

Distribution Agreement

In presenting this thesis or dissertation as a partial fulfillment of the requirements for an advanced degree from Emory University, I hereby grant to Emory University and its agents the non-exclusive license to archive, make accessible, and display my thesis or dissertation in whole or in part in all forms of media, now or hereafter known, including display on the world wide web. I understand that I may select some access restrictions as part of the online submission of this thesis or dissertation. I retain all ownership rights to the copyright of the thesis or dissertation. I also retain the right to use in future works (such as articles or books) all or part of this thesis or dissertation.

Signature:

Jessica Faye Hinton

July 9, 2009
Date

**“Till Death or Distance Do You Part”: Representations of African American Marriages
in the Works of Fiction Writers and Social Scientists**

By

Jessica Faye Hinton
Master of Arts
English

Frances Smith Foster, Ph. D
Advisor

Leslie Harris, Ph. D
Committee Member

Accepted:

Lisa A. Tedesco, Ph. D
Dean of the Graduate School

Date

**“Till Death or Distance Do You Part”: Representations of African American Marriages
in the Works of Fiction Writers and Social Scientists**

By

Jessica Faye Hinton
B.A., University of Maryland, 2005

Advisor: Frances Smith Foster, Ph. D.

An abstract of
A thesis submitted to the Faculty of the Graduate School of Emory University
in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of
Master of Arts in English
2009

Abstract

“Till Death or Distance Do You Part”: Representations of African American Marriages in the Works of Fiction Writers and Social Scientists

By Jessica Faye Hinton

By the late twentieth-century, the marriages of black men and black women had become a focal point within the politically charged debate that followed the 1965 publication of the Moynihan report on the “black family.” As the pivot upon which the debate stood, the institution of marriage served both opponents and defenders of the historic and contemporary “black family” as a critical site for understanding how black men and black women defined their families and households. Discussions on the marriages of African American persons, however, did not begin in the twentieth century, nor were they limited to fields of History, or even Sociology for that matter. Conversations on marriage, and its relation to African American culture, had begun as far back as the nineteenth century, if not earlier, often appearing in the most unexpected and unlikely of places. One such “unexpected and unlikely place” that we can now find a wealth of material on the subject of black marriages is in the works of fiction writers.

This thesis is meant to reveal the significance of those “unlikely” writings on black marriages produced by post-nineteenth century fiction writers, and their relation to those written by social scientists during the same period. One of my intentions in writing this thesis is to bring to light the often neglected significance of post-nineteenth century fiction authors’ interest in the marriages of black men and black women. A second intention is to integrate their perspectives with those of major social scientists of the “black family.” Most do not think of fictional writers such as Victor Sejour, Zora Neale Hurston, or Toni Morrison as being, in the same way as authors such as U.B. Phillips, Herbert Gutman, and Eugene Genovese, writers on the topic of black marriages. Despite the assumptions otherwise, and as this study seeks to reveal, the works of fiction writers on the topic of black marriages are a wonderful resource from which to gain a fuller understanding of the complex issues surrounding representations of black marriages.

**“Till Death or Distance Do You Part”: Representations of African American Marriages
in the Works of Fiction Writers and Social Scientists**

By

Jessica Faye Hinton
B.A., University of Maryland, 2005

Advisor: Frances Smith Foster, Ph. D.

A thesis submitted to the faculty of the Graduate School of Emory University
in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of
Master of Arts in English
2009

Acknowledgments

First and foremost, I would like to thank my family for supporting me financially, emotionally, and spiritually throughout this entire process. A special thanks goes to my husband, Abdulaziz and grandmother, Willie Mae, who both, in their own ways, inspired my writing on this topic. Last, but certainly not least, I would like to say thank-you to my advisors, Dr. Frances Smith Foster and Dr. Leslie Harris. I could not have completed or conceived of such a project without your support, wisdom, and guidance.

CONTENTS

Introduction.....	1
I. <u>Depictions of Slave Marriage in the Mid-Nineteenth Century Fiction Text</u>	
a. Victor Sejour’s “The Mulatto”.....	5
b. Harriet Beecher Stowe’s <i>Uncle Tom’s Cabin</i>	9
c. William Wells Brown’s <i>Clotel</i>	13
II. <u>Twentieth Century Black Marriages in Slavery and Freedom</u>	
a. Ulrich Bonner Phillips’ <i>American Negro Slavery</i>	19
b. Zora Neale Hurston’s <i>Their Eyes Were Watching God</i>	21
c. E. Franklin Frazier’s <i>The Negro Family in the United States</i>	24
d. Gwendolyn Brook’s <i>Maud Martha</i>	27
e. Kenneth Stamp’s <i>The Peculiar Institution: Slavery in the Ante-Bellum South</i>	30
f. Stanley M. Elkins’s <i>Slavery: A Problem in American Institutional and Intellectual Life</i>	32
III. Daniel P. Moynihan’s <i>The Negro Family: A Case for National Action</i> (1965).....	34
IV. <u>Rewriting Black Marriages and Families in the Late Twentieth Century</u>	
a. Toni Morrison’s <i>The Bluest Eye</i>	37

b.	Eugene Genovese's <i>Roll Jordan Roll</i>	42
c.	Gayl Jones' <i>Corregidora</i>	44
d.	Herbert Gutman's <i>The Black Family in Slavery and Freedom</i>	48
e.	Alice Walker's <i>The Color Purple</i>	50
f.	Deborah Gray White's <i>Ar'nt I a Woman</i>	56
V.	Conclusion	59
VI.	Bibliography.....	63

In this thesis, I compare nineteenth and twentieth century representations of African American marriages in works of fiction writers and social scientists. While much attention has been given to the social science proclamations on black marriages, and with the exception of studies such as Ann DuCille's *The Coupling Convention: Sex, Text and Tradition in Black Women's Fiction* (1993), the significance of the "marriage plots" found in nineteenth and twentieth century fiction to larger conceptual conversations on marriage has been largely ignored.¹ For the most part, we do not think of figures such as Victor Sejour, William Wells Brown, Zora Neale Hurston, Gwendolyn Brooks, and Toni Morrison as writers on the subject, despite the fact that significant portions of their writings depict several kinds of African American marriages. Using social science and fiction texts that represent trends within three eras, my study will bring to light the often unacknowledged significance of fiction to larger discussions on black marriages. It will also explore ways in which fiction writers have been writing about African American marriages, and consider how their writings complement and, in some cases, contrast with those of their social science counterparts.

The first section, Depictions of Slave Marriage in the Mid-Nineteenth Century Fiction Text, considers antebellum fiction: "The Mulatto" (1837), by Victor Sejour; *Uncle Tom's Cabin* (1852), by Harriet Beecher Stowe; and *Clotel; or, The President's Daughter: A Narrative of Slave Life in the United States* (1853), by William Wells Brown. These writings serve to thematically foreground the later twentieth century works of fiction writers and social scientists discussed in this study. The key themes coming out of their writings on the subject of marriage being: sexuality, gender relations, and cultural autonomy. The second section, Twentieth Century

¹ DuCille, Ann. *The Coupling Convention: Sex, Text and Tradition in Black Women's Fiction*. New York: Oxford University Press, 1993.

Black Marriages in Slavery and Freedom, considers twentieth century works: *American Negro Slavery* (1918), by Ulrich Bonner Phillips, *Their Eyes Were Watching God* (1937), by Zora Neale Hurston; *The Negro Family in the United States* (1939), by E. Franklin Frazier; *Maud Martha* (1953), by Gwendolyn Brooks; *The Peculiar Institution* (1956), by Kenneth Stampp; and *Slavery: A Problem in American Institutional and Intellectual Life* (1959), by Stanley Elkins. Because Daniel P. Moynihan's *The Negro Family: A Case for National Action* (1965) has such prominence, I discuss it separately following the formal second section. The third section, Rewriting Black Marriages and Families in the Late Twentieth Century, considers late twentieth century works: *The Bluest Eye* (1970), by Toni Morrison; *Roll Jordan Roll* (1972), by Eugene Genovese; *Corregidora* (1975), by Gayl Jones; *The Black Family in Slavery and Freedom* (1976), by Herbert Gutman; *The Color Purple*, by Alice Walker (1982); and *Ar'nt I a Woman* (1985), by Deborah Gray White.

My study demonstrates that fiction and non-fiction writings about black marriage are influenced by social, political, and intellectual forces. While discussions of slave marriage did not fully take hold in the social sciences until the twentieth century, by the nineteenth-century, discussions of the topic appeared in the works of such anti-slavery fiction writers as, William Wells Brown, Victor Sejour, and Harriet Beecher Stowe. These authors worked discussions of marriage into larger critiques of slavery's detrimental impact on slave families. In Brown's 1853 publication of *Clotel*, for example, he argues that one of the greatest crimes of slavery was that enslaved men and women could not legally marry. For early twentieth century historians such as U.B. Phillips, discussions of slave marriages served in larger projects often intent on responding to the "negro question." In such discussions, marriage was cited as one of the many "gifts" that enslavement had bestowed on the "darker race." By the 1930's,

sociologist E. Franklin Frazier concluded that the alleged high rates of sexual licentiousness, promiscuity, and illegitimacy found among twentieth-century urban lower-class black communities were caused by what he interpreted as an historical “absence” of marriage in enslaved communities.

In the second part of the twentieth-century, there seemed to be an increase in writings on black marriages. Influenced by the Black Power and Feminist movements, black women writers such as Toni Morrison and Gayl Jones began to offer revisions to the early twentieth century marriage plots found in the works of Gwendolyn Brooks and Zora Neale Hurston. Social scientists of the decade also offered revisions to the early twentieth century narratives on black marriages that were used by Moynihan to foreground his watershed report. Unlike their early twentieth century predecessors, who argued that marriage was historically absent from black communities, the new social scientists sought to establish the importance of enslaved men and monogamous, heterosexual marriages in defining slave households. For example, in his 1972 study, *Roll Jordan Roll*, Eugene Genovese redefined slave marriage as one of the many ways that enslaved persons defied their slave status. And in *The Black Family in Slavery and Freedom*, Herbert Gutman demonstrated that enslaved persons, despite their enslavement, did marry and men, not women, assumed dominant roles in the slave household.²

Amidst the debates over welfare reform of the eighties, fiction writer Alice Walker and social scientist Deborah Gray White continued to reconsider and revise interpretations of marriage and its relationship to the gender roles and sexuality of black men and black women.

² In their efforts of rewriting the narrative on slave families and marriages, Genovese and Gutman relied heavily on the contributions of James Blassingame and George Rawick.

Blassingame, James. *The Slave Community: Plantation Life in the Antebellum South*. New York: Oxford University Press, 1972.

²Rawick, George. *The American Slavery: A Composite Autobiography*. Westport, Conn: Greenwood Press, 1972.

Walker and White were similar to the fiction writers of the seventies in their tendency of presenting heterosexual, monogamous marriage as an honored component of African American communities, while at the same time, questioning through their inclusion of other kinds of relationships whether such a model of marriage was natural or necessary.

Depictions of Slave Marriage in the Mid Nineteenth Century Fiction Text

By the mid-nineteenth century, slave families had become fixtures in fictional writings protesting against the institution of slavery. A byproduct of the increased focus on slave families was a reconsideration of the role of marriage in the lives of enslaved men and women. In their writings, these authors boldly re-imagined marriage not as legal contract, but as social one that was validated by enslaved men and women through their expressed behaviors and intentions. Harriet Beecher Stowe's *Uncle Tom's Cabin* (1852) may be cited as one of the most widely read fictional texts of the nineteenth century to include slave marriages within a larger conversation on the evils of the institution, but it was by no means the first or last of its kind. For example, Victor Sejour (1837) and Williams Wells Brown (1853) also depicted African American marriage in their anti-slavery writings. While the fictional writings depicting slave marriages during this period can be said to differ in some ways, for the most part, and as made evident in the writings of Stowe, Sejour, and Brown, they share some remarkable similarities, particularly in their treatment of the constraints of enslavement on the possibilities of marriage for enslaved persons.

One of the ways that some nineteenth-century fiction writers such as Sejour, Stowe, and Brown revealed the detrimental impact of enslavement on slave marriages was through their use

of mulatto characters. Through these characters, these authors questioned the legal discourses of the day surrounding race, slavery, and bourgeois cultural mores pertaining to family and religious ideology. While mulatto characters were stock figures of nineteenth century canonical fiction, to say that mulatto characters were the only means through which nineteenth century authors imagined the marriages of enslaved persons would be incorrect. Indeed, and as will perhaps best be revealed in the discussion of Stowe's novel, the heterosexual couplings of non-mulatto slave characters did have a place in nineteenth century literature on slave marriages. However, and as exemplified in Stowe's depiction of that "marriage-like" relationship between Aunt Chloe and Uncle Tom, when writing the intimate relationships of non-mulatto slaves into fictional works for white audiences, writers often relied and perpetuated stereotypic notions of black men and black women.

