mobility.

Willie is aware of the circumstances that force Winston's marriage, and Willie's knowledge of Winston's situation provides Willie with another example of the connections between identity crises and economic mobility in Linden Hills. Both Winston and Laurel achieve the economic mobility that many people in Linden Hills desire, but neither is able to gain personal fulfillment. They remain unhappy and disconnected from identities that would allow them to couple happiness with success. While Laurel's and Winston's circumstances do not arise from conflicts with racial belonging, conflicts that people such as Mrs. White encounter, their situations help Willie develop perspective on some of the unsettling sacrifices people in Linden Hills choose to make to achieve economic mobility.

As Willie learns about Laurel, Winston, and others in Linden Hills, his new knowledge troubles him. Willie begins to articulate his disapproval of the lifestyles of those in Linden Hills, and this disapproval becomes evident when he asserts that the happenings in his impoverished neighborhood are no comparison to the happenings in Linden Hills. Responding to Lester's implicitly negative comment about violence in Putney Wayne, the neighborhood in which Willie lives, Willie says,

...I've seen things done to people down here [Linden Hills] that are a lot worse than anyone would have the heart to do up in Putney Wayne. 'Cause you see, it takes a lot of honesty, Shit—honest hate or rage, whatever—to pick up a knife and really cut a man's throat. And you're right, it could never happen here in

Linden Hills 'cause these people can't seem to find the guts to be honest about anything (Naylor 193).

For Willie, even the violence in Putney Wayne is not as bad as the dishonest and crude actions people undertake in Linden Hills. Willie's decision to use this example to illustrate his point shows the severity of his uneasiness with the events that occur in Linden Hills. Although Willie is an outsider in Linden Hills, people such as Nedeed and Braithwaite, who have had longer exposure to Linden Hills, confirm Willie's observations about the severity of seemingly mild issues in Linden Hills. Like Willie, they both note the discrepancies between the exterior appearance of the success of Linden Hills and the interior deterioration of Linden Hills. In "Gloria Naylor's Linden Hills: A Modern Inferno," Catherine Ward further illuminates this deterioration. Ward asserts that souls are "damned" because they have offended themselves in their quests for mobility, or essentially, they have sacrificed themselves for material aspirations and economic ascension. Dr. Braithwaite, Luther Nedeed, and Willie all realize that this self-sacrifice becomes detrimental to the well-being of Linden Hills because people in Linden Hills not only sacrifice themselves but are willing to stifle others to achieve economic mobility. People such as Mrs. White, whose husband has to work two jobs to satisfy her desire to obtain material possessions that are on par those of other Linden Hills residents, are brutally relentless in their quests to "make it" in Linden Hills.

Based on Willie's newly gained perspective on Linden Hills and his witness of the severe consequences of some of the identity crises present there, he tells Braithwaite, "I've seen a lot these last few days and I'll admit that I haven't sorted it all out yet. But I can say one thing, and I hope you won't take this the wrong way—I wouldn't live in

Linden Hills if it was the last place on earth” (Naylor 265). While this statement indicates his dislike of what he has seen in Linden Hills, it is not until later that he can more fully articulate what has been bothering him about Linden Hills. He thinks, “If anything was the problem with Linden Hills, it was that nothing seemed to be what it really was. Everything was turned upside down in that place” (Naylor 274). This realization helps him process all that he has seen during his journey through Linden Hills, and his assessment shows that he has become more knowledgeable of the conflicts that exist behind ostensible economic mobility and success in Linden Hills. His sentiments also indicate that he now has a better view of some of the unfavorable consequences of achieving economic and social mobility in Linden Hills, consequences including detachment from people who share similar racial belonging.

As his refusal to ever live in Linden Hills—or presumably a place like it— shows, Willie’s insight from Linden Hills helps him to develop perspective on some of the ways that quests for economic mobility cause problems including intra-racial, class discrimination, which he finds unacceptable. Although he notes his dislike of the poverty his family experiences and his desire to change his class belonging, he knows he does not want to compromise his integrity or disregard his racial belonging for that achievement. For Willie, then, this journey through Linden Hills ultimately serves as a form of education about affects of both racial and class belonging on opportunities for mobility; to attain economic mobility, he realizes he has to contend with the obvious forms of racial discrimination as well as intra-racial class discrimination. His experiences in Linden Hills consequently reinforce his desire to avoid perpetuating the racist and classist practices that stifle his movement.



Willa Nedeed's journey to self-discovery—which she undertakes as she recovers her foremothers' documents—also illuminates intersections between belonging and mobility, especially interconnections between gender belonging, mobility and freedom. While Willie's experiences demonstrate inhibitions that intra-racial classism causes, Willa Nedeed's story exhibits some of the detriments of intra-racial sexism. Willa Nedeed has to contend with gender roles that relegate women to domestic spaces as well as more restrictive gender roles Nedeed men assign to their wives. The Nedeed men essentially view their wives as vehicles used to continue the Nedeed patriarchy, so all of these women eventually become invisible to their husbands after they give birth to a son and secure the continuation of the Nedeed patriarchy. Eventually, they also become invisible to their sons, and at that point, they are relegated to the background in their family.

Luther, Willa's husband, punishes her because she has not fulfilled the roles he and his forefathers have assigned to her, to not only give birth to a son but to give birth to a son whose physical features mirror the physical traits of Nedeed men. Because Willa's son's complexion is not similar to Luther Nedeed and his forefathers', Luther believes Willa has been unfaithful to him. He therefore locks her in the basement of their home, and she remains there for the majority of the novel. During her confinement or restricted physical movement, we learn about the maltreatment she experiences prior to her bondage, and we also gain knowledge about connections between her experiences and the experiences of her foremothers. Willa, like her foremothers, is stifled by the Nedeed patriarchy and the resulting power dynamics that disregard her personhood. Her foremothers are invisible to their husbands and sons, but they leave evidence of their

existence in alternative ways. Bible scribblings, cookbooks, and photos tell their stories and break the silence their invisibility creates.

As Hanna Wallinger asserts in "Gloria Naylor's *Linden Hills*: The Novel by an African American Women Writer and the Critical Discourse," Willa skillfully reads between the lines of these documents to develop a fuller story about their lives. Further, as Stephanie Tingley notes in "A 'Ring of Pale Women': Willa Nedeed as Feminist Archivist and Historian in Gloria Naylor's *Linden Hills*," these documents allow Willa to serve as feminist archivist to recover the history of the Nedeed women. Ultimately, these documents provide the tangible material for Willa to conceptualize the detrimental effects of sexism on the personal freedoms of the Nedeed women.

This reconstructed history helps Willa tremendously in her self-discovery, but Willa is not immediately receptive to the stories of the Nedeed women. When Willa first encounters the stories of her foremothers, she dubs them "insane" because of their meticulous and seeming obsessive Bible scribblings, cookbook details, and photo journals. However, soon after this characterization, she stumbles upon Priscilla Nedeed's photos, and these photos prompt her to reconsider her characterizations of Nedeed foremothers. She develops a fuller understanding of her foremothers' experiences and uses this insight to propel her confrontation of her predicament. She learns that her foremothers leave stories about harmful effects of patriarchal oppression such as self-loss and mental agony, but they also provide examples of alternative ways to confront this oppression.

This self-loss is captured in the photo story of the final Nedeed woman she recovers, Priscilla. In the last of the pictures, Priscilla's missing face and the replacement of her

face with the word “me” symbolize her invisibility in her family. This visual representation of the marginalization of the Nedeed women speaks volumes for the experiences of the other Nedeed foremothers, Luwanna Packerville and Evelyn Creton Nedeed. They all have to come to terms with their insignificance to their husbands, and although the task of contending with their invisibility is difficult, they all extract some form of empowerment and voice from their situations. As Willa contemplates their experiences, she recognizes ways her predicament resonates with theirs. She, too, becomes subject to the legacy of maltreatment the Nedeed women experience, and she also has to articulate her oppression to formulate a strategy to confront it.

While Willa’s foremothers’ vehicles of empowerment—Bible scribbling, meticulous cookbooks, and photos—do not change their circumstances, these documents do allow them to use their power to voice their experiences, and their decisions to leave evidence of their maltreatment provide a foundation that helps Willa recognize her power and her own complicity in her entrapment in the basement. In a moment of awakening, she takes ownership of her *choices*: to marry Luther Nedeed, to take on the identity of mother and wife, and to walk down the stairs into the basement where her husband holds her prisoner. In a moment after Willa reclaims her power, the narrator says,

Upstairs, she had left an identity that was rightfully hers, that she had worked hard to achieve. Many women wouldn’t have chosen it, but she did. With all of its problems, it had given her a measure of security and contentment. And she owed no damned apologies to anyone for the last six years of her life. She was sitting there now, filthy, cold, and hungry, because she, Willa Prescott Nedeed, had walked down twelve concrete steps. And since that was the truth—the pure,

irreducible truth—whenever she was good and ready, she could walk back up (280).

This conclusion seems simple enough, but Willa has to undertake a very complex journey through her foremothers' lives to develop this assessment of her own situation.

Ultimately, Willa's journey through the past stimulates her personal growth, her ability to put her past in perspective, and her development of strategies to approach the future. For Willa, the next segment of her personal journey requires her to ascend the very steps that lead to her freedom. It is her hope that this reverse movement will also reverse the misfortune she experiences as a literal prisoner in her own home.

As the novel ends, Willa physically struggles with Luther to demonstrate her renewed willpower, and although Willa's life ends tragically because of this struggle, she spends her last moments as a woman who embraces her strength and owns her choices. Willa's journey through her foremothers' experiences and her own path to self-discovery illustrate the alternative ways women can challenge and voice their opposition to limitations on their freedom. While none of these women are able to change their maltreatment or their roles within the Nedeed patriarchy, they are able to break their silence through their alternative means of voice: writing, arranging a photo journal, and for Willa, confronting her source of oppression.

While the Nedeed women lose themselves within their own households because of the ramifications of their gender belonging, Dr. Braithwaite, the historian of Linden Hills, observes that racial belonging causes other residents in Linden Hills to lose themselves when they venture outside of Linden Hills for employment. In conversation with Lester and Willie, Dr. Braithwaite corrects Mamie Tilson's (Lester's grandmother) assertion

about the timing of Linden Hills residents' loss of identity. According to Mamie Tilson, the people in Linden Hills sell the mirror in their souls to make it in Linden Hills (Naylor 59 and 260). However, Braithwaite asserts,

If she'd [Mamie Tilson] had my vantage point all of these years, she would have known that they've sold nothing; pieces of themselves were *taken away*... They [Nedeeds] slowly began to realize that people could live here [Linden Hills], but with a few exceptions like myself, it was inevitable that they couldn't work here. So they had to keep going out and coming back with the resources to move down, but with less and less of themselves (260).

Braithwaite seemingly locates this loss of identity later than Mamie Tilson does, but ultimately, this loss is connected with "making it" in Linden Hills. Hence, as the more successful people descend to better spots in Linden Hills, many of them also experience a descent or deterioration in their sense of themselves because of the racial discrimination they face outside of Linden Hills.