Many argue that when it was published, "The Mulatto" (1837) was intended by its author, Victor Sejour, to serve in the support of the abolition of slavery, not in Haiti, the setting of the story, but throughout the Americas.³ "The Mulatto," or Georges, is the son of a Senegalese woman named Laïsa and the slave of a powerful and rich slaveholder Albert, whose life he once saved. In the short story, Georges marries Zelia, "...a mulatto about eighteen or twenty years old, standing very straight and tall" (Sejour 292). When Albert tries to rape Zelia, she fights him off, a crime which death is the penalty. Georges begs Albert to spare his wife's life, but Albert

³ Like other black writers at the time, Haiti is used by Sejour as a sign of the possibilities of black revolution and liberation. Given that slavery had ended in Haiti at the time of Sejour's writing, the reference back to the enslaved country is significant as it marks his authorial will to narrate a history that in a sense had already been written. Seen in this light, Georges' actions against master Albert at the end of the short story serve to foreshadow the actions of other slaves to end slavery on the island. Victor Sejour's connection to the island however, was not only metaphorical. His father, Jean Francois Louis Victor Sejour Marcou, was a native of the island, while Victor and his free black mother were natives of New Orleans, Louisiana. At the age of nineteen, Sejour traveled to Paris, France to further his education and to find work. While there, Sejour met Cyrille Bisette, editor of the Parisian abolitionist journal *La Revue des Colonies*, who published Sejour's short story "The Mulatto" or, as it was called in French, "Le Mulatre," in March of 1837.

refuses and Zelia is executed. Georges avenges himself by killing his master, and his master's family. As Albert is dying, Georges learns that Albert is his father, news that inspires him to commit suicide.

Understanding the marital roles and expectations of Zelia and Georges is difficult because Sejour gives few details. For example, readers are not only left to make sense of the "how" of that marriage, but also the "why." Given the legal restrictions placed on the marriages of enslaved persons, the narrator's sudden and unapologetic introduction of the union of Zelia and Georges, taken together with its limited development in the story, is significant. Sejour introduces their marriage shortly after the scene in which Georges saves his master's life by warding off the attacks of some bandits. Sejour writes, "Ah, I've forgotten to tell you that Georges had a wife, by the name Zelia, whom he loved with every fiber of his being..." (292).

Despite the seeming insignificance by which their marriage is introduced into the story, the proclamation's significance is both structural and thematic. Structurally, the first half of the story centers on the development of Georges, the young, faithful, orphaned slave, who looks to Albert as a father-like figure. The second half of the story centers on Georges' entrance into manhood, which is marked by his marriage to Zelia, and simultaneous emotional detachment from Albert. The thematic significance of marriage in the short story is revealed in Sejour's characterizations of Laïsa and Zelia. The narrative begins at the sale of Georges' mother, Laïsa, who is described as a Senegalese woman so beautiful that from every mouth leaps the exclamation "How pretty" (Sejour 288). During Laïsa's sale, the auctioneer assures Albert that she is, "As pure as the morning dew. But for that matter you yourself can..." (Sejour 288). Albert in return says, "No, no there's no need. I trust you" (Sejour 289). Later, readers learn that

Laïsa, the woman described as pure in this opening scene, is made to submit to the sexual advances of Albert. The narrator glosses the details, but says:

I won't tell you everything he did in order to possess Laïsa; for in the end she was virtually raped. For almost a year, she shared her master's bed. But Albert was already beginning to tire of her; he found her ugly, cold, and insolent. About this time the poor woman gave birth to a boy and gave him the name Georges. Albert refused to recognize him, drove the mother from his presence, and relegated her to the most miserable hut on his lands, despite the fact that he knew very well, as well as one can, that he was the child's father. (Sejour 290)

In a similar scene in which Sejour describes Albert's sexual advances towards Zelia, he says:

Georges lay for twelve days somewhere between life and death. Albert visited him often; and driven on by some faithful chance, he became enamored of Zelia. But unfortunately for him, she was not one of these women who sell their favors or use them to tribute their master. She repelled Albert's propositions with humble dignity; for she never forgot that this was a master speaking to a slave. Instead of being moved by this display of a virtue that is so rare among women, above all among those who like Zelia, are slaves, and who, everyday, see their shameless companions prostitute themselves to the colonists, thereby only feeding more licentiousness instead of being moved, as I said, Albert flew into a rage. (292)

While asserting Zelia's strong will to resist Albert's sexual advances, Sejour leaves the reason

why she resists unstated. While not using the word “marriage” in his explanation of Zelia’s action or Laïsa’s inaction, Sejour implies it through his implicit construction of these two women around the two thematic issues of purity and chastity. An important detail included by Sejour in his description of Laïsa on the auction block is that she was “pure.” The fact that Laïsa was a woman of virtue prior to becoming the slave of Albert serves to displace the responsibility of her later actions. As an enslaved woman, Laïsa’s purity is not compromised by her sexual violations because she did not have a choice in the matter.

Marriage also bears a relation to Georges and Zelia’s expected gender roles. As a husband, one of Georges’ responsibilities is to protect and ensure the safety of his wife. One of Zelia’s roles, as can be read from the scene in which Albert attempts to seduce her, is to guard her chastity and honor her husband’s right over her sexually. This point is not explicitly made in the text, but is implied through the author’s construction of Zelia from her identity as a wife. It is her identity as Georges’ wife that is most salient in the short story.⁴

The tragic irony of the gender roles pursued by Zelia and Georges is that they exist in direct opposition to those imagined for enslaved persons living beneath the institution of slavery. In his emphasis on the purity of Zelia and the masculine pride of Georges, Sejour focuses on the ways in which their expectations of marriage compare with those attributed to white bourgeois society. In doing so, Sejour deemphasizes the relation of their marriage to stereotypic understandings of the conjugal relations between black men and black women as

⁴ While Zelia is described in relation to other slave women, such as on page 18, there is no place in the short story that addresses her condition as a slave woman. Significantly, Sejour’s silence on Zelia’s life as a slave serves, perhaps intentionally, to undermine questions surrounding her actual life of servitude and to strengthen her appearance in the short story as an “ordinary” wife. I place the word “ordinary” in quotation marks, to emphasize the constructed nature of the term, and its often imposed relativity to notions of white cultural and social mores when discussing enslaved person.

reflecting sexual immorality and impiety. The implicit crime in the marriage of Zelia and Georges, as Sejour sees it, is that, as enslaved people, they do not have the legal or cultural protections of other married couples. Despite being denied those protections, Sejour persists in his depiction of Georges as an enslaved man who considers his marriage, wife, and manhood equal to those of white men. Acknowledging this point is critical to understanding the significance of the actions that Georges takes following Albert's attempted rape of Zelia, an act which threatened not only to undermine Georges' authority as a husband, but also as a man.

Depicting the tragedy of slave marriages, and to a much lesser extent the consequences of those ties being broken, would also be something that Harriet Beecher Stowe would do in *Uncle Tom's Cabin* (1852). Her novel presents two marriages between African Americans. The first and most detailed marriage in the novel is that between Eliza and George Harris. Stowe introduces the subplot of this marriage in the second chapter. Eliza is described as a beautiful mulatto woman, who, from childhood, had been Mrs. Shelby's domestic slave. After reaching her maturity, Mrs. Shelby arranges the marriage of Eliza and George, a mulatto slave of a neighboring plantation. Their wedding is held in Mrs. Shelby's parlor and includes all the fineries to be expected of a white bourgeois wedding, including wine, wedding cake, and flowers. In the early years of their marriage, with his master's permission, George works at a bagging factory as a hired-out slave. George's position at the factory allows him to spend more time with his family. As the narrator describes of this period:

For a year or two Eliza saw her husband frequently, and there was nothing to interrupt their happiness, except the loss of two infant children, to whom she was passionately attached, and whom she mourned with a grief so intense as to call for gentle remonstrance from her mistress, who sought, with maternal anxiety, to

direct her naturally passionate feelings with the bounds of reason and religion.

(Stowe 30)

Although initially unable to have children, Eliza and George eventually give birth to a child, whom they name Harry. Things go downhill for the young family when George invents “a machine for the cleaning of hemp...” (Stowe 27). Unlike his employer, George’s master, Mr. Harris, unfavorably views the young man’s invention as a threat to his authority as a white male and master. Seeking to reassert control over George as his slave, Mr. Harris forces the young man to leave his beloved place of employment and puts him “...to the meanest drudgery of the farm” (Stowe 29). In desperation, George runs away and is thus separated from his wife and child. Later, Eliza and Harry also run away when it is discovered that Harry is to be sold. The family reunites at the end of the novel and gains their freedom upon entering Canada.

Stowe’s depiction of the marriage of Eliza and George, particularly in her treatment of their sexuality and gender roles, is similar to Sejour’s depiction of Zelia and Georges’ relationship. Both emphasize ways in which those marriages adhere to attributed white cultural mores of monogamy and virginity at the time of marriage. Also, like the marriage depicted in Sejour’s short story, the legality of Eliza and George’s marriage is not the issue. There is no evidence in the novel to suggest their understanding of marriage is grounded in the law or even religion for that matter.

In Stowe’s novel, the likeness of Eliza and George’s marriage to attributed white bourgeois cultural mores of marriage is presented as a result of the intimate contact that they have with their white masters. This point is perhaps most evident in Stowe’s depiction of Eliza as a virgin at the time of marriage. As revealed in the novel, it was on account of her mistress’ protection that Eliza was able to avoid “...those temptations which make beauty so fatal an

inheritance to a slave” (Stowe 27). What Mrs. Shelby’s “protection” would seem to point to is her own invested interest in Eliza’s chastity. Understanding this requires that one fully grasp the significance of Eliza’s unique relationship with Mrs. Shelby. Eliza is introduced as having been “...brought up by her mistress, from girlhood, as a petted and indulged favorite” (Stowe 27). In her role within the Shelby household, Eliza is not only the “indulged favorite” of Mrs. Shelby, but also her model student. The narrator’s emphasis on the paternalistic efforts of Mrs. Shelby has the effect of undermining the individual efforts of Eliza. Two things are meant to be presumed from this emphasized point. The first is that without Mrs. Shelby’s guiding hand, Eliza would have been sexually immoral and promiscuous. The second is that had Eliza not been protected, her enslavement would have made her more stereotypically like “ordinary” enslaved women.

Stowe’s construction of the gender roles of Eliza and George, like their sexuality, is meant to appear in stark contrast to those imagined for “ordinary” field hands. Like Sejour, Stowe emphasizes the ways in which Eliza and George adhere to roles comparable to, and expected of, her nineteenth-century bourgeois white audience. On account of her work and relationship with Mrs. Shelby, Eliza is depicted in the novel as one who, despite her slave status, is a woman. While George does not receive wages for his work at the bagging factory, his position affords him a great degree of autonomy and liberty. In many ways, the autonomy and liberty that George has on account of his employment is constructed in the novel as a critical component to not only his masculinity, or manhood, but also his humanity. Unlike Uncle Tom, who patiently endures his enslavement, George, on account of his apparently close proximity to white culture, is presented as one who refuses to accept his slave status.

Stowe’s representation of Eliza and George’s marriage as being similar to those found in

white bourgeois society can be greatly contrasted with her representation of the marriage of Aunt Chloe and Uncle Tom.⁵ The difference between these two representations largely pivots on the issue of cultural autonomy. Central to Stowe's development of the marriage of Eliza and George is their close proximity to white culture. This proximity is made through Stowe's characterization of their intimate relationships with their masters. While Eliza and George's marriage is largely defined as the result of their close proximity to white culture, that of Aunt Chloe and Uncle Tom is defined as a result of their distance from white culture.

Two of the ways that Stowe defines the cultural "distance" between the apparently "normal" marriage of Eliza and George and that of Aunt Chloe and Uncle Tom is through geographic and physical markers. As Mrs. Shelby's "favorite pet," Eliza occupies a very intimate place in her master's home. In contrast, Aunt Chloe and Uncle Tom live together in a cabin that adjoins Mr. Shelby's house. The physically close proximity of Eliza and George is not only defined by where they live, but also by their physical attributes. The physical attributes of Eliza and George that make them appear "almost white" are built into Stowe's description of their marriage. Instead of being defined by their similarity to whites, Aunt Chloe and Uncle Tom are defined by their differences. Aunt Chloe is described as a "plump" black woman, while Uncle Tom is described as a "...large, broad chested, powerfully-made man, of a full glossy black, and a face whose truly African features were characterized by an expression of grave and steady good sense, united with much kindness and benevolence" (Stowe 68).