This source of this identity loss is different than the Nedeed women experience, but both sources demonstrate the multiple ways that adverse ramifications of belonging and desires for mobility can be detrimental to an individual's sense of self. The people who "lose" themselves in the world outside of Linden Hills have to compromise their identities to achieve their quests for economic mobility. In comparison, the Nedeed women ostensibly have achieved the economic mobility others in Linden Hills seek, but this economic mobility is of little value compared to their desires to be meaningful parts of their families. Like the Laurels of Linden Hills, the Nedeed women have the prize that others want, but they, like those who lose themselves outside of Linden Hills, lack self-

fulfillment. Hence, the Nedeed women and the Laurels, the supposed “prizewinners” of Linden Hills, have to embark on different journeys than the people still striving to “make it” or change their class belonging. Nevertheless, those who have supposedly “made it” still have to undertake equally difficult journeys to achieve their respective aspirations.

As in *Linden Hills*, in *No Crystal Stair*, racial, class, and gender belongings have a significant impact on opportunities for mobility, and discrimination that results from marginalized belongings emerges in various forms. Many of the characters in *No Crystal Stair* experience different types of racial discrimination that impedes chances for mobility including educational and career opportunities. While some characters know the inhibitions racism causes, their experiences with oppression do not prevent them from exercising mobility-stifling treatment towards others. For example, people who encounter racism perpetuate discrimination through classism and sexism. Therefore, like Naylor’s work, Sarsfield’s depictions of interconnected forms of racism, sexism, and classism illuminate some of the ways that blacks in Canada contend with many types of oppression and attempt to overcome the limitations on mobility that oppressive treatment causes.

*No Crystal Stair* is set in the 1940s in Montreal. The novel’s protagonist, Marion Willow, engages intersecting issues of belonging and mobility through her contemplation about her own position, positions of black men and women in Montreal, and the future prospects of her daughters. Early in the novel, Marion notes ways race, class, and gender inhibit her prospects for economic mobility. Marion’s early assertions that she is called a “cook” instead of a “dietician” because of her race and that she is paid less because she is a woman show that she realizes how her racial and gender belongings inhibit her

mobility. Although she sometimes thinks about ways marriage to Edmond Thompson (her daughters' surrogate godfather) would decrease some of the adverse consequences of racial and gender belonging, she continually reasserts her desire for independence.

Despite the hardship she endures, she wants to ensure that her daughters grow up with similar spirits of independence and self-confidence. Through her model, they see it is possible to not succumb to inhibitions of racial, gender, and class belongings.

Early in the novel, it is evident that Marion connects her desire for mobility with her desire for a better life for her daughters. For example, the narrator notes that Marion is jealous of mothers whose kids could roll on fresh-cut lawns and play in clean sandboxes, and Marion's inability to provide these advantages to her children reminds her of the larger disadvantages her daughters will face because of their class belonging. The clean sandboxes and fresh-cut lawns are symbolic of the childhood deprivations they already face, and her contemplation about these deprivations are interconnected with her concerns about the affects that not only class but also race and gender will have on her daughters' futures. While the ability to provide seemingly simple childhood pleasures escapes Marion, she is determined to prepare her daughters to be as successful as those children who are able to "play in clean sandboxes." Her chances to advance economically and to access better opportunities are limited, but she maximizes the tools she does have to help her daughters defeat the inhibitions their race, gender, and economic class could create.

In her many "lessons" for her daughters, she emphasizes the importance of educational and moral values and hopes their educational preparation and their values will abate the discrimination they face because of their belongings. She fosters an

environment conducive to learning by, for example, using their outings as geography lessons and requiring each of her daughters to read aloud every evening (230-231). She not only considers their present educational success but also sows seeds for their future education. For example, she continually reiterates to her daughters the importance of a college education. Recurring conversations about college education serve as reminders to her children about her belief that educational attainment allows opportunities for mobility and success.

In addition to emphasizing educational values, Marion also teaches her daughters the importance of moral values and behavior, and her class consciousness influences her instruction about morality and behavior. Although economically she is considered a member of the working- class, she associates with women with “genteel upper class pretensions” through her membership in the Coloured Ladies Club; the narrator indicates that these women are mostly wives of Pullman Porters who have relocated from the U.S. South because the only jobs their educated husbands could find were as railway porters. Despite Marion’s economic class, she and these women share similar views on social standards (e.g. proper and “ladylike” comportment).

These shared social standards inform the values she instills in her daughters, but her particular experiences provide a more complex view of the intersections of race, gender, and social and economic class. While the women of the Coloured Ladies Club exhibit concern for “the race,” many of them do not have to work outside of their home. Hence their understanding of race and class issues differs from the understanding of someone such as Marion, who does have to contend with racial issues in her workplaces. Marion’s distinct experiences with issues regarding racial, class, and gender belonging therefore



inform the lessons she teaches her daughters about values. For example, although she emphasizes educational values, she pinpoints some of the ways that adverse consequences of racial discrimination can make educational attainment seem futile. Her experiences with racism in the workplace as well as her awareness of adverse affects of racism on the employment of those who have obtained postsecondary education therefore temper her emphasis on educational values. Nevertheless, she remains hopeful that the advantages of education will help her daughters and outweigh the seeming futility of education for members of marginalized groups.

Marion's more nuanced perspective also becomes evident in her association with other people who are close to her, Edmond and Madame LaRoche (one of her employers). As Marion interacts with these characters, she pinpoints ways Edmond does not have to contend with the same gender discrimination she faces and ways Madame LaRoche does not encounter the racial issues she faces. For example, when Marion moves to a different house, she is reminded of the gender discrimination women face in Montreal. No woman is allowed to sign for utilities, even if they are the ones who take care of their household. Therefore, Marion relies on Edmond to sign for her lease and her utilities, and essentially, her ability to physically move is dependent on him. As Marion laments the unfairness of this situation, Edmond does not seem sympathetic. He tells her she needs to just accept that it is a "man's world." This sentiment indicates that although both Edmond and Marion contend with racial discrimination, Edmond is unwilling or unable to identify with other forms of discrimination and maltreatment that result from belonging to marginalized groups. (Sarsfield 27). Racial discrimination is the reason that he, a chemist by trade, is relegated to a job as a porter or essentially forced to

descend from the status he has achieved. However, even the severity of the racism he faces does not enable him to recognize how similar discriminatory treatment manifests in Marion's situation.

Madame LaRoche can identify with the gender discrimination Marion experiences, but she does not understand the intersecting ways race and gender hinder Marion. For example, she pressures Marion to exercise women's right to vote without a full understanding of how race affects Marion's ability to vote. While Marion agrees with the principles of women's enfranchisement, she also knows the particular hindrances black women experience when they attempt to vote. As Marion contemplates the prospect of voting, she recalls the time she was jailed for trying to vote. In this instance, the enumerator accurately describes Marion as black woman, but when Marion attempts to vote she is mistaken for white and therefore accused of pretending to be Mrs. Willow. Although she is presumably jailed for asserting a false identity, Marion connects this incident to racism; she indicates this connection when she thinks more generally about the ramifications that blacks who "dare" to vote experience. Madame LaRoche is not familiar with these types of ramifications, so as she pressures Marion to vote, her limited perspective does not equip her to understand the complex ways Marion's multiple belongings interfere with her voting rights. Madame LaRoche also misses the implications of this interference. In this case, Marion's belongings hinder her participation in a social movement for both voting rights and women's rights, a movement that could propel women's economic advancement and other forms of mobility that Madame LaRoche also advocates.

Marion's complex understanding of belonging also helps her pinpoint issues of belonging that do not directly affect her. For example, when Pippa, one of her daughters, questions why the French children do not like Victoria Day, Marion explains that Queen Victoria is a symbol of Britain's ownership of two-thirds of the world (Sarsfield 39). Marion's knowledge of some of the reasons for divisions between French and English Canadians in Montreal and her explanation indicate her understanding of the marginalization the French population feels during this celebration. In this instance, then, she not only gives voice to the reasons for division but also provides insight that will help her daughter become more capable of understanding the connections between marginalization of people of multiple groups.

Marion's chosen identifications shed some light on her ability to recognize connections between the discrimination against multiple groups. When she gives a sense of her family history and notes her feeling that she does not really belong to either the "earthy West Indian community" or the circle of "elegant American ladies" within her family, it becomes clear that she operates from a stance of hybridity (Sarsfield 5-6). She values the connections she has to multiple people and the multiple places from which they originate.<sup>1</sup> The value she places on these connections therefore provides a foundation for her willingness and ability to establish broad connections between adverse consequences of belongings that directly affect her as well as those that do not, and the above example in which she lucidly explains the marginalization French Canadians feel on Victoria Day shows her ability to establish these connections. She is therefore an intermediary between characters such as Edmond and Madame LaRoche who have limited perspectives on the pervasiveness of discrimination, and she serves as an example

for her daughters as they formulate their own perceptions of interconnected implications of belonging for marginalized groups.

Marion's contemplations of the positions of people who experience adverse consequences of belonging also lead her to reconsider her identifications and recognize her complicity in discriminatory treatment. For example, when she is denied entry into a restaurant because of her racial belonging, her anger and humiliation lead her to reconsider the influence her social class assumptions have on her discrimination against Torrie Delacourt (Edmond's partner and eventual wife). As Marion angrily contemplates her situation, she thinks, "So what else is new? Africans have been sold down the river so many times, they're like crabs. Here I am, rejected by Rurphy's because I look different from the other customers—just as I rejected Torrie Delacourt because she acts differently from most of us" (Sarsfield 127). In this moment, Marion realizes the superficiality of her and the Coloured Ladies Club's discrimination against Torrie. Just as the restaurant worker judges Marion superficially based on her skin color, members of the Coloured Ladies Club have judged Torrie superficially based on class-based specifications for "lady-like" behavior. In this moment of realization, spurred by her experience with racism, Marion knows she cannot perpetuate the very discrimination that creates obstacles in her life. Hence, she later rectifies her maltreatment of Torrie by supporting her membership in the exclusive Coloured Ladies Club.

Marion's treatment at Rurphy's restaurant also helps her further understand the discrepancies between the Coloured Ladies Club's discriminatory treatment against Torrie and members' positions in marginalized groups. Soon after the restaurant incident, Marion attends a meeting for the Coloured Ladies Club, and as a motion for

new members does not gain a lot of support, Marion, still enraged about the racism she experienced, speaks about the larger implications of their discriminatory treatment against potential new members such as Torrie:

Look at us, sipping tea as if we're gentry—as if we're well-to-do white ladies at the MAA. Unlike them, however, because our husbands aren't presidents of banks, we desperately have to find ways to raise money to continue doing worthwhile things for our community—like maintaining our two beds at the TB sanatorium, our four plots in the Mount Royal cemetery, and providing dinners for shut-ins (129).

As Marion continues, she notes that Torrie's affiliations would help them in their fundraising efforts, which they use to assist with their community needs. Marion recognizes how her discriminatory treatment toward Torrie may have stifled the Club's contribution to the community, so she now thinks that the women of the Coloured Ladies Club need to consider not only their class pretensions but also their racial affiliations as they decide the best interests of a club that ostensibly helps better a community of people affected by racism. Marion's willingness to revise her perspective on Torrie and consider the broader implications of her discrimination indicates her awareness that the petty issues that divided her and Torrie are insignificant compared to the work they could do to combat inequitable treatment of blacks.<sup>li</sup>

The benefits of Marion and Torrie's unification also become evident when Torrie offers to help Marion rear Pippa. Torrie wants to give Pippa "street smarts" to couple with the breeding of a working-class family that Marion provides. Torrie also wants to help Pippa develop her identity and embrace her heritage. Although Marion agrees to

accept her help, she makes clear she does not want Torrie to teach Pippa her “tactics” because she wants “. . .her girls to use their education, not their bodies, to escape the trap of poverty and consignment” (Sarsfield 179). Torrie and Marion have had different life experiences, so it is understandable that they have distinct approaches. However, the differences in their experiences also create an opportunity to provide Pippa with a diverse set of tools to contend with racial, class, and gender discrimination. Their agreement to work together to rear Pippa shows the necessity of using as many skills and as much knowledge as possible to survive the negative effects of belonging to groups that continually experience inequitable treatment.

The importance of Torrie’s attempt to prepare Pippa becomes even clearer considering the positions of the young adults in Montreal who witness the racial discrimination that prevents blacks from obtaining employment in fields in which they are qualified. For example, Otis, Edmond’s nephew, refuses to attend college, and Marion notes that Otis refuses because he has witnessed his uncle’s inability to gain employment as a chemist, despite his training. Rodney, Otis’ friend, is also skeptical about education because he has also witnessed other blacks in predicaments similar to Edmond’s. Otis’ and Rodney’s perspectives on the benefits of education show the generational affects racial discrimination has. They both bear witness to the seeming futility of education for people in the generation before them, so they are suspicious of the benefits education will have for them. Although people such as Torrie and Marion continue to remain partially hopeful about the advantages of education, the realities of racial discrimination overshadow their optimism. Nevertheless, Torrie and Marion feel it

necessary to equip children with tools, including education, to combat the negative consequences of marginalized belongings.

Marion and those closest to her provide the primary vantage points through which we engage nuanced intersections of belonging and mobility, but other characters within the novel further illuminate affects that multicultural belongings have on opportunities for movement.<sup>lii</sup> The complex issue of passing is one that illustrates how a range of cultural backgrounds shapes interconnections between mobility and belonging in *No Crystal Stair*. For example, Marushka, who is Afro-Russian, hides her African ancestry at work because she fears the stigmatization she will face. Sarita, who is Jewish, changes her name at work to conceal her Jewish identity. She, too, fears the impact that knowledge of her identity will have. Both of these women embrace their heritages outside of work, but they conceal their identities, or “pass,” at work to prevent potentially adverse ramifications that their belongings could have for their jobs, their sources of economic viability and mobility. In both cases, then, the decision to pass is not only about race and ethnicity but also about economic sustenance. They choose to temporarily conceal their belongings so that they can continue to thrive economically.

Ultimately, the complexities of the experiences of the characters in *No Crystal Stair* illustrate the multiple manifestations of ramifications of belonging. This multicultural community consists of people who have suffered a range of discriminatory treatment, but it also consists of people who are determined to develop strategies to counteract that maltreatment. The events that unfold at the end of the novel reveal the measured hopefulness this community holds. As Marion’s close friends and family help her celebrate her birthday, Marion learns that Edmond has found the land he purchased

when he first moved to Canada. Edmond gives her a piece of the land and also shares the land with Otis and Marushka. When he bestows this gift, he asserts, “We may not get to Garvey’s Africa, but now we’ll always own a part of Canada” (Sarsfield 245). Since the desire to go to “Garvey’s Africa” is directly connected to recognition of racism and other forms of discrimination, this assertion illustrates Edmond’s understanding of the progress that needs to be made to ensure equitable treatment of blacks and other marginalized groups in Canada. It also shows his awareness of the opportunities that are available to blacks in Canada. Although Edmond and other blacks have not attained the equality they desire, land ownership in Canada, or ownership of part of Canada, becomes a step toward claiming the rights and privileges of membership in the Canadian national community.<sup>liii</sup>

Like *Linden Hills*, *No Crystal Stair* provides insight on intricate ways ramifications of belonging affect mobility and opportunities for success. Both require complex views of identity and belonging and careful attention to some of the ways marginalized belongings directly affect black people’s movement and freedom. Although these novels depict different historical moments, the 1940s and the 1980s, they both question the import of national belonging for black people who do not experience the benefits of citizenship in nations such as the United States and Canada that tout equality, freedom, and justice. The discrepancy between these national ideals and the realities blacks experience is more pronounced in *Linden Hills* because it is set in the later twentieth century, decades after civil rights legislation attempted to transform some of the history of discrimination in the United States. While *No Crystal Stair* is set in the 1940s, it is published in the late 1990s, and the experiences of exclusion portrayed in the novel share similarities with the experiences of exclusion black Canadians voiced in the



late twentieth century and continued to reveal in the early twenty-first century.

Therefore, both *Linden Hills* and *No Crystal Stair* offer important literary representations that illuminate some of the ways racial discrimination continued to shape blacks experiences in the United States and Canada in the late twentieth century.

Both literary representations also pinpoint some of the potentially unexpected ways that marginalized belongings obstruct individuals' ability to achieve mobility. In *Linden Hills*, for example, marginalized class belonging has just as many negative consequences as racial belonging. In *No Crystal Stair*, class sometimes subsumes racial belonging and interferes with the betterment of communities that establish affiliation through racial bonds. Both novels therefore show the multi-dimensionality of belonging and the ranging affects these belongings have on mobility.

While *Linden Hills* and *No Crystal Stair* illustrate difficulties of belonging to marginalized groups and illuminate inhibitions of mobility and freedom that discriminatory treatment causes, these novels also pinpoint some of the tools—such as movement—that marginalized groups use to resist discriminatory treatment. Through their engagement with the negative effects of belonging as well as the strategies of empowerment used to counteract those unfavorable effects, these novels highlight some of the complex and dynamic ways that various categories of belonging intersect with opportunities for mobility and freedom. Naylor's and Sarsfield's engagement with these societal issues demands that we not only consider the particular issues of belonging that emerge within their novels' pages but also to think about the implications these issues have for people of other marginalized groups as well as for blacks in countries other than the United States and Canada. Hence, Naylor's and Sarsfield's interventions move

beyond the boundaries of their novels and the geographical areas they represent to spur us to consider and confront the injustices in and beyond our respective environments that result from marginalized belongings.

## Chapter Four

### **Diasporic Dialogues: Transcending National and Literary Borders**

The first three chapters of this study provide comparative analyses of African American and African Canadian literatures and illustrate some of the significant advantages of this comparative study: better knowledge of common historical trajectories of the United States and Canada, increased understanding of the impact racial, class, and gender belonging have on black people in both nations, and fuller illumination of the emergence of issues of belonging in literatures of both nations. In addition to offering insight for literary, cultural, and historical studies in the United States and Canada, this comparative study of African American and African Canadian literatures and histories also has implications for studies of African diasporic literatures and cultures. For example, African American and African Canadian literary representations of important issues such as racial and class oppression help to illuminate the emergence of these pervasive oppressions in other national locations because these forms of discrimination are detrimental to black people across the diaspora. Therefore, an analysis of these particular representations in American and Canadian contexts is also a partial analysis of the multiple manifestations of oppression that black people of the diaspora experience. This chapter focuses on these types of interconnections between diaspora peoples and builds on discussions in previous chapters to expand conversations beyond the literatures produced in two nations that share a border.

I have divided this chapter into multiple sections to provide a general overview of some of the critical discussions in diasporic studies, situate my specific study within those critical discussions, and address some of the ways that my work is significant to

diasporic scholarship and to my pedagogical practices. Before I discuss the implications that my comparative analysis has for transnational studies, I engage some important diasporic texts that help to ground the contributions my work makes to diasporic studies. Because my specific analyses of African American and African Canadian literatures as well as my contributions to diasporic scholarship are also significant to the courses I teach, the last section of this chapter engages the pedagogical implications of my study.

### Critical Perspectives on Diaspora and Diasporic Studies

Literary scholars such as Wendy Walters, Michelle Wright, and Wayde Compton, cultural studies scholars such as Rinaldo Walcott, Clifton Ruggles, Wisdom Tettey, and Korbla Puplampu, and feminist theorists including Njoki Wane and Angeletta Gourdine assert the importance and usefulness of a diasporic lens in their respective disciplines.<sup>liv</sup> These scholars of the African diaspora pinpoint different aspects of diasporic peoples' experiences, but they all emphasize the value in exploring interconnections between people in various national spaces to develop more complex narratives about experiences of people of African ancestry across the world. These scholars establish diasporic connections on a variety of bases including cultural values, concepts of Africa as "home," feelings of displacement, understandings of belonging to diaspora and nation, and gender roles. The range in diasporic connections, like the range in fields of diasporic study, indicates that diasporic analysis has the potential to illuminate multiple aspects of diasporic peoples' experiences.

While scholars of the diaspora assert the importance of transnational study, many of them recognize that these studies also evoke complicated issues that sometimes

overshadow the importance of diasporic analysis. Wendy Walters engages one such complication in *At Home in Diaspora* (2005) when she grapples with the vexed relationship between concepts of nation and diaspora. For example, as she describes the rationale for her literary examination of some of the ways black writers offer insight on concepts of diaspora, she asserts,

...I seek to unsettle and complicate the typical construction of home and diaspora as binary opposites. That is, in general usage one cannot be at home and in diaspora at the same time. My argument is that the authors in this study create prose writing that performs a home in diaspora, and that these performances have important political and epistemological implications for all of us (Walters x).

Walters' use of literature to (de)construct the limited concepts of national homes opens space to consider some ways in which individuals are connected to places and cultures beyond their national homes. Walters' analysis also suggests that tensions between diaspora and bordered spaces (nations and literature) contribute to the marginalization of multi-national studies and ultimately inhibit the important insight diasporic examinations can add to our understandings of people of African descent across the world.

Through her illumination of some of the ways in which diaspora community is not recognized in traditional modes of literary study or within nation-states (x), she implies that transnational communities and studies gain heightened significance because they challenge hegemonic national and literary borders. She notes that diaspora communities do not necessarily allow black writers to escape hegemonic powers of nation-state or nation-bound classification of literary audiences, publishers, and reading

communities. Nevertheless, she rightly emphasizes the productivity of engaging diasporic communities and their resistance to hegemonic bordering (x).

In “Dialoguing Borders,” Reginald Khoker also usefully engages some of the ways that diasporic study offers resistance to hegemonic bordering and asserts that literature is a vehicle to confront bordering practices. Khoker contends,

The construction of borders and boundaries, both physical and metaphorical, has long been a source of human obsession. In the realm of both the public and the private, one can specifically notice perimeters erected to contain transgression and police designated territory...Much of the battle against various hegemonic practices has often taken place in the literary sphere. Many diasporic writers have attempted to demonstrate the arbitrary nature of such boundaries and the possibilities of fluidly traversing these imposed barriers (pgs).

Therefore, in Khoker’s assessment, like in Walters’ analysis, literary studies and other fields of diasporic study perform the difficult but much needed tasks of expanding the scope of diasporic study, and this expansion is necessary because broadened perspectives allow more opportunities for complex analyses of the experiences of diasporic peoples. Ultimately, the tensions and the “battles” that ensue as consequences of diasporic conversations do not prevent scholars such as Khoker and Walters from continuing to assert the importance of engaging concepts of diaspora. Rather, the tensions and the uneasiness about diaspora prompt them to continue to create significant dialogues about the ways diasporic studies can transform our understandings of literature, culture, and history.