Two other differences in how Stowe represents the marriages of Eliza and George and Aunt Chloe and Uncle Tom relate to gender roles and sexuality. Her depiction of the gender

⁵ The absence of the word "marriage" in the novel to describe the relationship shared between Aunt Chloe and Uncle Tom implicitly serves to further remove it from the realm of what her nineteenth century white bourgeois audience would recognize as a legitimate "heterosexual coupling."

roles of Eliza and George are defined, in spite of their enslavement, according to patriarchal standards. In contrast, the gender roles of Aunt Chloe and Uncle Tom are largely defined by their work on the Shelby plantation. In her work role as head cook on the Shelby plantation, Aunt Chloe assumes a relatively privileged position within the slave hierarchy.⁶ In contrast to how Stowe explicitly and strictly defines the sexuality and sexual mores of George and Eliza within the parameters of marriage, the sexuality and sexual mores of Uncle Tom and Aunt Chloe are only implicitly and loosely defined as existing within any such parameters. This point is most obvious in Stowe's treatment of the children of Uncle Tom and Aunt Chloe, who are referred in the novel as "the baby," Mose, and Pete. Uncle Tom's family unit, while loosely defined as adhering to the white cultural norms seen in that of George's family, is nonetheless esteemed in the novel.

A year after the debut of Stowe's *Uncle Tom's Cabin*, Williams Wells Brown published *Clotel; or, The President's Daughter: A Narrative of Slave Life in the United States* (1853).

Writing from London, Brown interweaves fact and fiction to narrate the lives of four female slave descendants of Sally Hemings, who is named Currer in the novel, and Thomas Jefferson. According to Brown, one of slavery's greatest crimes is that it denies legal marriage to enslaved people. He argues that marriage is "...the first and most important institution of human existence—the foundation of all civilization and culture—the root of the church and state" (257). The fact that enslaved persons do not marry legally is no fault of their own; rather it is the fault of United States government.

⁶ I use the word "relatively" as the power that Chloe possesses is defined within the limits placed on Negro or, what are referred to in the novel as, black slaves living on the plantation. This clarification is necessary when discussing Aunt Chloe and Uncle Tom together with Eliza and George, two mulatto slaves.

Marriage, for Brown, is not merely a critical component of “normal” societies. It is the natural aspiration of human beings. In emphasizing the naturalness of human ambitions for marriage, Brown offers a critique of the unnatural aspirations produced by slavery that Curren has for her enslaved daughters, Clotel and Althesa—that they attract and eventually become the mistresses of the white men in attendance at parties and balls. In denying slaves the legal right to marry, enslaved women, as best revealed through the Curren character, had replaced their own human desire to marry with the unnatural desire to seek the attention of a white man, as it was with his attention that she could expect a better life than that typically afforded to other slaves. While not a marriage per se, the “attention of a white man” could afford, as revealed in the novel, a slave woman a higher degree of security, wealth, and status. This point on Curren’s skewed ambitions for her daughters is also made by Ann DuCille. In her study, she likens the motherly ambitions of Curren to those of Mrs. Bennet in *Pride and Prejudice*. As Ducille points out:

Like Mrs. Bennett in *Pride and Prejudice*, Curren has raised her daughters to be “great ladies,” to attract the attention—and ultimately the financial support—of white gentlemen of means and property. Unlike Mrs. Bennett, Curren does not have the luxury of plotting marriage for her daughters. (18-19)

The uncanny parallels between the kinds of life that a middle or upper class white woman of the nineteenth century could expect through marriage and that which an enslaved woman could expect through becoming a mistress to a white man, would not be underscored in the novel. On the day of their sale, Clotel is purchased for fifteen hundred dollars by a wealthy white planter named Horatio Greene and moves into a cottage on his estate. Althesa and her mother, Curren, are also sold to an unnamed trader. The sales of these three women set into motion several sub-

plots. Clotel's story begins with her life with Horatio. While a slave, and Horatio a white man, Brown reveals:

The tenderness of Clotel's conscience, together with the care her mother had with her and the high value she placed on virtue, required an outward marriage; though she knew that a union with her proscribed race was unrecognized by law, and therefore the ceremony would give her no legal hold on Horatio's constancy.

(64)

While not his legally married wife, Clotel describes their union as one made in heaven. Shortly after "marrying," the couple gives birth to a daughter named Mary. The happiness of their early lives, however, is undermined when Horatio meets Gertrude, a white woman who is the daughter of a "wealthy man" on whom Horatio's "political success depended" (Brown 85). When she learns that Horatio plans to marry Gertrude, Clotel ends their marriage. After Gertrude marries Horatio, she forces him to sell Clotel.

Another marriage represented in the novel is that between Althesa and Henry Morton. Althesa was living as a slave in New Orleans when she met and married the young white physician named Henry Morton. "The young physician and his wife immediately took lodgings in another part of the city; a private teacher was called in, and the young wife taught some of those accomplishments which are necessary for one's taking a position in society"(Brown 93). It is not revealed in the text how and where Henry and Althesa are able to marry, which would otherwise be of interest given the legal restrictions placed on the marriages of slave persons. Despite their racial and social differences, the marriage of Althesa and Henry is presented as naturally coming out of their interest in one another. The happy couple gives birth to two

daughters, Ellen and Jane. Unfortunately, after years of happy marriage, the couple dies and their children are sold into slavery.

The third marriage in the novel is that of Clotel's daughter Mary, and a mulatto man named George. Mary and George meet each other while serving as slaves in Horatio's household. When George is jailed for participating in a slave rebellion, Mary disguises herself as the young man and takes his place in prison. With Mary's help, George escapes to Canada where he works day and night in hopes of buying her freedom. His hopes for freeing Mary, however, are challenged when he learns that she has been sold to a slave trader on account of her involvement in George's escape. Despite the obstacles faced, the two eventually reunite by happenstance in France and "...[are] joined in holy wedlock..." (Brown 206).

What becomes most apparent through a closer study of how Brown represents marriage in the novel are the ways in which it becomes a signifier of freedom and of one's humanity. This point is corroborated by Ann Ducille, who characterizes Brown's use of marriage in the novel as having both metaphorical and literal significance. As she argues, "...marriage as a liberating rather than confining force is only one of the several reversals or inversions" (24) found in the novel. Conversely, while legal marriage is used to signify freedom and one's humanness, the fact that the United States, at the time, had made it illegal, was not only a crime against slaves, as chattel, but of slaves as human beings. Taken together with the author's introductory treatment of miscegenation in the United States, Brown's writing on marriage serves to question the moral judgments of what constitutes a human being.

Even without legal protection of their marriages and their statuses as slaves, Clotel and Althesa define themselves as wives, not as slaves to their "husbands." In the case of Clotel, it is upon discovering Horatio's affection for Gertrude that she realizes the precedence that her

condition as a slave has over her ironically imagined condition as a woman, and as a wife. Given the circumstances of their marriage as an act of the heart rather than as an act of the law, it lacks the obligatory nature of marriage not missed by Horatio in his legal marriage to Gertrude.

The close relationship that Brown creates between marriage and freedom continues with the union of Althesa and Henry Morton, and Mary and George. When Henry marries Althesa he wants her to assume a rightful position within the couple's household. This contrasts with Horatio, who is less clear in his desire to publicly proclaim Clotel as his wife. In becoming the mistress of the Morton household, Althesa's primary responsibilities are domestic. While she ensures that their servants are kept in order, Dr. Morton works outside of the home as a physician. Another important distinction between their marriage and that of Clotel and Horatio's is that it did not begin with him being her master and she being his slave. Nonetheless, and as Brown acknowledges, "Morton was unacquainted with the laws of the land; and although he had married Althesa, it was a marriage which the law did not recognize; and therefore she whom he thought to be his wife was, in fact, nothing more than his slave"(173). The only marriage that is recognized as being of two equals is that of Mary and George. Unlike the other marriages of the novel, their marriage takes place outside of the United States of America. It is perhaps, not by chance, that it concludes the novel.

The nineteenth-century depictions of slave marriages in the works of Sejour, Stowe, and Brown are largely shaped by the fact that they were written amidst the debates over slavery and the humanity of those enslaved. These authors' emphases on the similarities between black and white marriages enable them to argue that enslaved people were human and had the same kinds of feelings and attachment as whites. Such sentiments challenged conventional understandings of the institution of slavery, but more specifically of enslaved men and women

themselves. Given the socio-political context in which they published their anti-slavery works, these authors were well aware that the audience to which they spoke was white and likely unsympathetic to appeals based on quantifying the evils of slavery. Through their use of marriage, these authors encouraged their audience to re-imagine blacks not as chattel slaves, but as men and women with the capacity to love and be loved.

Twentieth Century Black Marriages in Slavery and Freedom

A decade after Brown published *Clotel*, slavery ended in the United States of America. The end of slavery in the United States precipitated an increase in social science and fiction writings on the marriages of black men and black women. During the period, social science studies, such as *American Negro Slavery* (1918) by U.B. Phillips, began to consider how the paternalistic efforts of slave masters and the institution itself influenced the marital patterns of enslaved men and women. While largely secondary to larger projects often intent on responding to the “negro question,” the early inquiries into social practices of slaves, such as marriage, created a conceptual foundation upon which later scholars built. For example, E. Franklin Frazier used much of Phillips’ scholarship to support his findings in *The Black Family in the United States* (1939) on the apparent absence of marriage and the prevalence of female-headed households in lower-class urban black communities in the twentieth-century.

Interestingly, two years before Frazier wrote about marriage’s absence among twentieth century working class blacks, Zora Neale Hurston in *Their Eyes Were Watching God* (1937) revealed its centrality to “ordinary black folk.” By the Civil Rights movement of the late fifties, Kenneth Stamp (1956) and Stanley Elkins (1959) were reframing the earlier twentieth century understandings of slavery and enslaved persons by adopting more critical approaches to the

subject of slavery, and as a result, black marriages. Writing around the same time as Stamp and Elkins was Gwendolyn Brooks. In her novel, *Maud Martha* (1953), Brooks tells the story of an “ordinary” married black woman named Maud Martha.

The central concern of U.B Phillips’ *American Negro Slavery: A Survey of the Supply, Employment and Control of Negro Labor as Determined by the Plantation Regime* (1918) is the “...ramifications of Negro slavery...its rise, nature, and influence in the regions of its concentration” (Phillips vii, emphasis my own). However, several parts of the text treat marriage implicitly. He begins that treatment in his discussion of traditional African economies. He argues, “In the African economy nearly all routine work, including agriculture, was classed as domestic service and assigned to the women for performance. The wife, bought with a price at the time of marriage, was virtually a slave; her husband her master” (5-6). While seemingly insignificant, this admission by Phillips is important because it reveals his own recognition that persons of African descent did, prior to their enslavement, value and have a place for marriage in their societies.

The distinction that Phillips intends to make, however, between what occurred in Africa and the United States America, is that what came before enslavement was abnormal, immoral, and incorrect. Unlike those systems of marriage from which they departed, enslaved men and women in the United States of America followed in the white bourgeois cultural patterns of their white masters. This view comes out of his central argument that “Each white family served very much the function of a modern social settlement, setting patterns of orderly, well bred conduct which the Negroes were encouraged to emulate; and the planters furthermore were vested with a coercive power, salutary in the premises, of which settlement workers are deprived”(Phillips

343). While not stated explicitly by Stowe in *Uncle Tom's Cabin*, this judgment made by Phillips on the cultural source of “normal” marriages among enslaved persons, can be found in her depiction of that relationship shared between Eliza and Mrs. Shelby. In her capacity as Eliza’s cultural model, Mrs. Shelby is presented as being critical to defining for the young woman the proper behavior of a wife and mother.

As a result of Phillips’ emphasis on the good of slavery in ensuring that slaves engaged in lawful sexuality, he is able to be silent on such things as amalgamation, rape, etc. This silence can also be found in Stowe’s novel, which completely ignores those realities of slavery. With the exception of his discussion on free blacks in Louisiana, Phillips only briefly considers the “unfounded” claims of sexual abuses waged by white men in his discussion of the sale of enslaved men and women. While considering its worth, Phillips quickly dismisses it as invalid.

As he argues:

Among the thousands of bills of sale which the present writer has scanned, in every quarter of the South, many have borne record of exceptional prices for men, mostly artisans and "drivers;" but the few women who brought unusually high prices were described in virtually every case as fine seamstresses, parlor maids, laundresses, hotel cooks, and the like. Another indication against the multiplicity of purchases for concubinage is that the great majority of the women listed in these records were bought in family groups. Concubinage itself was fairly frequent, particularly in southern Louisiana; but no frequency of purchases for it as a predominant purpose can be demonstrated from authentic records. (194)

Beyond the occurrences on the auction block, enslaved men and women, through the efforts of

their masters, engaged in moral and legal sexual relations beneath the institution of marriage. In contrast to the picture given of enslavement by Brown and Sejour, Phillips contends that:

Masters of the standard type promoted Christianity and the customs of marriage and parental care, and they instructed as much by example as by precept; they gave occasional holidays, rewards and indulgences, and permitted as large a degree of liberty as they thought the slaves could be trusted not to abuse... (327-328)

The notion that, in general, masters did the “favor” of bestowing Christianity, marriage, and parental care on their slaves would be carried forward into the following two decades by scholars such as E. Franklin Frazier.

Nearly two decades after Phillips argued that marriage was one of the many gifts that enslavement had bestowed on enslaved men and women, Zora Neale Hurston in *Their Eyes Were Watching God* (1937) told the story of an “ordinary” black woman named Janie Crawford. Hurston tells her story in three sections of the novel that correspond to the character’s three marriages. Janie’s first marriage to Logan Killicks is arranged by Nanny, her formerly enslaved grandmother. Nanny, who as a slave was denied the right to legally marry, hopes that through marrying, Janie will be afforded respectability, protection, and economic security. Despite Nanny’s efforts, the marriage between Janie and Logan does not last. Amidst Logan’s treatment of his new wife as property and demands that she work for him on the farm, Janie comes to realize that what she desires most in life is love and companionship, two things that she finds when she marries Joe (Jody) Starks. While that marriage began well, prior to his death, Janie comes to the conclusion that Joe is too controlling and obsessive. Janie finds true love when she

marries her third husband, Vergible Woods, nicknamed Tea Cake, a twenty-something year old gambler and drifter. Their marriage, however, also ends when Janie shoots Teacake in self-defense. After being tried and acquitted for the crime in court, Janie returns to her hometown of Starkville, Florida.

Unlike Phillips' study, which roots the African American value for marriage in white culture, the instructive relationship between the two women of Hurston's novel firmly roots the African American value for marriage within black culture. While not a skilled slave, Nanny recognizes the value of marriage and hopes to preserve and honor its importance through an ancestral narrative told to Janie. Unable to marry and forced to bear a child with her master, Nanny looks to marriage for her granddaughter Janie as a way for her to not only lead a "better life," but also to "make right" some of the wrongs committed against black women during slavery. As Nanny tells Janie, "The nigger woman is de mule of de world so far as I can see. Ah been praying for it to be different for you. Lawd, Lawd, Lawd" (Hurston 18-19).

Nanny also aspired for marriage as a young woman, but as a slave she was denied that opportunity when raped and impregnated by her master. The master in this instance is not figured as the paternalistic cultural resource for slaves that Phillips imagines in his studies, but as an impediment to slave culture. That culture, as Nanny's narrative reveals, valued marriage and understood it in ways similar to how it was understood in the culture of white masters. This is revealed in Nanny's desire that Janie become married soon after discovering that she has kissed a neighborhood boy named Johnny Taylor. In that scene, she says to Janie, "Janie, youse uh' oman, now, so..." To this Janie replies, "Naw, Nanny, naw Ah ain't no real oman yet." Nanny continues by saying, "Yeah, Janie, youse got yo' womanhood on yuh. So Ah mout ez well tell

yuh whut Ah been savin' up for uh spell. Ah wants to see you married right away" (Hurston 12, emphasis my own).

The gender roles in Janie's three marriages adhere to patriarchal normative standards. In her first marriage, Janie is responsible for the domestic care of Logan's home and tending his farm. In her second marriage to Joe Starks she again assumes a domestic role, only working with her husband's permission at their family store. Unlike her first and second marriages, where Janie was young and financially dependent on her husbands, in her third marriage with Teacake she is the more financially established and older of the two. While Janie's third marriage has many nuanced qualities, it also has many conventional ones. For instance, despite being older and having more money than he, Janie assumes primarily a domestic role in the home. At one point in the text, Janie voluntarily works alongside Teacake in the field. Once together in the field, Teacake asks Janie, "You don't think Ah'm trying tuh git outa takin' keer uh yuh, do yuh, Janie, 'cause Ah ast yuh tuh work long side uh me?" To this Janie responds, "Ah naw, honey. Ah laks it. It's mo nicer than settin' round dese quarters all dey" (Hurston 133, emphasis my own).

Aside from offering new interpretations of cultural autonomy and gender roles found in African American marriages, Hurston's novel was also one of first of its kind to trace the internal development of a black woman through her marriages. While Janie ultimately rejects the obligatory underpinnings found in Nanny's model of marriage, she does not reject her view that marriage is a valuable institution for black women. This is perhaps most revealed in Janie's repeat marriages. What Janie desires more than anything else, and as she learns through the course of her three marriages, is love. She finds love within her third marriage to Teacake. While not the most perfect relationship, the ending of the novel with that marriage serves to conclude

Janie's personal evolution as a "real" woman. I make this distinction between the "woman" that Janie becomes through her third marriage as it contrasts with the early understanding of "woman" advanced by Nanny in her decision to marry Janie off to Logan. In this understanding, a girl becomes a woman when she bears the external trappings of a woman. Janie's definition of a woman is very different. It is based on a more psychological process. Janie's internal journey is made within and outside of her three marriages. Marjorie Pryse in "Zora Neale Hurston, Alice Walker, and the "Ancient Power" of Black Women" writes, "*Their Eyes Were Watching God* explains the beginnings and growth of Janie's autonomous self and her ability to create a world" (14). By the end of the novel, and with the end of her third and most fulfilling marriage, Janie becomes a woman.

Two years after Hurston told the story of Janie Crawford, E. Franklin Frazier published *The Negro Family in the United States* (1939) as a response to the early twentieth-century urban migration of African Americans into the North. Its findings reflected nearly a decade of scholarship produced on the subject in journals ranging from *Annals of the American Academy of Political and Social Science* to the *Journal of Negro Education*. Summing up his views on the impact of the migration on lower-class black culture Frazier writes, "Because of the absence of stability in family life, there is a lack of traditions. Life among a large portion of the urban Negro population is casual, precarious, and fragmentary. It lacks continuity and its roots do not go deeper than the contingencies of daily living" (636). Frazier roots the "disorganization" and "discontinuity" of the lower-class urban Negro in the institution of slavery. He argues that enslavement had pathologized black culture, values, and morals.

Frazier argues that only under the “most favorable” conditions of slavery, those afforded to house slaves and skilled artisans, was some semblance of culture possible. It was here that “normal” marriage was pursued and sustained. These slaves learned culture by imitating the behavior of their masters. This argument made by Frazier was not new, it had heavy circulation in the early twentieth century, appearing for instance in Phillips’ 1918 study. However, unlike many of his predecessors, in addition to considering the favorable conditions, in his study, Frazier also considers the “unfavorable” conditions of slavery. The “unfavorable” conditions of slavery were those afforded to average bondspersons, or plantation field hands, whose distanced relationship from the slave master disallowed them to build or sustain a viable culture. Without culture, Frazier contends that the average bondsperson did not value the institution of marriage and thus were unable to assume normal gender roles and sexuality. This is the premise that Frazier then uses to explain how twentieth century working-class blacks in urban cities, the proposed descendants of average bondspersons, did not marry.

This bridge that Frazier draws between the cultural autonomy of ordinary slaves and their alleged descendants, while convenient for the author’s twentieth century purposes, is extremely flawed. To begin, while accepting the bridge as a premise of his argument, he does not concretely explain how the “absence of culture” among slaves came to be “passed down” to their descendants. This depersonalized rendering of the relationship between average slaves and twentieth century working-class black men and black women living in urban cities contrasts with what occurs in Hurston’s novel in which it is a communicated narrative shared within a family that acts as the link between enslaved persons and their descendants.

In addition to offering differing interpretations of cultural autonomy, two other major distinctions to be made between Frazier's and Hurston's representations of marriage pivot on the issues of gender roles and sexuality. In his study, Frazier argues that as an adaptation to the system of enslavement, the familial structure of these slaves was both matriarchal and matrifocal. Within this structure, the enslaved man was conditioned to take on a more submissive role, while the enslaved woman had been thrust into a dominant and more "masculine" role. In Frazier's study, enslaved women are identified as the culprits of pathology in slave households. Because they did not have a culture, he argues they did not value marriage and because they did not value marriage they were sexually promiscuous and possessed a lenient attitude towards illegitimacy. Frazier continues to perpetuate his view of matrifocality and enslaved women in his treatment of twentieth century working-class black women. Nanny and Janie of Hurston's novel, however, cast doubt on these characterizations. As revealed in her slave narrative to Janie, Nanny did value such virtues as virginity and childbirth within the confines of marriage, but she was denied the chance to realize those virtues because of her enslavement. "Ah was born back due to slavery so it wasn't for me to fulfill the dreams of what a woman oughta be and to do" (Hurston 19). Nanny passes down the value of these virtues to Janie, who upholds them in her three marriages. Furthermore, Frazier's interpretation of the emasculated black man and domineering black woman does not reflect the patriarchal normative gender roles found in each of Janie's marriage.

The differences between how Hurston and Frazier talk about the marriages of black men and black women are largely a result of how the two authors use sources. Frazier's reliance on white-authored sources limits his understanding of marriage to the very superficial perceptions that white slave masters had of their slaves. Lost within this constricted view of slave life are such familial narratives as that shared between Nanny and Janie. For Nanny's slave master, it is

likely that his own actions towards his slaves would not be written about in plantation records. Also missing from such plantation records would be the wishes of slaves, such as Nanny, for their emancipated grandchildren. In contrast to Frazier, in her novel, Hurston privileges black sources. In so doing, she provides readers with a more expansive and redeeming view of how marriage was appropriated by slaves and their descendants.

Fourteen years after E. Franklin Frazier made his proclamation on the absence of marriage among working class blacks of the Great Migration, Gwendolyn Brooks published *Maud Martha*. In her 1953 publication, Brooks uses Hurston's technique to tell the story of an ordinary black woman named Maud Martha. While the two authors' uses of the technique are similar, there are also some important distinctions to make between the two. Hurston's novel focuses most on Janie's development as a married woman against the weight of Nanny's ancestral narrative. It is through this narrative that Hurston is able to address the relationship between marriage and such ideological forces as sexism and racism and to allude to their continuation from slavery into freedom. Whereas Hurston looks to the past to foreground Janie's journey, Brooks looks to the present. In her study, she focuses more explicitly on Maud Martha's development as a woman in spite of heavy ideologically rooted weights of racism and sexism found in twentieth century America. This difference between the two authors is important to note as it underlies how they write about marriage in their respective novels.

Out of her contrastive focus on the role of ideology in not only shaping the marriages of black women, but also how they view themselves as wives, Brooks' novel offers a more frank response to Frazier's views on cultural autonomy. Like Hurston, Brooks identifies marriage as an intrinsic part of black culture. *Maud Martha*, like *Their Eyes Were Watching God*, is set inside of

an ordinary black community. The focus of these two authors on the “ordinariness” of their female protagonists and their communities is significant as it challenges Frazier’s emphasis on the exceptional nature of blacks in slavery and freedom who learned to value marriage through the model provided by whites. Maud Martha’s family can best be described as working class. They own a home and her parents are married. Her father works outside of the home and is recognized as the head of the household. He not only provides financially for his family, but also is viewed as the decision maker in the family. Maud Martha’s mother assumes a more domestic and supportive role in her marriage and family.

While in full agreement with Hurston that marriage is a valued part of ordinary black communities, Brooks is, at the same time, critical of the role of white idealism in influencing black women’s perceptions of themselves as wives and women. As a married woman, Maud Martha undergoes a series of changes in the process of becoming what she deems the ideal “wife” for her husband. The ideal “wife” that Maud Martha hopes to become in order to make her husband happy sacrifices, is hard working, and patient. As Maud Martha asks herself amid a potential disagreement with her husband on where to live as a couple:

Was her attitude uncooperative? Should she be wanting to sacrifice more, for the sake of her man? A procession of pioneer women strode down her imagination; strong women; praiseworthy, faithful, stout-minded; with a stout light beating in the eyes. Women who could stand low temperatures. Women who would toil eminently, to improve the lot of their men. Women who cooked. She thought of herself, dying for her man. It was a beautiful thought. (Brooks 59)

It is only after marrying that Maud Martha begins to question the ideals that had defined her pre-marital notions of marriage. Her dissatisfaction begins with her Kitchenette. It was too small, she felt, too modest. Even with Maud Martha's disappointment in her lack-luster living arrangements, she makes plans to redecorate. She soon, however, learns from the janitor that the building's owner would not "...allow the furniture to be disturbed" (Brooks 62). Shortly after this setback, Maud Martha discovers the first roach. With its appearance, Maud Martha feels defeated and hopeless. She also realizes at this time that Paul, the man that she had imagined toiling for, had lost interest in her and their marriage.