Another aspect of the sometimes conflicting relationship between concepts of nation and concepts of diaspora is the questionable role of national and cultural specificity in diasporic study. The possibility of overshadowing these specificities and essentializing people of African descent creates some of the skepticism about the productiveness of diasporic study. Diasporic scholars such as Njoki Wane and Gay Wilentz note the hazards of generalization and essentialism, but they practice precautionary measures to avoid these hazards. For example, in the conclusion to a compilation about diasporic feminisms (*Theorizing Empowerment* (2007), Wane asserts that it is important to delineate distinctions in feminisms across the African diaspora, but she also emphasizes the significance of finding common ground to contend with issues that affect black women throughout the world. Similarly, Gay Wilentz, in “Towards a Diaspora Literature: Black Women Writers from Africa, the Caribbean, and the United States” (1992), notes how geographical and cultural separation between black people throughout the world shape the manifestations of gender inequity, but she also asserts that common aims such as confrontation of varying forms of gender inequity provide a basis for some of the connections between people of African descent. Although these scholars engage different aspects of diasporic studies, they both emphasize some of the shared historical and contemporary circumstances of people of African descent, and the benefits of their work demonstrate the importance of moving beyond seemingly disparate experiences of people of the African diaspora.<sup>lv</sup>

Like Wane and Wilentz, Michelle Wright’s work helps to reshape the landscape of literary studies and women’s studies because her diasporic examination augments limited national analyses and establishes a broader framework for understanding some of

the societal issues—such as racism— with which people of African descent contend. In *Becoming Black* (2008), Wright examines the works of black writers in Germany, France, and Britain in the 1980s and 1990s to address race-related adversities in their respective countries and show some of the distinct ways in which black people experience race-related discrimination. Wright is careful to note that definitions of race and criteria for national belonging differ in France, Germany, and Britain. However, she also highlights the common experiences of exclusion in these countries. She implicitly asserts that the experiences of exclusion in these countries are products of Western discourses that “...locate[s] them [black people] as always, already outside Western history, culture, and civilization” (Wright 226). Wright also contends that ultimately, black writers in Germany, France, and Britain confront this marginalization because they “...draw on and deploy the now unmistakable presence of the African diaspora in the West” (226). In Wright’s assessment, the African diaspora achieves even more significance because the writers she examines understand “the” Black subject as first and primarily part of the African diaspora. Hence, the works Wright engages not only share a common focus on the significance of diaspora to the West but also share a common assertion of the significance of the African diaspora to black being(s). Wright’s analysis essentially demonstrates that while the specific forms of marginalization black people face in Germany, Britain, and France vary, their marginalization within Western discourse and their usage of writing to confront that marginalization are some of the commonalities black people in these countries share.

Although Michele Wright’s *Becoming Black* focuses on literary engagement with diasporic similarities, she also illustrates the importance of interdisciplinary approaches



to diasporic study through her use of both literary studies and women's studies to engage diasporic experiences.<sup>lvi</sup> For example, in her argument about the significance of diaspora to literature blacks produce, she cites Audre Lorde's and Carolyn Rodgers' assertions about the function of diaspora for black women: "nationalism, no matter its form, necessarily constructs antagonistic differences and a diasporic outlook, dialogic in design, is the only means by which black women can hope to have their subjectivity acknowledged alongside black men" (Wright 202). Lorde and Rodgers highlight the specific implications of diasporic studies for black women who face sexist as well as racist practices. Wright extends their analysis further and notes the implications that Lorde and Rodgers' women-centered analyses have for other marginalized groups. She asserts that their "textured" views of black and white communities are fitting for diasporic discourses that elaborate on complexities within these communities, complexities such as marginalization of white, poor people (Wright 226). Hence, in Wright's analysis, black women's issues become issues that have relevance for all black people and other groups of people who face discrimination. By extension, Wright's analysis indicates that the field of women's studies has insight to offer for a range of other fields of diasporic study that engage the ramifications of marginalized belongings.

There are many other women's studies texts that also have potential implications for other disciplines and reinforce Lorde's and Rodgers' diasporic emphasis. Works such as *Theorizing Empowerment: Canadian Perspectives on Black Feminist Thought* (2007) and *Sisterhood, Feminisms, and Power: From Africa to the Diaspora* (1998) are predicated on the potential knowledge gained from considering the global impact of women's rights. Feminist scholars who contribute to these works are knowledgeable of

the dangers of making generalizations about women's oppression, but they also understand the advantages of considering some of the common factors in women's oppression across the world. For example, in the introduction to *Theorizing Empowerment: Canadian Perspectives on Black Feminist Thought*, Notisha Massaquoi asserts,

A feminist theory which is grounded in the specific materiality of Black women's lives in Canada must acknowledge the need for a transnational feminist practice as a framework, one which can incorporate an understanding of the global economic and political upheaval which results in the movement of Black women across borders (7).<sup>lvii</sup>

While Massaquoi contends that feminist theoretical frameworks need to integrate some of the common realities, such as globalization, that affect black women throughout the world, she is also careful to note the importance of recognizing specific circumstances that contextualize these realities. For example, she pinpoints some of the specific factors—including economic benefits, social and personal security, and distinct forms of racism, sexism, and heterosexism—that distinguish black Canadians from other people of the diaspora (8). She also notes that the title “Canadian” affords material entitlement that differentiates Canadians' experiences from those in other national contexts. Because *Theorizing Empowerment* devotes attention to some of these details, it demonstrates some potential ways we can engage commonalities black women and black people share but also account for their distinctive experiences.

The aforementioned studies and other diasporic analyses conducted in women's studies, literary studies, and other fields not only illuminate commonalities in black

people's experiences but also highlight potential strategies for combating shared problems such as racial discrimination. For scholars such as Lorde and Rodgers, the concept of diaspora itself presents a partial solution to the problem of women's inequality because the dialogic nature of diaspora allows space to discuss the intricate and specific ways women experience gender discrimination. Since a lack of knowledge of complexities of women's experiences is a factor in intentional and inadvertent racist, sexist, and classist practices, a diasporic concept that allows space for these complexities can also, ideally, provide an impetus for the achievement of women's equality. In Michele Wright's assessment, black writers in Germany, France, and Britain help emphasize the importance of the African diaspora to the "West." Recognition of this importance reaffirms the presence and the contributions of black people of the diaspora and helps counteract racist practices that intentionally ignore those contributions.

Hence, for scholars including Wright, Lorde, and Rodgers, diasporic studies help initiate solutions to the limitations of exclusive national identification and interrelated exclusionary practices against black people in particular nations. For example, Wright asserts, "Because diaspora is inherently unstable—a nonlinear construct produced by fluid dynamics such as travel, discovery, conflict, and negotiation—one would be hard put to produce a subject who is mobile and multifaceted and yet concretely defined and wholly achieved" (213-214). As Wright's assertion indicates, the concept of diaspora destabilizes fixed boundaries such as the physical and figurative boundaries constructed around nations. By connection, the concept of diaspora also interrupts the identity-related limitations imposed on people of the diaspora because diasporic identity requires acceptance of the influence of diverse cultural heritages on diasporic peoples.

While diaspora serves as a remedy in the above-mentioned assessments, Angeletta K. M. Gourdine issues a reminder about the problems that also arise in conceptualizations of diaspora. In *The Difference Place Makes: Gender, Sexuality, and Diaspora Identity* (2002), she asserts that diaspora people, like the “Negro,” have been masculinized, and the diaspora “...has been claimed as an especially male place” (1). As a way to combat masculinized concepts of diaspora and make diaspora a more complex and useful counterdiscourse, Gourdine emphasizes the importance of *place* in diaspora studies and considers each writer she examines in her cultural and national contexts. Her attention to place is foundational to her analysis of some of the ways in which women’s writings offer a “revision of a [masculinized] diasporic politic” (106). Ultimately, in Gourdine’s work, diaspora maintains its transformative potential, but this transformative potential can only emerge when diasporic studies account for the complexities that diaspora inherently represents. Essentially, Gourdine, like the above-mentioned diasporic scholars, pinpoints some of the complexities of diaspora but nevertheless demonstrates the utility of diasporic frameworks in illuminating, assessing, and confronting the experiences of black people throughout the diaspora.

#### Implications of Literary Representations of Belonging to Nation and Diaspora

My comparative analysis of African American and African Canadian literatures and histories augments Gourdine’s examination and other aforementioned diasporic scholarship because the experiences represented in African American and African Canadian literatures and histories are experiences that also have relevance for black people throughout the world. While national and cultural locations shape the specific

manifestations of oppressions such as racism, sexism, and classism and influence some of the ways diasporic peoples represent these oppressions through literature, literary representations of shared societal concerns provide a springboard for nuanced analyses of both commonalities and distinctions in African diasporic peoples' experiences. Therefore, engagement with literary representations of these shared societal concerns helps to illuminate pervasive issues— such as those regarding belonging, movement, and freedom— that shape black peoples' experiences throughout the world.

Both the general observations about the novels discussed in my comparative study and specific textual moments within these novels further illuminate benefits of diasporic study and the implications of my comparative study for diasporic analysis. One of the explicit reasons that the novels I selected for my comparative study also work well for diasporic study is their evocation of diasporic places and concerns through representations of a number of African diasporic sites. The three African Canadian novels discussed in this dissertation, *The Meeting Point* (1967), *No Crystal Stair* (1997), and *Someone Knows My Name* (2007), all take place in, recall, or reference multiple national locations. These novels provide insight on the multiple places with which people of the diaspora identify and the multiple locations that provide a context for their struggles to achieve belonging and freedom. In *The Meeting Point*, for example, Austin Clarke compares the discrimination in Canada and in the United States. Characters compare conditions of blacks in Toronto to that of blacks in the South generally and in Alabama and Mississippi specifically. References to racially-oppressive incidents such as the brutal church bombing that killed the four young girls in Birmingham, Alabama in 1963 help to establish a broader context for the experiences of blacks in Toronto and

demonstrate the multiple transnational manifestations of oppression. Hence, through these representations of multiple national locations, works such as *The Meeting Point* provide explicit and tangible diasporic connections that are foundational to diasporic analyses of experiences of oppression.

Since I comparatively examine each multi-nationally engaged African Canadian text with an African American novel that focuses on one national community, these works of African Canadian literature also help to more fully illustrate the interconnections between experiences in the United States and other diasporic places. These interconnections become evident, for example, when African Canadian novels evoke the very U.S. locations in which the comparatively studied African American novels are set. For example, in both *The Meeting Point* and *The Street*, Harlem is a significant point of reference for the experiences of marginalization blacks encounter in the United States and Canada. Harlem is the place in which the *The Street* is primarily set, and it is the place where Lutie struggles to achieve her ideals of economic mobility. Harlem is also the place that Bernice, in *The Meeting Point*, continually references as a source of her knowledge of the Black Power Movement and therefore an indirect source of the empowerment she feels as a result of the information disseminated from the Black Power Movement.

Lutie's Harlem exists twenty years prior to the Harlem Bernice references, so some of the struggles for freedom and equality that spark the Black Power Movement are struggles with which Lutie contends. Therefore, the struggles *The Street* depicts stimulate the Black Power Movement that *The Meeting Point* represents as beneficial to the novel's protagonist (Bernice). Through the vantage point of Harlem, we learn that

black people in the United States and Canada experience marginalization that inhibits their ability to achieve their ideals of mobility and freedom. While Harlem is central to these two novels for distinct reasons and is referenced in two different national and cultural contexts, Harlem serves as a binding agent that helps to structure comparative analyses of interconnections between African American and African Canadian experiences, analyses that then become foundational to broader, diasporic studies of the emergence of various forms of oppression.