After becoming pregnant, Maud Martha's attention gradually shifts away from her failing marriage and onto her own livelihood. At the moment of her child's birth, Maud Martha does not think too much about her new child. No, as she reveals, "There would be all of her life long for that. She preferred to think now, about how she felt. Had she ever in her life felt so well? She felt well enough to get up" (Brooks 98). Maud Martha's decision to "get up" has both a literal and metaphorical significance in that it marks her consciousness-raising moment in the novel, or her growing consciousness of her own wants, needs, and desires not as a wife or mother, but as a woman. The self that Maud Martha acquires amidst her otherwise unhappy marriage to Paul has its parallels with that of Janie found in Hurston's novel. By the end of the novel, the plot shifts away from telling the life of Maud Martha by way of her marital identity and unto her womanly identity.

Despite their differences, the representations of marriage found in *Their Eyes Were Watching God* and *Maud Martha* were similar enough that they continued to facilitate the later writings on black marriages published by black women writers. Unlike the continued

conversation on black marriages found in fiction writings, by the mid-twentieth century social scientists were beginning new conversations on the topic. One of the first publications to change the conversation in the social sciences was Kenneth Stampp's *The Peculiar Institution* (1956).

In his work, Stampp overturns many of the arguments pursued by Phillips and Frazier on the institution itself, the plantation, and the relationship between enslaved persons and their masters. Slavery was not, he argues, a benevolent, mild, or even instructive system. Rather, it was founded upon and perpetuated by fear, violence, and cruelty. Masters and slaves did not, as Phillips had suggested thirty-eight years earlier, have a relationship based upon understanding and "concessions;" rather that relationship was one of dominance and submission. The institution did not have the positive effect, as Phillips had argued, of civilizing enslaved persons; instead it had an infantilizing effect. Stampp writes on this effect by saying, "The system was in its essence a process of infantilization and the master used the most perfect products of the system to prove that Negroes were a childlike race, needing guidance and protection but inviting paternal love as well"(327). In describing the plantation as an "isolated, autonomous enclave," and the master's power as "nearly absolute" (197), Stampp gives little credence to the idea that enslaved men and women could lead lives outside of the constraints imposed. One of the areas in which Stampp argues enslaved men and women were most constrained was in their ability to form lasting familial and marital relations.

Stampp's interpretation of the external constraints faced by slave persons desiring marriage coincides with Nanny's narrative in Hurston's novel, which attests that it was not that enslaved persons did not value marriage; rather it was slavery and slave masters that acted as barriers. In contrast to their lives in Africa, a place described by Stampp as having "strictly

regulated” family life and moral codes, in the United States, enslaved men and women lived beneath a “...disintegration of their social organization, removed from the traditional sanction which had encouraged them to respect their old customs”(Stampp 340). The apparent differences between the family life of enslaved persons and their masters resulted, he argues “...from the fact that slavery inevitably made much of the white caste’s family pattern meaningless and unintelligible—and in some ways impossible—for the average bondsman” (341). The avenues of “success” and “respectability” found in white society were denied to bondspersons. Much like E. Franklin Frazier, Stampp contends that it was only in the most favorable circumstances of slavery, such as those afforded to domestic slaves, that some semblance of white culture could be found.

Another similarity that can be drawn between Stampp and Nanny’s discussions of slave marriage is how they imagine its relation to the establishment of “normal” familial relations. In Hurston’s novel, Nanny views marriage as the proper means through which families should be created. Similarly, Stampp proposes that because slaves could not legally marry they could not create or sustain what he calls “normal” familial relations. While Stampp and Nanny appear alike in their understandings of the relationship between marriage, specifically legal marriage and normal families, there are also some important differences to note.

These differences pivot on the issues of slave gender roles and sexuality. While focusing on how the institution of slavery disallowed enslaved women from marrying, Nanny does not elaborate on how this shaped her or other slaves’ understandings of gender roles or sexuality. In contrast, Stampp explicitly argues that the absence of marriage did distort the gender roles of enslaved men and women. The enslaved woman could not be a “...wife, mother, and

homemaker” (Stampp 343). Rather, first and foremost, she was a worker, a role which determined her relation to both her husband and children. The enslaved man could not be “...the head of the family, the holder of property, the provider, or the protector” (Stampp 343). Stampp cites the apparent inability of enslaved men to protect their wives and children from the threats of their masters as further evidence of the weakening effects of enslavement. While distinct in their interpretations of the sources of slave gender relations, Stampp’s and Frazier’s explanations of those roles appear very similar. Like Frazier, who proposed that slavery had pathologized the gender roles of enslaved persons, Stampp contends that under slavery, the enslaved man as a husband could, at most, be described as “...his wife’s assistant, her companion, and her sex partner” (344).

Another consequence cited by Stampp of the absence of marriage among slaves, not addressed in Nanny’s narrative, is sexual promiscuity. Writing on the prevalence of sexual promiscuity Stampp acknowledges that, “This was a condition which some master tried to control but which most of them accepted with resignation, or indifference, or amusement” (346). This statement made by Stampp is interesting as it persists in maintaining the very strain of paternalism found in both Phillips and Frazier’s studies. While attempting to make the case for the high prevalence of sexual deviance among enslaved men and women, Stampp also acknowledges the overwhelming ability of enslaved persons who, contrary to the “corrupting influences” abounding, did engage in loving relationships with their spouses and offspring.

Kenneth Stampp’s study continued to prove influential on the works of social scientists of the fifties. One study that acted as a follow-up to Stampp was Stanley M. Elkins’ *Slavery: A Problem in American Institutional and Intellectual Life* (1959). Appearing in the waxing years of

the Civil Rights Movement, the study was the first to introduce the *Sambo Thesis*, a theory which proposes that, as a result of the harsh conditions of their enslavement, enslaved persons had become submissive, docile figures. Continuing in the trends of former social scientists, enslaved men are identified in Elkins' study as those who were most impacted by the conditions of slavery. This emphasis in Elkins' and other social science studies on the effects of slavery on enslaved men contrasts with how Hurston's Nanny remembered the effects of slavery on enslaved women.

On slave marriage, he argues that it was at the cost of the plantation economy, which valued property interests over human ones that ruined the prospects of marriage for slaves. Elkins continues on this point by saying, "...the law could permit no aspect of the slave's conjugal state to have an independent legal existence outside the power of the man who owned him: "The relation of master and slave is wholly incompatible with even the qualified relation of husband and wife, as it is supposed to exist among slaves... [m]arriage, for them, was denied any standing in law" (54, emphasis my own). Given the illegality of slave marriage, even those arrangements made between enslaved men and women could only be recognized in the eyes of the law as concubinage.

Elkins' focus on the legal components of slave marriage served the author's overall intentions of shifting the debate on slavery away from its moral dimensions and onto a debate on its cultural and legal dimensions. While this approach served to further the social science debate on slavery, it did little to further the social science conversation on the marriages of black men and black women. In his reliance on white authored sources, Elkins, like his predecessors, gives little credence to the possibility that enslaved persons could marry, or even assume "normal"

gender roles and sexuality. This interpretation could not have been more different from those of Zora Neale Hurston and Gwendolyn Brooks, who were writing at the same time. By rooting the tradition of patriarchal marriage firmly within African American culture, these fiction writers cast doubt on the view that slavery had pathologized or infantilized the black men and black women of slavery and their culture. Furthermore, by emphasizing the ordinariness of the black men and black women of their story worlds, these authors challenged conventional understandings of the institution of slavery, African American culture, and more specifically of black men and black women themselves.

The Moynihan Report

Six years after Elkins, U.S. Senator Daniel P. Moynihan published *The Negro Family in America: A Case for National Action* (1965) for the U.S. Department of Labor. Moynihan begins his report by stating, “The United States is approaching a new crisis in race relations” (Moynihan, ch. 2). He argues that, black Americans in this new era will demand more than civil rights. “Being Americans, they will now expect that in the near future equal opportunities for them as a group will produce roughly equal results, as compared with other groups. This is not going to happen. Nor will it happen for generations to come unless a new and special effort is made” (Moynihan, ch.2).

Moynihan identifies the Negro family as the culprit behind the retarded progress of Negro society. Relying upon Frazier, Moynihan argues that the weakened family structure had its roots in slavery and “...is the fundamental source of the weakness of the Negro community at the present time” (Moynihan, ch.2). Unlike other groups, he proposes that lower class African American families are unstable. He attributes a large part of their instability on a historically

rooted absence of patriarchal marriages. Because, as he argues, “Nearly a quarter of Negro women living in cities who have ever married are divorced, separated, or are living apart from their husbands” (Moynihan, ch.2) there are high rates of illegitimacy, and welfare dependence.

The absence of marriage in black communities is one of several attributes that Moynihan proposes defined the black family’s “tangle of pathology,” a term first coined by Frazier that referred to the generational cycle of matriarchy and matrifocality in black communities. As Moynihan explains of the matriarchal condition found in African American communities, “A fundamental fact of Negro American family life is the often reversed roles of husband and wife” (Moynihan, ch.4). In tune with the argument of Frazier, Moynihan argues that black women from slavery to freedom, rather than the black men, played dominant roles in domestic and social relations in black communities. Moynihan concludes his report by stating that the “special effort” to be made for black Americans must serve to “strengthen the Negro family” (Moynihan, ch.5).

Rewriting Black Marriages in the Latter Twentieth Century

Writing amidst the Black Power movement, Feminist movement, and anti-war protests of the seventies, and the debates over welfare reform of the eighties, social scientists and fiction writers focused more on the marriages of black men and black women in order to respond to earlier twentieth century cultural and historical narratives on black sexuality, gender roles, and cultural autonomy.⁷ By the early seventies, emerging writer Toni Morrison in *The Bluest Eye* (1970) drew upon the textual and thematic elements of the marriage plot found in

⁷ The historical narrative that social science writers of the seventies responded to was that on the pathological black family. The historical and cultural narrative that fiction writers, particularly black women writers, responded to was that pursued in the Civil Rights and Black Power movements on black men and on what Barbara Christian calls, the “idealized relationship” that they shared with black women.

Gwendolyn Brooks' *Maud Martha* in her telling of the failed marriage of Pauline and Cholly Breedlove. While in many ways similar to Brooks, Morrison is also distinct in her desire to understand the pathology of gender roles and sexuality that E. Franklin Frazier (1939) wrote about as being endemic to working class African Americans of the Great Migration.

The desire to recast, or, and as demonstrated through Morrison's novel, reframe traditional narratives on sexual and gender pathology in black communities, was not, however, limited to fiction. A year after Morrison, Genovese used the new histories produced by James Blassingame and George Rawick to counter the twentieth century interpretations of authors such as Phillips, Frazier, and Stamp, especially about slave marriages. In contrast to his predecessors, who argued that marriage was largely irrelevant to average bondspersons, Genovese proposed that it was central to how "ordinary" enslaved families and communities were organized. While Genovese and other revisionist social scientists centered marriage in their studies on slave culture, Gayl Jones in *Corregidora* (1975) used many elements found in the marriage plot of Zora Neale Hurston's *Their Eyes* and a new form called the neo slave narrative to critically examine the racially and sexually fraught political and cultural underpinnings of marriage in black communities.

A year after Jones told the story of Ursa, Herbert Gutman in *The Black Family in Slavery and Freedom* (1976) responded to the Moynihan report by challenging the findings of Frazier and Stamp. Relying on the contributions of Blassingame and Rawick, Gutman, like Genovese, emphasized the prevalence of monogamous, patriarchal marriage, heterosexually normative gender roles, and sexuality in slave communities. Five years after Gutman, Alice Walker (1982), while depicting multiple marriages in her novel, *The Color Purple* (1982), focused less on monogamous patriarchal marriage and its relation to issues such as sexuality

and gender roles. Similar to Walker, in her study, *Ar'nt I a Woman* (1985), Deborah Gray White also spent less time in talking about the marriage relationship, and instead spent more time in talking about the roles of enslaved women and the mother/child relationship.

While often an overlooked detail when viewed alongside the rape of Pecola, marriage in Toni Morrison's *The Bluest Eye* (1970) is a critical piece of the author's thematic interest in the ideological linkages between black families and black communities. The most detailed marriage in the novel is that of Pauline and Cholly Breedlove, two southerners who migrate to Lorain, Ohio during the Great Migration. In their small storefront, the nascent years of Pauline and Cholly's marriage are described as a blissful period. Things change, however, as Pauline comes to believe that her inability to fit in with the northern city's fancy women could be fixed with money, money that Cholly did not have. To compensate for her husband's limited income; Pauline takes jobs as a "day worker" and eventually finds a "steady job" in the home of a white family. Shortly after being fired from that job, Pauline learns that she is pregnant, news which temporarily calms the couple's fighting. "In this state of ease, Pauline stopped doing day work and returned to her own housekeeping" (Morrison 121). The couple's happiness is soon lost and with the birth of the couple's second child, Pauline becomes the "breadwinner" of the family and returns to church. Disheartened with her marriage, Pauline takes comfort in the order and beauty she sees in her white employer's home, while Cholly descends deeper into a state of depression as an unemployed alcoholic.

Morrison is most similar to Gwendolyn Brooks (1953) in her interpretation of cultural autonomy and presentation of the early gender roles of Pauline and Cholly. On the former issue, like Brooks, Morrison identifies marriage as an accepted and fundamental part of African

American culture. *The Bluest Eye*, like *Maud Martha*, is set inside of an ordinary black community. Pauline's family can best be described as working class. Her parents are married and they own a home. While Pauline's mother is depicted as having some domestic responsibilities, because she and her husband work outside of the home, the brunt of the day to day chores of cleaning, cooking, and caring for the youngest children falls on the shoulders of Pauline, who is the eldest unmarried daughter. Unlike Pauline, however, Cholly does not come from a two-parent household. His parents, who abandon him to the care of an aunt, separate before his birth. Despite this, it is Cholly who proposes marriage to Pauline after only a brief period of courtship. As Morrison explains, after courting, "...they agreed to marry and go 'way up north, where Cholly said steel mills were begging for workers. Young, loving, and full of energy, they came to Lorain, Ohio. Cholly found work in the steel mills right away and Pauline started keeping house" (116).

In Morrison's presentation of the early gender roles of Pauline and Cholly she, like Brooks, is critical of the role of white idealism in influencing black women's self-perceptions of themselves as wives and women. Similar to *Maud Martha*, in their early years, Pauline eagerly indulges in what she views as the domestic duties of a wife—or the cleaning, cooking, etc. As Pauline explains of that time, "We moved into two rooms up over the furniture store, and I set up housekeeping" (Morrison 117). Like *Maud Martha*, Pauline's eagerness in assuming responsibility over the domestic affairs of the Breedlove household is implicitly explained in the novel by her desire to fulfill some preconceived ideals of womanhood. Assuming the role of wife for Pauline, like *Maud Martha*, is important as it is the standard by which she, at least in the beginning of her marriage, uses to measure her worth as a woman. Pauline begins to question

this and other ideals that defined her pre-marital notion of marriage when she becomes dissatisfied with her small storefront.

The love, then hate relationships that Maud Martha and Pauline have with their homes is similar in that they are used by both Morrison and Brooks to mirror the two women's self-perceptions of themselves as black women, wives, and mothers. The important distinction to be made between Pauline and Maud Martha in their relationships with their homes is in how they imagine themselves and their potential as women outside of that ideologically premised relationship. In Brooks' novel, Maud Martha's realization of the failings of her home and her inability to adhere to an ideal of womanhood leads her to find other ways to define herself uniquely as an independent black woman. In Morrison's novel, however, Pauline's realization of the failings of her home and ideal of womanhood causes her to descend further into the depths of idealism. Yearning for what she does not find in her own life, she continues to seek its validation by esteeming the home and family life of her white employers.

While Morrison and Brooks offer similar interpretations of the role of white idealism in shaping the self-perceptions of the married women in their novels, their treatments of the consequences of that idealism and gender roles are distinct. The effect of white idealism in shaping Pauline and Cholly's marriage and gender roles is revealed in Morrison's discussion of the effect that Pauline's attendance at the movies has on her marriage. The couple's momentary bliss changes when Pauline again feels the loneliness of being a migrant and decides to go to the movies. "Them pictures gave me a lot of pleasure, but it made coming home and looking at Cholly hard. I don't know" (Morrison 123). What Pauline receives from the movies are images of white idealism. In seeing those ideals shown on movie screens, Pauline is given a window into

a society that she did not have exposure to in her southern home of Kentucky. After realizing the ugliness of her home and marriage, Pauline seeks and finds the semblance of beauty and order that she sees in the movies in the home of her second white employer.

While Morrison's focus on the impact of white idealism on Pauline and Cholly's marriage is significant, it is her focus on the internal dynamics of black communities that makes her discussion unique for its time. Unlike the social scientists of the seventies, and the fiction writers of previous decades such as Gwendolyn Brooks, Morrison does not only place blame for the dysfunction in black marriages solely on whites, but also blacks. The impetus that precipitates the couple's change of gender roles is Pauline's inability to fit in with the black women of her new northern surroundings. As she explains:

I don't know what happened. Everything changed. It was hard to get to know folks up here, and I missed my people. I weren't use to so many white folks. The ones I seed before was something hateful, but they didn't come around too much... Northern colored folks was different too. Dicty-like. No better than whites for meanness. (Morrison 117)

Through the critical lens that Morrison uses to view the black community of Lorain, Ohio, she offers a fuller picture of that community and their relationship with marriage. This leads us to new understandings of the relationship between the institution of marriage and sexuality.

While not focusing on the issue of sexuality outright, in Brooks' novel, and as representative of her time, her exclusive focus on the heterosexual, monogamous marriage relationship serves to silence the then overbearing stereotypes of black sexuality as unrestrained.

The desire to uphold heterosexual, monogamous marriage to silence those stereotypes is perhaps best revealed in Brooks' authorial decision to depict Maud Martha as a black woman who is able to acquire personal independence and happiness in spite of her failed marriage and sex life.

While finding her voice as a woman, Maud Martha continues to be a dutiful, faithful wife. One who is monogamous and does not step out of the bounds of patriarchal gender roles. In contrast to Brooks, Morrison not only offers an unfavorable picture of Pauline and the "independence" that she attains amidst her failed marriage, but also calls into question its worth by including within her novel's plot black women characters who do not marry and who are sexually active outside of marriage. The three most central characters that Morrison uses to depict this are China, Poland, and Miss Marie, the three prostitutes who live above the Breedlove's storefront. Scorned by past lovers and unwilling to give their "love" away for free, China, Poland, and Miss Marie are depicted in the novel as women who do not follow traditional ideological scripts on gender roles and sexuality.

In her interpretation of the effect of the internal and external forces in shaping the Breedlove marriage and their gender roles, Morrison offers an unlikely response to the twentieth century proclamations of social scientist E. Franklin Frazier (1939). As will be recalled, in his study, Frazier also focuses on those forces within the black community in order to explain its apparent "dysfunction." Through this lens, he interprets the overwhelming absence of "normal" patriarchal marriage among working-class blacks as a consequence of their actions and the actions of their ancestors. In contrast, Morrison uses the marriage of Pauline and Cholly to examine the possibility of not only internal forces, or those forces within the black community itself, but also external forces, or those forces within the surrounding white community, as being

the cause of the apparent “dysfunction” and “pathology” found in twentieth-century migrant marriages and families.

While Morrison’s discussion of black men and black women who did not marry called into question the assumed naturalness of patriarchy, Genovese’s emphasis in *Roll Jordan Roll* (1972) on the significant role of marriage in slave culture served primarily to establish its importance in slave communities and to counter stereotypic views of black sexuality, culture, and gender roles. In contrast to Phillips, Frazier, and Stamp, who argued that sexuality in slave communities was unrestrained, Genovese proposed that slaves’ attitudes toward sexuality were restrained by the institution of marriage. It was typically desired, particularly by mothers, that young slave women remain chaste. However, when a daughter did “...slip into sexual adventures” (Genovese 465) it was generally accepted within slave communities. While premarital sex was not viewed as a sin, when sex resulted in pregnancy it was assumed that the couple would marry. Even when marriage did not result, unmarried mothers were largely accepted in their communities. In Genovese’s words:

Even the more conservative parents who married their daughters off did not get hysterical if their unmarried daughters got pregnant. It was not a nice thing to do, but it was not a moral disaster either. The object became to live respectably and happily with one man or at least with one man at a time. (465)

While sexual indiscretion between unmarried enslaved persons was not frowned upon in slave communities, upon becoming married it was to be assumed that a couple would remain faithful to one another. When adultery did occur it was marked as a “serious offense.” In some abroad

marriages, Genovese suggests that polygamy did occur. Nonetheless, in most of these kinds of marriages the couples were still expected to practice fidelity.

Genovese's interpretation of the cultural rootedness of slave marriages, while dissimilar from that of Frazier and Phillips, is similar to that of Hurston, Brooks, and Morrison. In contrast to the views of his social science predecessors, Genovese argues that the value enslaved persons attached to marriage proceeded from African cultural mores and traditions. This interpretation of the cultural origins of slave marriages is similar to Hurston, Brooks, and Morrison's presentations of the marriages of their ordinary African American characters as an accepted and intrinsic part of traditional African American culture. While masters did play a role in the arrangement of marriages of young enslaved persons, Genovese points out that it was typically parents who played the largest role in such decisions. As he argues, "...the master's permission followed the consent of the parents" (464). When masters did force unions, they typically ended in divorce.

Genovese's discussion of the gender roles of married slaves serves to challenge the stereotypic views of Phillips, Frazier, Stamp, and Elkins. While focusing somewhat on the roles of enslaved women in slave households, his discussion of gender roles is largely limited to the roles played by enslaved men in their capacities as husbands and fathers. In attempting to undo the two alleged myths of "the emasculated black male" and matriarchy, Genovese points to areas in which enslaved men did protect, honor, maintain, and serve their wives and families. In this way he is able to assert the role of patriarchy in slave communities. To this end, he is sensitive to the significance of acts such as those done by the father of Louisa Adams, an ex-slave of North Carolina, who supplemented the diet of his family by hunting for small animals.

In contrast to Stamp, Genovese observes that in some favorable instances of slavery, masters did encourage and promote the authority of slave males as heads of their households.

Genovese's constructions of patriarchal slave households are similar to those constructions of the twentieth-century black households found in the writings of Hurston and Brooks. Like these twentieth century fiction writers, Genovese focuses on casting a very patriarchal normative picture of the marriages of black men and women who were enslaved. He argues that in slave households men typically assumed more arduous tasks, while women were responsible for "lighter tasks," such as cooking, sewing, and caring for their children. "In addition to the usual work load, the women had to cook for their families, put the children to bed, and often spin, weave, and sew well into the night" (Genovese 495). Despite their enslavement, Genovese writes, "A remarkable number of women did everything possible to strengthen their men's self esteem and to defer to their leadership" (500).

Genovese uses the fact that enslaved persons married and continued to uphold patriarchal marital mores as evidence of the continued relevance of African traditions to enslaved persons and their determination to resist against the negative impact of slavery. This argument contrasts with that made by Gayl Jones, who in *Corregidora* (1975) looks to patriarchal marriage, not as a carryover from traditional African culture, but as a new world phenomenon that served to reinscribe patterns of hegemony and patriarchy found within the institution of slavery at large.

Ursa, the main character of Jones' 1975 novel, marries twice. She introduces her husband, Mutt, with these words: "It was in 1947 when Mutt and I married. I was singing in Happy's Café around on Delaware Street. He didn't like for me to sing after we were married because he said that's why he married me so he could support me" (Jones 1). Despite his

protestations, Ursa continues to sing. Angered by this, Mutt pushes her down the stairs of Happy's café, causing a miscarriage that necessitates a hysterectomy. Following this, Ursa divorces him, and after a brief courtship, marries Tadpole, the owner of Happy's café. The marriage between Tadpole and Ursa, much like that between Mutt and Ursa, begins well. However, Tadpole grows increasingly disapproving of Ursa's singing career. Despite this, Ursa continues to sing and that marriage also ends. After their divorce, Ursa and Mutt reunite.

Ursa's repeat marriages are similar to those of Janie found in *Their Eyes Were Watching God*. The first marriages of Ursa and Janie were both conceived through the lens of their once enslaved female ancestors. Ursa, like Janie, views her marriage as a kind of obligation, serving to connect her individual narrative with that of Great Gram and Gram. Programmed by their passed down memories, Ursa sees her purpose in life as a woman to "make generations," or have children. For both Ursa and her mother, the need to "make generations" underlies their individual motives to marry. In contrast to what occurs in *Their Eyes Were Watching God*, in *Corregidora*, the value of the act of marriage is not explicitly passed down from ancestor to descendant. Rather, the value of marriage is implicated within those narratives as a new world means through which the female descendants of slaves use their wombs to bear witness to the truths of the painful histories of their enslaved female ancestor(s).