African Canadian novels such as *No Crystal Stair* provide additional illustrations of some ways that literary representations and evocations of particular places connect African America and African Canada. Torrie, who is initially the antagonist, was a participant in the Harlem Renaissance and continually references her connections to Harlem Renaissance participants such as Langston Hughes and Josephine Baker. In fact, Torrie's connections to these prominent United States figures lead to lucrative fundraising efforts for one of the organizations featured in *No Crystal Stair*, The Coloured Ladies Club. Through Torrie's arrangement, Langston Hughes attends one of the club's fundraising events, and it is because of Hughes that the event raises a substantial amount of money. Since this money funds the community work that the Coloured Ladies Club undertakes, Torrie's connection to the United States becomes an important source that helps provide means for the community service that benefits her counterparts in Montreal. Through this explicit textual representation of the ties between the United States and Canada, *No Crystal Stair* helps further illuminate some of the links between African Canada and African America and helps reinforce the significance of examinations of transnational connections that bind people of the African diaspora.

Engagement with place not only provides a foundation for comparative analysis of African American and African Canadian literatures but also offers a prism for examining the shared societal issues and concerns of people throughout other parts of the African diaspora, issues and concerns that originate in the particular national locations in which people reside and call “home.” For example, Lutie’s quests to attain American national ideals in the *The Street* can be situated in a broader, diasporic framework when paired with depictions such as those in *The Meeting Point* that show quests to obtain Canadian national ideals. Both novels detail the difficulties black people in the United States and Canada experience when attempting to achieve national belonging, and the emergence of important similarities in the United States and Canada, two nations with different national ideals and cultural compositions, indicate that comparisons of seemingly disparate national places and cultures can yield important knowledge about varying ways people experience and confront oppression. This pairing also shows that in many instances, distinctions do not automatically deter transnational analysis; rather, both novels help stimulate more intricate engagement with people who belong to different nations, cultural groups, etc. because these novels illuminate distinctive experiences but also demonstrate some of the common ground between African America and African Canada.

My comparison of *No Crystal Stair* with *Linden Hills* further demonstrates the benefits of comparative analysis of African American and African Canadian literatures. In the United States context of *Linden Hills*, as in the Canadian context of *No Crystal Stair*, we learn that members of marginalized groups experience oppression, but they, too, can exercise discrimination. Marion, the protagonist in *No Crystal Stair* encounters



racism and sexism, but she practices classism towards Torrie Delacourt. When Marion is denied entry into a restaurant because of her race, she realizes that she has recreated exclusionary, classist practices by barring Torrie from a prestigious women's organization, The Coloured Ladies Club. The classism evidenced in *No Crystal Stair* parallels some of the class-based discrimination in *Linden Hills*. Like in *No Crystal Stair*, characters in *Linden Hills* enact intra-racial classism that becomes detrimental. Willie is an outsider in Linden Hills because the residents of Linden Hills associate negative behavior with people of his social class. Although the residents of Linden Hills and nonresidents such as Willie share similar experiences of racial discrimination, Linden Hills residents participate in classist acts—such as class-based exclusions from Linden Hills—that compound the marginalization that Willie and others with fewer economic means encounter. Therefore, comparative analysis of *No Crystal Stair* and *Linden Hills*, works that represent different national locations, contributes to nuanced analyses of some of the inhibiting consequences of belonging to marginalized groups in the diasporic places that African American and African Canadian literatures represent.

In addition to place(s), a range of time periods become pivotal to African American and African Canadian literary engagement with multiple restrictions on freedom and mobility, restrictions that black people experience because of their belongings. The wide range in time periods during which novels in this study were published (1945-2007) and time periods they represent (eighteenth century through the late twentieth century) show perpetual affects that belonging to marginalized groups has on movement and freedom in diasporic places. Within the eras that these novels represent, people marginalized because of their racial, class, and gender belongings

experience adverse affects on their ability to attain social, economic, and other forms of movement, and they encounter hindrances to their desires for various forms of freedom. While marginalized belongings are at the root of their discriminatory treatment, they nevertheless experience this maltreatment distinctly. For example, the physical constraints of slavery that Lawrence Hill represents in the eighteenth and nineteenth century setting of *Someone Knows My Name* are distinct from the physical constraints of sharecropping that William Attaway represents in the mid-twentieth century setting of *Blood on the Forge*, but in both depictions, racial oppression becomes a basis for creating limitations on freedom and movement. While the effects of racial belongings vary by time period, the recurrence of adverse consequences of particular categories of belonging illustrates the depth and duration of the oppression that people of marginalized groups encounter.

Systemic discrimination is a primary reason that the oppressions black people experience persist, and the African American and African Canadian novels I engage also demonstrate some of the ways systemic discrimination (e.g. racism and sexism) oftentimes exists on a national scale in the United States and on a provincial scale in Canada. These novels also show the importance of national and provincial critiques and action that address the discriminatory treatment black people experience in different diasporic places.<sup>lviii</sup> Some of these novelists, such as Mairuth Sarsfield in *No Crystal Stair*, directly participate in this provincial critique by, for example, pinpointing the provincial policies that sanction sexism. Madame LaRoche, one of the characters in *No Crystal Stair*, works to combat the Napoleonic Code in Quebec that renders women “chattel.” Marion, the protagonist of the novel, experiences the code’s consequences

when she has to rely on her male friend to sign for her lease and utilities. Madame LaRoche is aware that the specific consequences that Marion experiences represent the broad implications of sexism for women in Quebec. Therefore, the solutions to discriminatory treatment that Madame LaRoche promotes, such as utilizing voting rights, take into account some of the ways in which experiences such as Marion's represent the pervasive impact of sexism.<sup>lix</sup> As illustrated in Marion's predicament, the problems and solutions Sarsfield represents in *No Crystal Stair* are ones that have specific manifestations for particular women but also have a broader impact on women's rights in the province of Quebec and the nation of Canada.

Other novelists discussed in this dissertation also provide the material for national and provincial critique and therefore also indirectly help to scrutinize discriminatory practices that are systemic in the United States and Canada. Works such as *The Street* (1946) and *Linden Hills* (1985) provide national critique through representations of a range of black protagonists and characters whose experiences of racial discrimination are indicative of their exclusion from national communities in which they reside. While gender and class belongings also influence their experiences of exclusion, these protagonists' racial belongings are common factors that contribute to their marginal status in their respective nations. Both novels illustrate the ramifications that marginalized belongings have for black people's sense of inclusion in the nation in which they are born and/or the nation they call home.

African Canadian and African American novels offer national critique to propel transformation of discriminatory treatment, but these novels also illustrate how diasporic belonging can serve as an alternative for people who experience exclusion from national

communities. These novels also show how diasporic belonging functions as a category of belonging for people who disavow restrictive national belongings. Ultimately, these literary representations reinforce scholarship such as Michele Wright's that asserts the significance of diasporic identity for people of African descent. Two African Canadian novels, *Someone Knows My Name* (2007) and *No Crystal Stair* (1997), provide examples of some of the ways in which literary representations illustrate the possible advantages of embracing diasporic belonging or not committing to single national belongings. In both *No Crystal Stair* and *Someone Knows My Name*, protagonists, who embrace diasporic connections, are not as burdened by the marginality experienced in respective nations as individuals who are committed to single national identifications. They deal with the consequences of this exclusionary treatment but are not preoccupied with claiming belonging to nations in which they encounter inequitable treatment. In some ways, then, these diasporic identifications help to minimize the disappointments that emerge from this exclusion. These protagonists do not have to commit exclusively to nations that do not commit to them by, for example, fostering a sense of inclusion in their national community. They can demand equality and justice in nations in which they are born or reside without being bound to those nations.

In *Someone Knows My Name*, Aminata eventually decides that it is not wise to claim a belonging to any specific place and contends, "Personally, I concluded that no place in the world was entirely safe for an African, and that for many of us, survival depended on perpetual migration" (Hill 385). This cautionary assertion about the danger of *any* national space emerges after her experiences of kidnap, enslavement, and escape lead her to different national residences including the United States and Canada. It

becomes apparent that Aminata develops this perspective because her experiences in all of the above mentioned places reflect her marginalization. Even in Britain, the place where she is ostensibly valued for her contributions to the anti-slavery cause, she senses her devaluation. She realizes that the antislavery supporters with whom she is working do not want to disseminate a truthful representation of her experiences. They want to refashion her experiences to fit the needs of their anti-slavery cause. The lack of interest in her “unadulterated” truth makes Aminata aware of the false pretenses of her counterparts in Britain. Aminata’s experiences of marginalization in Britain and other places outside of her home, Bayo, and later within her home make Aminata realize the dangers she can face in these national locations. Hence, her approach to this perpetual sense of outsidership is to assume a belonging to no place. She remains rooted in her home country, but she knows that the home she once knew no longer exists and this home could not be reproduced anywhere else. Therefore, her adverse experiences in multiple countries ultimately prompt her refusal to claim belonging to a single country.

Marion, in *No Crystal Stair*, does not approach belonging in the same way as Aminata, but she still does not claim belonging to one place. An important aspect of her understanding of her diasporic belonging is her personal history. Marion consciously recites her family history to indicate her diasporic connections (her ancestors are from places including Bermuda, the southern United States, as well as Canada). As she outlines her family history, she also indicates her decision to refuse strict belonging to any of the nationally-identified parts of her family and specifically asserts that she does not really belong to either the “earthy West Indian community” or the circle of “elegant

American ladies” represented in her family (Sarsfield 5-6). Instead, she identifies herself as more of a hybrid, in an in-between space that is conducive to diasporic identification.

Her commitment to diasporic identification becomes evident again when we learn that she is affiliated with Marcus Garvey’s “Back to Africa” movement, a movement that aimed, in part, to help transport people of the diaspora “back” to Africa. Her involvement with the “Back to Africa” movement is another indication that she is not bound to Montreal, even as she is committed to gaining equal rights and opportunities in Montreal. She still feels entitled to rights and privileges of Canadian citizenship, but her ties to her current “home” remain within a broader, diasporic framework. Marion’s pride in the diasporic representation in her family and her identification with a movement in which the concept of diaspora is central show multiple vantage points from which she develops and gains insight on her diasporic connections.

Literary works— such as *No Crystal Stair* and *Someone Knows My Name*— that represent some of the potential benefits of claiming belonging to a diasporic community also shed light on works with a primary focus on the problems of national belonging including *The Street* and *Linden Hills*. The difficulties characters experience in *The Street* and *Linden Hills* provide examples of circumstances in which diasporic communities can potentially offer refuge to people who are marginalized in their respective nations. Therefore, even literary works that have a national focus help pinpoint the advantages of diasporic belonging for people who experience exclusion from their national communities.

In *The Street*, for example, Lutie’s inability to fully achieve national belonging is situated exclusively within the problematic maltreatment of black people in the United

States. Lutie makes connections between her plight and the plight of other black people in the United States who have not been able to accomplish their dreams. Although Lutie does not consider the possibility that discriminatory treatment black people experience in the United States is representative of discriminatory practices in other nations, her focus on the systemic issues that affect blacks in her local and national communities illustrates some of the ways that these issues of oppression permeate national communities in various parts of the diaspora.

*Linden Hills*, the other work I have identified as one with more of a national focus, also represents the struggles black people experience as they try to attain the fruits of belonging to a nation that touts its commitment to equality and freedom. The characters' attempts to gain entry into a Linden Hills, an exclusive black community, represents their attempt to attain their versions of the American Dream, which they construct based on realization that they cannot access opportunities for mobility in the same way as privileged, white members of the American national community. A number of characters view Linden Hills as a symbol of the economic and social mobility that are integral to their versions of the American Dream. However, the dream that Linden Hills represents is inaccessible for blacks such as Willie because of their social and economic class status. For the people who do "make it" into Linden Hills, their dreams are circumscribed because although they have achieved a degree of economic and social mobility, they remain marginalized because of their race.