Despite the apparent similarities in Hurston's and Jones' constructions of the ancestral underpinnings of their female protagonists repeat marriages, there are also some important distinctions to be made between the two authors' uses of marriage. The most critical distinctions are in their interpretations of the value of ancestral narratives and in how they define marriage. On the first distinction, in both novels the ancestral narrative is identified as the underlying force motivating the marriages of the female protagonists. In Hurston's novel, Nanny's slave narrative

is recognized as a valued part of Janie's own development of female self-consciousness. It is one of the impetuses that seem to underlie Janie's continued desire to re-marry after her first husband. In contrast to what occurs in *Corregidora*, in *Their Eyes*, Janie's self-realization of the failings of Nanny's understandings of marriage does not make her want to abandon either the ideal or the institution altogether. Rather, it seems to inspire her to continue to search in the novel for a marriage that reflects her own ideals, and values, such as love. In *Corregidora*, however, Ursa's self-realization necessitates not a revision, but a breaking away from the ancestral narratives of Great Gram and Gram.

The two different approaches taken by these authors as to whether the ancestral narrative on marriage should or should not be continued must be understood in light of their own distinct definitions of marriage. In Hurston's novel, Janie's third marriage to Teacake marks her departure from the obligatory model of marriage established by Nanny. Despite its problems, the love marriage between Janie and Teacake is valued in the novel as a sign or indicator of her personal freedom as a woman and of the possibilities of individuals to reconstruct marriages for their own ends. When viewed in this light it becomes apparent that the novel affirms the value of marriage for black men and black women.

The lens through which Jones defines marriage in *Corregidora*, on the other hand, is colored by the Feminist movement. As such, Jones defines marriage as what Vivienne Elizabeth calls "...an institutional site for the production and reproduction of hierarchal gender relations" (87).⁸ In *Corregidora*, Jones, however, is not only interested in uncovering the ideological forces that underpin contemporary marriages between black women and black men, but also in

⁸ Elizabeth, Vivienne. "Co-habitation, Marriage, and the Unruly Consequences of Difference." *Gender & Society* 14.1 (2000): 87-110.

establishing their historical rootedness in slavery.⁹ Given this, Jones is less optimistic about the reconstructive possibilities of marriage that Janie is able to realize in *Their Eyes*.

The entangled ideological linkages between new world marriage and old world slavery are made most apparent in Jones' clever depiction of the gender relations between Ursa and her two husbands. In *Corregidora*, both Tadpole and Mutt interpret their responsibilities as husbands through a patriarchal lens. As Mutt tells Ursa, "A man works for a woman, a man don't work for hisself... A man sees to it that a woman eats and has some place to sleep, and children, if he got any, before he takes a bite or feels like he can lay his head down"(Jones 159). The manner in which Mutt and Tadpole interpret their gender roles as husbands explains their anger over Ursa's continued work as a blues singer.¹⁰ While Ursa's blues singing was deemed acceptable by her two husbands during their courtships, when they marry, it is deemed problematic because it clashes with their scripts on the proper gender roles of husbands and wives.

Similar to Morrison, in *Corregidora*, Jones does not limit depictions of sexuality to heterosexual marriage couplings. In the final scene of the novel, an unmarried Ursa performs fellatio on Mutt. Beyond enabling Ursa to realize her own agency as a black woman, this scene is also significant as it is done outside of marriage. It is this depiction of sex outside of marriage that makes Jones' novel unlike the early novels of Hurston and Brooks. While sharing with Jones an interest in the consciousness- raising journeys of married black women, both Hurston and Brooks are careful to confine these journeys within the context of marriage. In their novels,

⁹ In effect, Jones' will to bring to light the historical roots of the ideologies beneath the surface of black marriage served as her response to the Black Power movement's de-emphasis on the past as a largely irrelevant construct.

¹⁰ In "Relate Sexual to Historical: Race, Resistance, and Desire in Gayl Jones' *Corregidora*," Ashraf H. A. Rushdy explains the contrastive attitudes that Mutt and Tadpole have after marriage towards Ursa's singing by first contextualizing what such a career meant for African American women.

the female protagonists, while realizing the impossibility of their ideals of marriage and womanhood and the inability of their husbands to assume ideal roles, remain married, ending their stories as a widow, in the case of Janie in *Their Eyes*, or as a wife of a soldier in combat, in the case of Maud Martha in *Maud Martha*.

In addition to presenting the unmarried Ursa and Mutt engaging in a sexual act, Jones also includes characters, like Ursa's friend Cat, who chose homosexuality over heterosexuality. In the novel, Cat explains her sexuality to Ursa as a result of her desire to come home at night and "not feel foolish." In a pivotal moment between the two women, Cat reveals to Ursa, "You don't know what it's like to feel foolish all day in a white woman's kitchen and then have to come home and feel foolish in the bed at night with your man. I wouldn't mind the other so much if I didn't have to feel like a fool in the bed with my man. You don't know what that means, do you?" (Jones 64).¹¹ By not limiting her depictions of sexuality to heterosexual marriage couplings, and Jones, like Morrison, challenges the traditional view of marriage as a license to sexuality.

What is perhaps most interesting about Jones' questioning of the relevancy of patriarchal marriage to the lives of black men and black women is that at the same time, social scientists, in keeping with much of the ideology of the Black Power movement, continued to emphasize its relevance. The historical relevancy of marriage to black men and black women was a critical part of Herbert Gutman's 1976 publication of *The Black Family in Slavery and Freedom*. The key premise that informs his contestation against Moynihan, Frazier, and Phillips is that beyond the

¹¹ Much like Morrison's use of Poland, China, and Miss Marie, the three prostitutes in *The Bluest Eye*, in *Corregidora*, Cat's homosexuality, much like Ursa's work as a blues singer, not only represents a possibility for black women outside of the patriarchal and hegemonic systems, but also, in her defiance of that "foolish" system, poses a threat to those very systems. While Ursa does not necessarily agree with Cat's homosexuality, she, as a black woman, is able to sympathize with her decision, well aware of the limited possibilities for women within the "accepted scripts" available to black men and black women who marry.

grips of their enslavement, enslaved men and women had a culture, a system of organization that enabled them to have a degree of agency over their lives. He argues that Frazier "...did not misperceive the oppressive nature of enslavement but underestimated the adaptive capacities of the enslaved..." (xxi).

In this way, Gutman's interpretation of cultural autonomy and its relation to slave marriages is similar to that found in Genovese's study. He argues that because of enslaved persons' ability to adapt, they were able to maintain their own culture, values, and traditions. A critical part of slave culture was marriage. Gutman's emphasis on marriage and the prevalence of two-parent households enables him, like Genovese, to fit the enslaved family into a "normal" paradigm of patriarchal familial structures.

By establishing the importance of marriage in the slave community as a customary norm, Gutman is able to reinterpret conventional understandings of slave gender norms and sexuality in ways that are similar to Genovese. Gutman suggests the gender and sexual norms of "ordinary," not just "elite," enslaved men and women, with little deviation, were comparable to those of their white masters. For instance, Gutman reveals, like their white masters, enslaved husbands and wives practiced monogamy and were expected to remain faithful to each other. Similar to Genovese in his study, by focusing on black men and black women in their roles as husbands and wives, Gutman evades the stereotypic depictions of black sexuality as unrestrained and immoral. Enslaved men, in their roles as husbands and fathers, are presented in Gutman's study as providers and sustainers of their families. Perhaps there is no greater image of enslaved men offered by Gutman than that found in his discussion of abroad marriages. It is here that Gutman, in a manner similar to Genovese, is able to cast a romantic view of strong enslaved men who, despite the threat of physical abuse, walked miles to visit their adoring wives on nearby

plantations. These images of enslaved men and women are significant as they contrasted with the images of the weak and timid slave man and the dominant and strong slave woman rendered by historians like Frazier and Stamp.

Like Genovese, in Gutman's study, enslaved women are defined foremost through their domestic roles as wives and married mothers. In doing this, Gutman isolates marriage as an accepted and privileged space for reproduction. Marriage, Gutman argues, for enslaved communities was "...the licensing of parenthood" (64). While pre-nuptial sex was not demonized in slave communities in the same way that it was in white communities, when pre-nuptial sex resulted in pregnancy, marriage soon followed. In his discussion of the South Carolina *Good Hope plantation*, Gutman identifies the church as a critical site for enforcing gender norms and sexuality. As Gutman reveals, only young and unmarried women practiced indiscriminate mating. In joining the church, however, their behavior would change. This "public bridging" from being *unsaved* to *saved* in the church transitioned young and unmarried women "...from prenuptial sexual freedom to marital fidelity" (Gutman 71).

Six years after Gutman, Walker published *The Color Purple* (1982). In the novel, there are five marriages that are described in some detail, those of Celie and Albert, Sofia and Harpo, Mary Agnes and Harpo, Samuel and Corrine, Nettie and Samuel, and Celie's parents. The most detailed marriage of the novel is that of Celie and Albert. Their marriage is arranged by Celie's father and the bridegroom. Unable to marry her younger sister Nettie, Albert agrees to taking possession of the "spoilt" older sister after being told by Pa about her domestic capabilities. At the beginning of their marriage, Celie, a victim to sexual molestation by Pa, accepts her marriage, seeing it as the natural aspiration of women to secure some higher degree of social and economic autonomy in society. Things change, however, when Celie falls in love with a blues

singer, and once lover of Albert, named Shug. When her relationship with Shug ends, Celie returns to Georgia, where she reunites with her sister Nettie and Nettie's new husband, Samuel. Despite Albert and Celie's unhappy ending, by the end of the novel, the two eventually become friends.

Walker, like Jones draws upon twentieth century predecessor Zora Neale Hurston to offer a more traditional presentation of marriage as an act that is guided by sentiments of obligation, honor, and conceived through familial lenses. Similar to Ursa whose marriages to Teacake and Mutt are given meaning through the ancestral narratives of the Corregidora women, and Janie, whose first marriage to Logan Killicks is given meaning through Nanny's slave narrative, in Walker's novel, Celie's marriage to Albert is given meaning through a patriarchal exchange that occurs between Albert and Pa. In that exchange between Pa and Albert, Celie overhears her father saying:

Well, He say real slow, I can't let you have Nettie. She too young. Don't know nothing but what you tell her. Sides, I want her to git some more schooling, Make a schoolteacher out of her. But I can let you have Celie. She the oldest anyway. She ought to marry first. She ain't fresh tho, but I spect you know that. She spoiled. Twice. But you don't need a fresh woman no how. I got a fresh one in here myself and she sick all time. He spit, over the railing. The children git on her nerve, she not much of a cook. And she big already. (Walker 7-8)

As evidenced in their exchange, and the exclusion of Celie from that exchange, marriage is communicated as a patriarchal social contract made between two men, namely the father and

suitor. Also similar to Ursa and Janie, Celie, using the meaning created for her marriage by Pa and Albert, comes to accept her marriage as an obligatory act.

Similar to Jones, Walker reveals how the very collective forces that give meaning to Albert and Celie's marriage influence their interpretations of gender roles and sexuality. Like the black women protagonists of the early twentieth century, Celie assumes a domestic role in her household, one who is responsible for the cooking, cleaning, and care of his many children. While Walker emphasizes the domestic responsibilities of Celie, she does not spend much time in defining Albert, as would be expected, through his responsibilities outside of the home. Rather, in the novel, depictions of Albert are largely limited to his abusive interactions with Celie and his interactions with other men of the novel, such as his father and Celie's father.¹²

While sharing much in common with early twentieth century authors, Walker, like other black women writers of the seventies, offers a more controversial view of the role of sexuality inside that marriage. She emphasizes the ways in which Celie and Albert's marriage is built upon patriarchal notions of sexuality, such as a woman's expected monogamy and virginity at the time of marriage. As will be recalled, in the exchange between Pa and Albert, in which it is revealed that Celie "ain't fresh," virginity at the time of marriage is recognized as a valued trait in women. However, and as Pa admits to Albert through his inclusion of details about his "fresh" wife, the value of virginity can be subsumed by the value of having a wife who is able to assume the traditionally domestic role expected of married women.

¹² This authorial decision made by Walker has interesting implications in how readers are made to connect with these two characters.

In her marriage, Celie is expected to submit to her husband's sexual demands. However, through Celie's relationship with Shug she learns new ways to think about sexuality. In a pivotal scene in the novel, Celie answers a question from Shug as to whether she enjoys having sex with Albert by saying, "I don't like it at all. What is it like? He git on you, heist your nightgown round your waist, plunge in. Most time I pretend I ain't there. He never know the difference" (Walker 77, emphasis my own). In response to this, Shug explains that because Celie has never enjoyed sex, she is still a virgin. This response comes as a surprise for Celie, who had defined virginity as something that is lost upon having vaginal intercourse with a man.