For both sets of people, those who do make it into Linden Hills and those who do not, obstacles created by race and class are represented exclusively within a national context. While the discrimination characters experience is discussed as a problem within

the United States, it also has implications for people of marginalized racial and class belongings in other nations who experience exclusion and restricted mobility because of their belongings. These experiences of discrimination provide common ground for analysis of societal issues that variably affect black people in different nations and opens space for consideration of the potential benefits of identifying with diasporic communities.

My engagement with some of these intersections between belonging and mobility as well as other aspects of my comparative study not only reinforces the significance of some of the insight cross-national studies offer but also further emphasizes the importance of attending to the *process* by which these analyses are conducted. Like scholars such as Njoki Wane, Michele Wright, and Wendy Walters who echo the need for engaging distinctions in experiences of black people throughout the world but also asserting the overall benefit of diasporic studies, I also show that it is important for transnational and diasporic studies to attend to both the commonalities and differences in cultural and national contexts. The common historical trajectories of the United States and Canada, for example, are integral to my comparative study, but other historical and cultural developments within these nations create notable distinctions that affect strategies for diasporic study.

For example, conceptualizations of race and ethnicity in the United States and Canada inform my comparisons of the affects racial belonging has on movement and freedom in these nations. While some current scholarship on race recognizes it as a social construct and questions and refutes notions that race has a biological foundation, there remains debate about whether race is a biological reality.<sup>lx</sup> Regardless of this



debate about biological bases for racial difference, racial categories continue to have social, economic, and political implications. In both the United States and Canada, racial conflicts become even more complicated when the multicultural composition of both nations challenge strict black and white racial binaries. People who are categorized as black come from a range of cultural and national backgrounds. Their experiences of exclusion and discrimination provide common ground, but their differing backgrounds may affect the specific types of marginalization they experience and the types of affects it has on their opportunities. For example, both nations are comprised of black people who are and are not native members of these national communities and experience varying degrees of exclusion. Blacks who are not native to the United States and Canada might have experiences of racial oppression similar to those of blacks who are native to these nations, but those who are treated as outsiders because of their national and cultural belongings will encounter a distinct type of exclusion. An analysis of racial belonging in a Canadian and American context should therefore incorporate a multicultural framework that accounts for the particular multicultural and international compositions of each nation and specific ways black people in these nations encounter oppression.

In my study, I carefully engage multicultural representations of racial oppression. For example, my analysis of *No Crystal Stair* highlights some of the specific implications of racial belonging for people of different cultural backgrounds in Montreal. The Montreal community that *No Crystal Stair* represents consists of black people who identify as African American, African Canadian, Afro- Russian, and West Indian. They all experience the brunt of racial discrimination, but their cultural identifications shape how they understand and contend with this discrimination. For example, Marion, who is

African Canadian, and Marushka, who is Afro-Russian, experience racial discrimination in different ways. Marushka is light enough to “pass” for white, so she passes at work to avoid some of the stigmas of being black.<sup>lxi</sup> Although passing allows her to escape the direct experience of racism, she indirectly experiences racism because she hears derogatory statements about black people. Despite her witness of the impact of racism, it is not until a guy she is dating asks her to hide her African heritage that she realizes the detrimental impact of racial discrimination. After this incident, Marushka contemplates what it must be like for her former fiancé (Otis), a visibly black man, to have to contend with marginalization because of his race. As she parts with her date, the narrator describes her reaction: “Humiliated, Marushka realized that this was actually her first direct encounter with personal bigotry” (Sarsfield 211). As she contemplates the situation, Marushka thinks, “This is what Otis constantly went through. This devaluing of one because of colour...One drop of blood from an African ancestor shapes who he is and who I am— that’s the bottom line” (Sarsfield 211). Until this moment, she is not fully aware of the ways her light skin helps her to avoid much of the racist treatment that people such as Otis constantly experience. Additionally, her sheltered upbringing and her mother’s emphasis on her white, Russian heritage prevent her, for much of her life, from confronting the marginalization that people of African ancestry encounter.

Unlike Marushka, Marion persistently contends with adverse ramifications of racial belonging. Her connections to people of multiple cultural backgrounds, including blacks from the United States and the West Indies, shape her understanding of the impact of racial discrimination for various groups of people. Early in the novel, Marion notes the presence of racism and continues to pinpoint the impact of racial discrimination on

her life and the lives of those close to her. In the beginning of the novel, she asserts that her racial belonging is the reason that she is called a “cook” instead of a “dietician.” Later in the novel, she empathizes with Otis and other young black men who do not see the value in education because they have witnessed some of the ways that racism hindered the benefits of education. Therefore, in her own situation as well as in the circumstances of others, Marion continually recognizes the detriments of racial discrimination. As the differences between Marion’s and Marushka’s encounters with racism illustrate, the specific ways that black people of different national and cultural backgrounds experience and understand racial discrimination are important distinguishing factors when examining African Canadian literatures.

These distinctions are also important for interrelated discussions of Canadian national identity because African Canadian literary representations pinpoint some of the discrepancies between the culture of inclusiveness that is implied in the multicultural national image/identity of Canada and the realities of exclusion that black Canadians experience.<sup>lxiii</sup> Ultimately, this type of engagement with some of the specificities of Canadian national identity and interrelated multicultural ideals illustrates some of the distinctions that should be noted in African diasporic studies that are inclusive of Canada. This example also shows the importance of noting particularities of other national and cultural communities when conducting cross-cultural and transnational studies.

My study also pinpoints another notable lesson for diasporic study: it can be advantageous to consider nontraditional or “unpopular” routes in comparative studies. Although Canada and the United States share a border, United States-Canada comparative studies such as mine are not abundant and arguably not a “traditional” mode

of inquiry. As noted in chapter two, historical distrust and Canadian “fear” of United States domination are some of the reasons that prevented comparative study and discussion of the United States and Canada. In addition to the minimal U.S.-Canada comparisons, there is also minimal inclusion of Canada in African diasporic studies. Oftentimes, discussions of the African diaspora focus on Africa, the United States, and the Caribbean. Therefore, on multiple levels, the exclusion of the fruitful insight that studies of African Canada can offer minimizes the complexities of transnational studies.<sup>lxiii</sup>

Both the dearth in U.S.- Canada comparisons and lack of inclusion of Canada in diasporic studies resulted from a perpetual tendency to overlook Canada in American studies and diasporic studies. This tendency hindered comparative studies of the United States and Canada, and of African America and African Canada, that could have contributed to strategies for combating common societal issues such as racism. However, as past and current comparative studies of the U.S. and Canada and diasporic studies inclusive of Canada illustrate, the tendency to overlook Canada in these studies does not decrease the importance of Canada in these studies. In fact, the comparative studies that *do* include Canada illustrate the significance of engaging Canadian perspectives. While these missed opportunities for comparative analysis are unfortunate, current comparative examinations help to make us more knowledgeable of the connections between Canada and the U.S. and between Canada and other places in the African diaspora. Additionally, there is much unexplored material (e.g. histories and anecdotal narratives) that can help us continue to produce important comparative studies of African America and African Canada and continue to include Canada in the diasporic imagination.

Both the need to note distinctions and to consider the less travelled comparative routes when conducting diasporic studies are interconnected with a more general and perhaps more simple advisory for diasporic studies: individuals, communities, and nations have interesting and instructive stories that can contribute to a range of academic and “nonacademic” quests including comparative studies and social and political activism. Some of these stories will be more useful at particular times and in specific circumstances, but they all teach us something about ourselves, our communities, our nations, and our world. They teach us that we are individuals who have distinctive attributes, but we are also connected to local, national, and global communities that also have defining features. Despite this lesson about interconnections, we know that we do not coexist easily; we have conflicting values and understandings of our places in our communities and in the world. This difficult coexistence reflects the complexities of our beings and can serve as reminder of the complexity with which we should conduct diasporic studies, studies that move us beyond both national and literary borders.

### Pedagogical Implications

The insights gained from diasporic scholarship, such as this project, have important pedagogical implications, particularly for discussions of diasporic literatures, histories, and cultures. Generally, this study and other diasporic studies that attend to complex experiences of diasporic peoples can be useful to teachers who are unfamiliar with diasporic texts and scholarship and can offer a good foundation upon which to build their knowledge bases. Additionally, in classes that engage diasporic texts, studies such as mine remind both faculty and students of the importance of engaging the nuances of

specific texts and times and considering commonalities and complexity in national and international communities.

Because the classroom allows opportunities to dialogue, contemplate, and revise conceptualizations of diaspora and consider some of the ways in which literary, historical, and cultural texts fit within a diasporic framework, this optimal space is useful for illuminating the complexities of diasporic texts. Students and professors can use the classroom space to articulate and contextualize understandings of particular texts and share thoughts about connections between diasporic literatures. For example, in my classes, my study of interconnections between movement, belonging, and freedom in African diasporic literatures will prompt class discussions and inspire class assignments that will allow students to think about and voice their thoughts about some of the distinct ways these themes emerge in a range of diasporic texts. Students will have an opportunity to compare some of the ways historical and cultural contexts shape literary representations of these themes of movement, freedom, and belonging in texts such as Ishmael Reed's *Flight to Canada* (1976), Toni Morrison's *Beloved* (1987), and Dionne Brand's *At the Full and Change of the Moon* (1997)—texts that engage questions of freedom, movement, and belonging as they depict historical experiences of enslavement that affect their protagonists in the United States, Canada, and the Caribbean. Using a diasporic lens to engage these themes is advantageous because it stimulates examination of the constant movement and migration that connects people of the African diaspora, propels consideration of the politics of belonging that influence opportunities for movement and freedom in national spaces, and provides knowledge about people's rationales for choosing diasporic identities.

The dynamic intellectual exchanges that occur in the classroom space can ultimately foster productive conversations about concepts of diaspora and diasporic texts that extend beyond the classroom. Because these texts and the conversations they inspire address extra-textual issues such as discrimination, these works stimulate dialogue about some of the ways literature not only represents particular historical and cultural contexts but also helps illuminate diasporic experiences in subsequent periods. For example, by representing specific historical and cultural moments, diasporic texts help us think about some of the ways systemic oppression emerges in different periods and persistently affects people of the African diaspora.

Because of these potential uses of diasporic literary study, diasporic literary conversations also have implications for our understanding of classic disciplinary inquiries about the reasons for the study of literature. Diasporic literary study answers this question, in part, because it produces knowledge about some of the distinct ways that people throughout the world experience multiple facets of their local, national, and international communities. Examinations of diasporic literatures expose the excitement, disappointment, sadness, joy, and multiple other feelings that accompany human existence generally and existence in particular times and place, and these examinations show how literature can contribute to our understanding of diasporic experiences. Diasporic literary study therefore has benefits that range from helping us appreciate distinct cultural productions to expanding our understanding of the social and political implications that diasporic texts have for black people throughout the world.

Ultimately, my study and studies like it are segments of a larger body of work that recognizes that national literatures and experiences do not exist in isolation but are

connected to international literatures and experiences, and these studies can therefore help students and teachers become knowledgeable of these connections. While teachers should emphasize the importance of pinpointing the differences that help to make diasporic literatures and experiences distinct, they should also demonstrate some of the advantages of discussing commonalities that diasporic peoples and texts share. Dialogue, in and outside of the classroom, about these international connections is necessary in an historical moment in which it is clear that none of us is removed from the experiences of people in other countries, near or far. Technological advances such as cellular phones and computers that allow people to communicate instantly via e-mail, chat rooms, and web cameras provide tangible evidence of the closeness of places that once seemed distant. For those who have access to technological tools, many of the experiences of people throughout the diaspora are visible, and diasporic literatures complement some of the information to which technology exposes us on a daily basis. Diasporic literary study therefore provides another lens through which we can view, engage, interrogate, and change our local, national, and international communities.



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<sup>i</sup> This is a portion of a quote from Rinaldo Walcott, which Bina Toledo Freiwald uses in “Identity, Community, and Nation in Black Canadian Women's Autobiography.” I choose the title because issues surrounding race and nationality are central to the literature studied in this dissertation. Although race and nationality are pivotal, this project also engages gender and class.

<sup>ii</sup> Because this project covers African Canadian texts published and set before and after Canadian independence (1982), I take into account differences between African Canadians’ sense of national belonging before and after Canadian independence. As documented in historical sources including *We’re Rooted Here and They Can’t Pull Us Up* (1994), African Canadians experienced exclusionary and discriminatory treatment in Canada before and after Canadian independence. Therefore, engagement with this persistent sentiment is an important task for this project. Historical moments such as recognition of Canada as an autonomous nation (1931), the passing of an act establishing Canadian citizenship (1946), and the passing of the Canada Act (1982), an act that established Canadian independence, are important to the historical contexts of this dissertation (Story 132).

<sup>iii</sup> Concepts of home are important elements of my engagement with expressions of national belonging in both African American and African Canadian texts. Susan Friedman, in “Bodies on the Move: A Poetics of Home and Diaspora,” uses an array of literary texts, anecdotes, and adages to complicate notions of home and belonging. Questions she asks illuminate the intricacies of concepts of home: “Is home a place? A memory? An ideal? An imagined space? The black hole of desire?” (195). The texts she selects answer these questions in different ways, but these questions point to convergences and divergences of physical and imaginative concepts of home. Ultimately, the various texts Friedman incorporates in this essay illustrate the multiplicity of concepts of home and the range of understandings of relationships between concepts of home and belonging. Friedman’s attention to this multiplicity is useful in my analysis of the importance of questions regarding “home” to concepts of national belonging.

<sup>iv</sup> Texts including Michele Wright’s *Becoming Black: Creating Identity in the African Diaspora* (2004) and Njoki Wane and Notisha Massaquoi’s *Theorizing Empowerment: Canadian Perspectives on Black Feminist Thought* (2007) use a range of lenses such as literary, historical, and feminist theoretical analyses to engage some of the ways racial discrimination has distinct affects on black people throughout the African diaspora.

<sup>v</sup> bell hooks does explicitly engage belonging in *Belonging: A Culture of Place* (2008); her discussion focuses primarily on her understanding of what it means to belong to places we consider home and the detriments of feeling a sense of exclusion in places in which we are not embraced. She also offers her experiences to highlight individual’s connection to the natural world.

<sup>vi</sup> While I do not always explicitly talk about freedom, my discussions of racism, sexism, and classism are essentially discussions about freedom because these oppressions limit people’s equal access to opportunities in their national communities and therefore confine them to marginal positions in those communities.

<sup>vii</sup> The beginning of this passage is a quote from Robert Butler, a scholar of American literature. In this essay, Henderson reviews Butler’s *The Open Journey*, a text she says focuses on African American authors’ assertion of “... their autonomy through their depictions of the journey motif in their fictional writing” (999).

<sup>viii</sup> For example, a common issue African American feminist writers confront is the subsumption of gender concerns to race concerns.

<sup>ix</sup> Winks also asserts that Le Jeune was not the first “Negro” in Canada. Rather, he is the first black for whom there is sufficient record (1).

<sup>x</sup> Clarke’s neologism, “Africadian,” refers to black Nova Scotian identity (107). Clarke cites the texts of Boston King and David George to support his claim (108).

<sup>xi</sup> Sylvia Hamilton, in “Naming Names, Naming Ourselves,” adds another dimension to the history of the migration of black Loyalists by noting the entrenchment of slavery in Nova Scotia by the time of the arrival of black Loyalists. While Clarke cites Africadians’ critique of United States slavery, Hamilton emphasizes the discrimination black Loyalists experienced in Nova Scotia. For example, their expectations of land and labor opportunities promised to Loyalists did not come to fruition (Hamilton 21).

<sup>xiii</sup> This title is borrowed from Pauline Hopkins’ novel, *Contending Forces* (1900). In Hopkins’ novel and this chapter, this title captures some of the conflicts or contending forces that arise from the adverse ramifications of racial belonging.

<sup>xiii</sup> Hayden White, in “The Historical Text as Literary Artifact,” discusses the intersections between history and literature. In establishing his argument, Hayden White references R. G. Collingwood’s insistence that “the historian was above all a story teller” (White 83). White complicates Collingwood’s assertion by contending that the most historical events can do is offer “story elements.” Further, White asserts, “[t]he events are *made* into a story by the suppression and subordination of certain of them [elements] and the highlighting of others...” (84).

<sup>xiv</sup> See Dodson and Diouf’s *In Motion: The African American Migration Experience* (2004).

<sup>xv</sup> Dodson and Diouf, in *In Motion: The African American Migration Experience*, also draw distinctions between forced and voluntary migrations but are careful to emphasize the role of blacks’ willpower in their migrations. Carole C. Marks, in “In Search of the Promised Land: Black Migration and Urbanization, 1900-1940,” also emphasizes blacks’ empowerment: “Labor migrants were active participants in the migration process. They decided the timing of their moves, making decisions about location, specific employment, and even the nature of that employment. They constantly attempted to control the world around them through negotiation, bargaining, and compromise” (183).

<sup>xvi</sup> Other black Loyalists went to Florida and Jamaica (Winks 31-33).

<sup>xvii</sup> Black Pioneers were a company of Loyalist soldiers who provided engineering duties such as clearing grounds for camps and digging.

<sup>xviii</sup> John Clarkson was born in 1764. He served in the Royal Navy since he was eleven, and after witnessing bloodshed during his service, he became an advocate of “universal peace” and resigned his commission. At the time he sailed to Halifax, Nova Scotia, he was twenty-seven. Prior to volunteering for the mission, he was working to gather information on the slave trade. He was the younger brother of Thomas Clarkson, who had dedicated his life to the abolition of the slave trade (Winks 62-65).

<sup>xix</sup> Before the migration, Parr passed away and the new governor of Nova Scotia, Richard Bulkeley, was more helpful in assisting with the migration to Sierra Leone (Winks 62-70).

<sup>xx</sup> Winks estimates that one-third to one-half of the blacks who migrated from Nova Scotia to Sierra Leone in 1792 were born in Africa (61).

<sup>xxi</sup> The group of blacks who journeyed from Nova Scotia to Sierra Leone in 1792 was the first of two groups of blacks who migrated from Nova Scotia to Sierra Leone. The second was the Maroons who had been exiled from Jamaica in 1796. They, too, were unhappy with the conditions of Nova Scotia and decided to migrate to Sierra Leone in 1800. They arrived during the rebellion of the first group of blacks who migrated. Maroons were used to help quell the rebellion of the earlier settled blacks and were given Granville Town and one thousand acres of land as reward for their efforts (Winks 81-94).

<sup>xxii</sup> Some of Hill’s sources include classic slave narratives, African Canadian and European accounts of black Loyalists, books about slaves’ hair and clothing, South Carolina histories, books about Jews in South Carolina, books about the transatlantic slave trade, old maps of Africa, and a range of other sources (Hill 475-479).

<sup>xxiii</sup> To native Africans in Sierra Leone, she is now a Nova Scotian. Ironically, when in Nova Scotia she is regarded as a Loyalist or a negro and therefore still an outsider.

<sup>xxiv</sup> With the passing of the Abolition Act of 1793 in Upper Canada, runaway slaves entering the country were free (Mensah 49; Abdi 51).

<sup>xxv</sup> Mary Ann Shadd Cary migrated from Delaware to Canada West in September of 1850. Prior to her migration, she was a school teacher in Delaware. When she moved to Canada West, she continued her role as an educator. She also edited the *Provincial Freeman*, an African Canadian newspaper (Almonte).

<sup>xxvi</sup> According to Almonte, there is no record of sales figures for *A Plea* and no precise information on the amount of copies printed. It is known that Shadd Cary sold copies of the book during her lecture tours in the United States and Canada to help maintain her livelihood (Almonte 19).

<sup>xxvii</sup> Additionally, as early as 1830s blacks in Amherstburg (along the Niagara frontier) were relegated to back galleries entitled “Nigger Heaven” (Winks 148).

<sup>xxviii</sup> Dodson and Diouf note that the Red Summer, triggered in Chicago in 1919, had its beginning in 1917 in East St. Louis, Illinois. The riot in East St. Louis occurred after African American workers were hired to break a strike at an aluminum plant. As disgruntled trade unionists left a meeting they had called to tell the mayor to stop black migration, they were told that a black man accidentally shot a white man during a holdup. As the rumor spread, the story shifted; the shooting became intentional and involved an insulted white woman and eventually white girls. Mobs formed and raided the streets; at the end of the riot, forty-

eight African Americans were dead, hundreds were injured, and over three hundred buildings were destroyed (129).

<sup>xxxix</sup> Perhaps recognition of this unfortunate state motivated movement back to the South. Marks, for example, notes that some migrants migrated north only to earn and save money and intended to return to the South. Weather and undoubtedly experiences of discrimination contributed to dislike of the North for a number of migrants (185).

<sup>xxx</sup> Hahn contends, “Many of the landmark political developments of twentieth-century America—electoral realignments, the New Deal, industrial unionism, the Great Society, and, of course, the battle for civil rights—would be difficult to imagine outside of this massive demographic shift that then continued, and accelerated, over the next three decades” (465). Marks notes other important demographic shifts: between 1890 and 1930, the number of black school teachers more than doubled, the number of black businesses tripled, and black illiteracy declined from sixty-one to fifteen percent because of the rise of public, segregated schools (189).

<sup>xxxvi</sup> Benedict Anderson’s concept of a nation as an “imagined community” informs both Hall’s discussion and my own. While Anderson’s formulations are confined to geographical boundaries of the nation, in my discussion, concepts of national identity are ones that travel beyond the physical limits of nation.

<sup>xxxvii</sup> A range of texts have distinct and important implications for my specific focus, comparison of the impact of Lutie’s and Bernice’s racial, class, and gender belongings on their mobility. These texts include William Scott’s “Material Resistance and the Agency of the Body in Ann Petry’s *The Street*,” Carol Henderson’s “The ‘Walking Wounded’: Rethinking Black Women’s Agency in Ann Petry’s *The Street*,” Carole Boyce Davies’ *Moving Beyond Boundaries: Critical Dimensions of Black Women’s Writing*, and Arun Mukherjee “Canadian Nationalism, Canadian Literature and Racial Minority Women.”

<sup>xxxviii</sup> The work of earlier feminist scholars such as Frances Beale and Deborah King as well more current feminist scholarship such as bell hooks’ and Patricia Hill Collins’ work inform my discussion of intersecting categories of identity.

<sup>xxxix</sup> These principles are emphasized in Franklin’s *Autobiography* (1771-1789) and *Poor Richard’s Almanac* (1733-1738).

<sup>xl</sup> See David Larson’s introduction to *Poor Richard’s Almanac* (1998).

<sup>xli</sup> Horatio Alger’s (1832-1899) “rags to riches” stories also shape conceptualizations of the American Dream as a discourse of opportunity that is available to all Americans who work hard.

<sup>xlii</sup> Katharine Dunn, in “In Search of the Canadian Dream (2004),” pinpoints the ambiguity of Canadian identity but does not address the Canadian Dream indicated in the title. Therefore, the evocation of the Canadian Dream in an article that discusses the uncertainty about Canadian identity implies that the Canadian Dream is also not defined. George Elliot Clarke, in “White Like Canada” (1997), does not talk specifically about the Canadian Dream—and does not give any indication that he will—but also argues that Canadian identity is ambiguous.

<sup>xliiii</sup> Konrad Gross implicitly points out one key difference between the discourses of opportunity in the United States and Canada when he notes that in contrast to a notion of unlimited opportunities in the U.S., there is an acceptance of limitations in Canada (591). Despite this distinction though, the ideology of community and metaphor of the mosaic that are integral to Canadian national identity indicate a willingness to allow the every national community member to thrive. Like in the U.S., however, these ideas do not necessarily manifest in reality.

<sup>xliiii</sup> Hartwig Isernhagen, in “Canadian Identity and the Challenge of Multiculturalism,” also deals with the conflict between ideal and reality when he discusses multiculturalism in Canada.

<sup>xliv</sup> The West Indian Domestic Scheme (1955) was an employer-sponsored scheme that recruited women from the English-speaking Caribbean. The scheme lasted seven years, and hundreds or thousands of women were recruited to perform work that white women no longer wanted to do. To be eligible, the women had to have an eighth grade education, be between ages eighteen and thirty-five with no dependents, and pass a medical exam (Carty 218-219).

<sup>xlv</sup> These and other extratextual implications of Bernice’s and Lutie’s experiences resonate with formulations in works such as Carole Boyce Davies’, which emphasize the significance of black women’s attempts to transcend restrictive ramifications of belonging that would prevent their access to national discourses of opportunity.

<sup>xliii</sup> Petry's depictions of the insurmountable environmental forces that obstruct Lutie's path reflect elements of the naturalistic mode of fiction, which, in part, focuses on effects of environment on people's character and behavior. Partially because of Petry's naturalistic focus on the severe impact of environment on characters, critics liken Petry's *The Street* to Richard Wright's *Native Son*. Other writers who are linked to Wright and publish during the same period as Petry include Chester Himes and William Attaway.

<sup>xliiii</sup> Helène Cristol, in "'The Black Woman's Burden': Black Women and Work in *The Street*," also asserts that Lutie is ignorant of the impact of the politics of race, class, and gender on her opportunities (152).

<sup>xliiv</sup> This is one of a number of comparisons of plights of blacks in Canada and in the United States.

Characters compare conditions of blacks in Toronto to that of blacks in the south generally and in Alabama and Mississippi specifically. For example, Dots references the brutality of the church bombing that killed the four young girls in Birmingham, Alabama in 1963. *The Meeting Point's* direct engagement with international conversations is an important reason this text is fruitful for comparison to *The Street* and useful in considering the implications of literary work for social and cultural questions.

<sup>xlv</sup> As Henry recalls Bernice's frustration, he notes that no one speaks to him either. He also notes that the working-class Jewish man who lives next to him experiences the same isolation on street cars. This shared experience indicates that this sense of outsidership is connected to both racial and class belonging.

<sup>xlvi</sup> Patricia Hill Collins' "outsider-within" formulation illuminates Bernice's vantage point (See *Fighting Words*). Also, in "Invisible Hands at Work: Domestic Service and Meritocracy in Ann Petry's Novels," Rachel Peterson discusses the insider vantage point of domestics that allows them to witness the disparities between public image and private reality. Although Lutie embraces the American Dream, as forwarded by the Chandlers, she also contemplates what it really means to achieve this dream when she recognizes that the Chandlers are not happy, despite all of their money.

<sup>xlvii</sup> Henry's and Boysie's experiences also contribute significantly to *The Meeting Point's* historically-engaged representations of exclusionary treatment in Toronto. Critics of *The Meeting Point* pinpoint some of these important extratextual implications. For example, in "Changing the Metropolis or Being Changed by It; Toronto West Indians in Austin Clarke's Trilogy" (1991), Michel Fabre notes the pessimistic outlook with which Clarke portrays Toronto but also contends that this portrayal seems to be a "well-balanced" picture of black immigration in Canada, given the "restrictions in space [Toronto] and time [1960-1975]." Horace L. Goddard, in "The Immigrants' Pain: The Socio-Literary Context of Austin Clarke's Trilogy," also notes the extratextual relevance of Clarke's work: "Both as independent novels, and as a series which develops a sense of continuity, the books portray vividly the social, economic, and racial concerns of blacks in Toronto and its rich suburban areas" (39).

<sup>xlviii</sup> As previously mentioned, through the West Indian Domestic Scheme (1955), the Canadian government actively recruited West Indian women to become domestics in Canada. The West Indian Domestic Scheme not only limited the ways that black women could benefit from Canadian discourses of opportunity but also heightened black men's exclusion from some of these discourses. While black women who participated in the West Indian Domestic Scheme received relative advantages, their relegation to domestic jobs indicated that they were to have restricted roles in Canadian communities and limited access to opportunities for economic mobility. Therefore, this scheme ultimately inhibited black men and women from fully accessing Canadian discourses of opportunity.

<sup>xlix</sup> *No Crystal Stair's* depiction of blacks' mid-twentieth century experiences with oppression also resonates with discriminatory treatment blacks continue to encounter during the historical moment in which the novel is published. African Canadian scholars including George Elliott Clarke, Rinaldo Walcott, and Joseph Mensah pinpoint some of the ways blacks continue to be excluded from Canadian national imaginaries and discriminated against in the late twentieth century.

<sup>1</sup> Her sense of hybridity and nonexclusive belonging represents the migratory subjectivity Carole Boyce Davies theorizes in *Black Women, Writing and Identity* and Andrea Davis expounds upon in "Diaspora, Citizenship and Gender: Challenging the Myth of the Nation in African Canadian Women's Literature." Davies' concept of migratory subjectivity highlights black women's multiple identities and emphasizes the importance of locating black women's writing in "myriad places and times" (36). Andrea Davis asserts that migratory subjectivity is interrelated with the concept of diaspora; like migratory subjectivity, diaspora attempts to capture the collective while also challenging "hegemonic patriarchal control of geographical, political, and cultural borders" (Davis 65). Davis recognizes Sarsfield's creation of characters of multiple



ethnicities who challenge those national and cultural borders and therefore exhibit a sense of migratory subjectivity (66).

<sup>li</sup> Torrie Delacourt is also aware of the unfairness of the Coloured Ladies Club's discriminatory treatment against her. From her perspective, this rejection compounds the exile she feels from her home state, Kansas. Her rejection in Montreal is more of an affront because she notes that she is rejected by women to whom she feels intellectually and economically superior (Sarsfield 73). She is rightfully agitated at her rejection by the Coloured Ladies Club, but she, too, creates division by asserting her superiority to the women of the Coloured Ladies Club. By creating this division, she also overlooks the ways the community would benefit from her alliance with the Club. However, she is eventually able to use her connections to help the Club raise money.

<sup>lii</sup> In "Rewriting Race and Ethnicity across the Border: Mairuth Sarsfield's *No Crystal Stair* and Nella Larsen's *Quicksand* and *Passing*," Jessica Wegmann-Sánchez notes that Canada's multicultural policy (1971), Multiculturalism Act (1988), and tradition of accepting more than one heritage informs Sarsfield's representation of individual's complex cultural heritage (139).

<sup>liii</sup> Jessica Wegmann-Sánchez also notes that Edmond's discovery of the land he bought metaphorically represents blacks' sharing in Canadian society (157).

<sup>liv</sup> See, for example, Wendy Walters' *At Home in Diaspora* (2005), Michele Wright's *Becoming Black* (2004), and Wade Compton's *Bluesprint: Black British Colombian Literature and Orature* (2001).

<sup>lv</sup> Paul Gilroy, a reputable scholar of diasporic studies, also recognizes the cultural specificities that impact diasporic analysis. In *The Black Atlantic* (1993), Gilroy argues that the African diaspora is a paradigm for black cultural analysis but also recognizes the conflicts within widely dispersed communities within the diaspora. These conflicts interrupt easy comparisons of diasporic cultures and experiences but are not enough to discount the usefulness of these comparisons.

<sup>lvi</sup> Historical works such as Ronald Segal's *The Black Diaspora* (1995) and Michael Gomez's *Reversing Sail* (2005) demonstrate heightened interest in diasporic studies in other disciplines.

<sup>lvii</sup> She credits Alexander's "Erotic Autonomy as Politics of Decolonization" (1997), Grewal and Kaplan's *Scattered Hegemonies: Postmodernity and Transnational Feminist Practice* (1994), and Chandra Mohanty's "Critical Feminist Genealogies: On the Geography and Politics of Home and Nation" (1998) as influences for this formulation.

<sup>lviii</sup> This national critique and diasporic identification also occurred in earlier periods. For example, Sandra Gunning, in "Nancy Prince and the Politics of Mobility, Home and Diasporic (Mis) Identification" (2001), discusses Nancy Prince's role as a diasporic subject and activist who also protested racist practices in the U.S. in the nineteenth century. Jeff Westover, in "Africa/America: Fragmentation and Diaspora in the Works of Langston Hughes" (2002), asserts that Langston Hughes had a dual vantage point as a U.S. citizen and a member of the African diaspora, and this dual vantage point helped him to criticize the failures of the American democracy and challenge America to live up to its ideals.

<sup>lix</sup> Women in Quebec gained the right to vote in 1940, so *No Crystal Stair* is set during a period in which women's voting rights had just come to fruition.

<sup>lx</sup> For example, in "'Everyone Knows It's a Social Construct': Contemporary Science and the Nature of Race" (2007), Ann Morning outlines the debate about the biological foundation of race and argues that contrary to popular belief in academia, there is not a mass academic consensus that race is a social construct. While sociologists often support the argument that race is a social construct, she contends that there are scientists who still assert that there is biological support for racial categorization.

<sup>lxi</sup> Marion's skin color also becomes a point of interest. There is some uncertainty about Marion's complexion because Marion notes an incident when an enumerator mistakes her for white, but she also notes an incident when she is mistreated at a restaurant because of her skin color and racial belonging. The former incident indicates that perhaps she is light enough to "pass," but the latter incident creates some ambivalence about her complexion.

<sup>lxii</sup> Texts including Rinaldo Walcott's *Ride: Contemporary Black Canadian Cultural Criticism* (2000), a compilation of essays by African Canadian cultural critics, and Joseph Mensah's *Black Canadians: History, Experiences, Social Conditions* (2002) engage blacks' historical experiences of exclusion from Canadian national imaginaries and related experiences of discrimination that persist into the late twentieth and early twenty-first century.

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<sup>lxiii</sup> African Canadian scholars such as Rinaldo Walcott, in *Black Like Who?*(1997), confront this exclusion. Walcott notes two factors that contribute to the relative invisibility of Canada in diasporic studies: the exclusion of black Canadians from diasporic studies and the presumed whiteness of Canada. Additionally, literary works such as Mairuth Sarsfield's *No Crystal Stair* challenge the presumed whiteness of Canada and provide representations of the inability to imagine black people as native Canadians. For example, when Marion's daughters visit a rural area in Montreal, many of the residents are unable or unwilling to believe that the girls are native to Canada. Instead, they insist that the girls are African, and residents' inability to imagine black children as native Canadians demonstrates the exclusion of black people from Canadian national imaginaries.