The second most detailed marriage in the novel is that of Harpo and Sofia. In contrast to Celie and Albert's marriage, Harpo and Sofia's marriage is a love marriage that is entered on terms that are favorable to both parties involved. When they decide to marry, Harpo brings the then pregnant Sofia home to meet his father, an interesting twist that plays upon the more traditional arrangement that occurs with Celie and Albert. Despite his and her fathers' hesitations, Sofia and Harpo marry and move into her family's home together. While their marriage begins well, things begin to sour as Harpo struggles to make Sofia submit to his authority as husband. In an attempt to wield a greater sense of authority, Harpo, after heeding the advice of Celie and his father, beats Sofia. When Harpo does this, however, and to his surprise, she fights back. The fighting between the couple continues until Sofia decides to leave Harpo for good. After their informal divorce, Harpo remarries a woman named Mary Agnes, who does submit to his authority as husband. While Sofia does not remarry, she eventually begins "dating" a "prizefighter" named Henry Broadnax in the course of the novel.

In her construction of the attitudes held by the Harpo and Sofia toward the relationship between marriage and sexuality, Walker is similar to Genovese and Gutman. In the novel, Harpo and Sofia are sexually involved and become pregnant before marrying. While Sofia's out-of-wedlock pregnancy is not viewed by the characters of the novel as acceptable behavior, it is not demonized within the community of the novel either. In fact, Harpo interprets Sofia's pregnancy as his right to her hand in marriage. As he says, "But if she big I got a right to be with her, good enough or no" (Walker 29). This point made by Harpo parallels with the argument made by Gutman, who writing on enslaved communities, proposed that when pregnancy resulted from pre-marital sex in slave communities it was assumed that marriage would soon follow. When Harpo and Sofia do marry, however, they are monogamous to one another. This point parallels with that made by Genovese, who, writing nine years earlier about slave communities, argued that while pre-marital sexual indiscretion was not "frowned upon," when enslaved persons married it was assumed that they would be faithful to one another.

Unlike the sexually barren marriage of Celie and Albert, the early years of Harpo and Sofia's marriage are described as being passionate and loving. Sofia reveals, "I use to chase him home from the field. Git all hot just watching him put the children to bed" (Walker 65). With Harpo's change in gender expectations, however, things change. As Sofia admits to Celie, "I don't like to go to bed with him no more" (Walker 65). In the end, Sofia leaves Harpo, taking her five children with her. While she does not marry again, after her separation, Sofia does give birth to another child, presumably out of wedlock. As she tells Celie, "Life don't stop just cause you leave home, Miss Celie. You know that" (Walker 81).

Harpo and Sofia's marriage is defined by complementary gender roles. While Sofia assumes primary responsibility for caring for the children and the home, she also is depicted in the novel in a variety of other capacities such as mending a broken roof, working in fields, etc. Similarly, while Harpo is primarily responsible for providing for his family, he also is depicted in the novel as performing household chores, cooking, and caring for their children. As Sofia admits to Celie, "I rather be out in the fields or fooling with the animals. Even chopping wood. But [Harpo] love cooking and cleaning and doing little things round the house" (Walker 59). Walker not only builds the gender roles of Harpo and Sofia through discussing their work around the house, but also their physical characteristics. Unlike Harpo, who is at one point described by Celie as being "weak" and having "woman's face," Sofia is described by Celie as being a "strong," "big" woman who often wore pants.¹³

When the problems in Harpo and Sofia's marriage do occur they are the result of Harpo's changed interpretation of the roles that a man and woman should assume in a marriage arrangement. While Harpo began his marriage viewing Sofia as his equal, over time things change. No longer enchanted by his own marriage, Harpo begins to look to his father's marriage to Celie as a model of the proper roles of a husband and wife. As Harpo explains to his father after becoming frustrated with his wife, "I tell her one thing, she do another. Never do what I say. Always back talk" (Walker 35). Despite his desire to transform the gender roles of the couple, Harpo is unsuccessful in his attempts.

In her depiction of the marriages of Celie and Albert, and Sofia and Harpo, Walker offers a complex portrait of black marriages. While presenting marriage as being a central part of the

¹³ Interestingly, as Harpo changes his views on the proper gender roles of men and women, he also is depicted by Walker as attempting to also change his physical appearance.

black community of the novel, Walker, like Morrison and Jones, de-centers the patriarchal marriage relationship by focusing on the stories of black women, and their relationships with one another. This point is significant because at the time of her writing, social scientists, largely in keeping with Genovese and Gutman, continued to center the institution and emphasize its prevalence in slave communities. An exception to this trend was Deborah Gray White, who published *Ar'nt I a Woman* three years after Walker.

In her study, *Ar'nt I a Woman* (1985), White studies the dual burdens of racism and sexism placed on enslaved women. This focus, which underlies White's discussion of marriage and its relation to issues such as gender and sexuality, makes her study most distinct from those of her social science predecessors. Unlike Genovese and Gutman, for instance, who argued years earlier that men and women in slave communities assumed "normal" patriarchal gender roles, in her study, White focuses on the gender equality between enslaved men and women. The equality within slave marriages, she argues, was founded on complementary roles. White compares these roles with those found in peasant societies, in which men and women both assumed public and domestic roles within a single household.

The approach that White assumes towards gender roles in slave communities serves to foreground her views on issues such as courtship, marital relations, and divorce. On the issue of courtship, White argues that contrary to popular belief, enslaved persons had courting rituals that were similar to those found in white culture. To prove this, White uses the example of enslaved men who often physically competed for the attention of enslaved women. The competition between enslaved men over enslaved women, she explains, was particularly pronounced on plantations in which men outnumbered women. While enslaved men competed for enslaved

women, and similar to Genovese, White argues that it was enslaved mothers who assumed the most important role in protecting their young daughters and ensuring that they remained chaste. When enslaved men found the right woman, they married. In so doing, enslaved men traded freedom, or the possibility of more easily absconding to freedom, for the love of their wives. They also traded promiscuity for monogamy. Enslaved women, she argues, also made sacrifices for love and marriage. White writes, “When they were happy with a relationship slave women did all within their limited power to sustain it” (148).

White’s approach to the complementary nature of slave gender roles is similar to that taken by Walker in her depiction of the twentieth-century marriage of Harpo and Sofia. As will be recalled, in the beginning of their marriage, Harpo and Sofia assume complementary gender roles. Both Sofia and Harpo share in the domestic responsibilities of caring for their children, cleaning, cooking, and such nondomestic tasks as working in the fields and chopping wood. This complementary construction of gender roles is similar to that found in White’s study of enslaved men and women. She argues that the marital relations between enslaved men and women were in many ways influenced by enslavement. White writes, “The nature of plantation life required that marital relationships allow enslaved women a large degree of autonomy” (153). In contrast to male dominated societies, in which male dominance was based on ownership, property and control, dominance in slave societies was more equally distributed between men and women. Marrying abroad, White argues, contributed to rather than hindered the ability of enslaved women to be more independent. Women in abroad marriages, while not receiving daily help from their husbands, would rely on “...relatives and females who had similar problems and needs” (154). Slavery, White explains, necessitated that enslaved women be strong, independent, and have “survival instincts.”

The equality found in the gender roles of enslaved men and women also impacted the ways in which divorce was handled in slave communities. On the differences of divorce in slave communities, White begins by addressing the illegality of slave marriages. She writes, "Slave marriages were not recognized by the courts, and slave women were not dependent on their husbands for food, shelter, or clothing" (157). Given its distinction from the marriages pursued in their masters' society, in their marriages, enslaved men and women were equal partners. They both had equal autonomy within their marriages and divorces. In contrast to white bourgeois cultural mores that positioned the woman of a marriage as submissive and the man as dominant, slave women had a degree of leverage not afforded to white women. This did not mean, however, "...that she dominated her husband. It means that in her relationship with a lover or a husband she was an equal partner" (White 158).

While divorce was more easily conceived in slave communities, and in corroboration with the findings of Genovese and Gutman, White argues that slave marriages survived many problems and were, given the context in which they were pursued, long-lived. White acknowledges the value of statistics in determining the lengths of slave marriages, while also discussing what statistics do not reveal. She points out that while lengths of marriages were recorded, there is no way of knowing if those marriages, if voluntary, "...were founded on romance" (150). The statistics also do not reveal anything about marital disputes. As White contends, "Harmony did not always prevail in slave households" (151). On the topic of marital disputes, White considers the largely overlooked prospect of abuse of enslaved women by enslaved men, which she argues was largely overshadowed by that abuse waged at the hands of white men.

At the same time that she argues for the value of the husband and wife relationship in slave communities, White contends that, in importance, it did not supersede that of the mother and child. In her view, "...women in their roles as mothers were the central figures in the nuclear slave family" (159). While acknowledging the parallels between this position and that which Frazier waged nearly sixty years earlier, White suggests that the distinction between the two lies in their interpretations of the value of slave women. In her view, enslaved women were not, as Frazier had rendered them, domineering, jezebels, or matriarchs, rather they were "...bulwarks against the destruction of the slave family's integrity" (160).

This seemingly delicate distinction made by White, and her willingness to position the mother-child relationship as being more important than the husband-wife relationship, is significant as it contrasts with the dominant and influential narratives of Genovese and Gutman. Unlike those authors who, in their desire to respond to Moynihan, offered more rigid approaches to heterosexual marriage in order to challenge stereotypic understandings of black sexuality and gender roles, White de-centered the marriage relationship. In doing this, White was very similar to fiction writers of the previous decade such as Toni Morrison and Gayl Jones. While her controversial approach did little to change how the majority of social science writers spoke about marriage in the eighties, it did prove influential in shaping some of the narratives pursued, mainly by black women social scientists, in later decades.

Conclusion

In this paper, I have aimed to show that the writings of social scientists and fiction writers on black marriages in the nineteenth and twentieth century do follow some significant patterns. One of the ways that their patterns are best revealed is by taking a chronological approach that is

mindful of the political, social, and cultural contexts in which the writings of black marriages were pursued. For nineteenth-century fiction writers such as Sejour, Stowe, and Brown, discussions of marriage often worked their way into larger critiques of the institution of slavery. Through their use of mainly mulatto characters, these authors sought to reveal the humanity of black men and black women by emphasizing the similarities, particularly in their discussions of sexuality and gender roles, between their marriages and those found in white bourgeois culture. Their focus on slave marriages prevailed until the legal end of slavery when authors such as E. Franklin Frazier and Zora Neale Hurston offered revised interpretations of black marriages.

While E. Franklin Frazier, in his study, rooted the apparent absence of marriage, sexual immorality, and pathology in twentieth century urban black communities of the Great Migration in slavery, Zora Neale Hurston argued for the importance of marriage to black communities by writing two years before about a thrice-married Janie Crawford, who learned the value of marriage not through whites, but through her formerly enslaved grandmother Nanny. Hurston's discussion of Janie's marriages, and their role in shaping her consciousness as a black woman, also bore many similarities to that found in Gwendolyn Brooks' *Maud Martha*. Interestingly, while fiction writers such as Hurston and Brooks emphasized the historically rootedness of heterosexual, patriarchal marriage in black communities, social scientists such as Kenneth Stampp and Stanley Elkins argued that the conditions of enslavement and the culture of African Americans disabled "normal" patriarchal marriage from thriving among black men and black women who were slaves.

Many of the trends found in the writings of Frazier, Stampp, and Elkins were continued in Daniel P. Moynihan's *The Negro Family: A Case for National Action*. Similar to his

predecessors in the social sciences, Moynihan argued that marriage was not a valued part of twentieth century urban, working-class black communities. Like Frazier, Moynihan roots the absence of marriage in these communities in slavery. While Moynihan's findings seemed to serve well in political discussions of the post-Civil Rights era on poverty in the United States of America, they did not sit well with social scientists of the seventies such as Eugene Genovese and Herbert Gutman. In their studies, these authors responded to Moynihan by emphasizing the importance and relevance of patriarchal, heterosexual marriage to enslaved men and women. Interestingly, while social scientists of the seventies sought to reveal the importance of marriage to enslaved men and women, fiction writers of the seventies, influenced by the Black Power and Feminist movements, such as Toni Morrison and Gayl Jones, used their writings to question whether this model was natural or even necessary for black men and black women. Many of their trends were continued in the next decade by authors such as Alice Walker and Deborah Gray White, a social scientist who revised the narrative of slave marriage pursued by social scientists of the seventies. Much like the fiction writers of the seventies, in her study *Ar'nt I a Woman*, White emphasizes the importance of enslaved women's roles in slave households and focuses more on their identities outside of being wives.

Despite the efforts of such social scientists as Deborah Gray White, and black women fiction writers to expand the meanings of marriage, and redefine its status in African American communities, leading into the twenty-first century, many social scientists and fiction writers continued to adhere to traditional understandings of marriage. Furthermore, while African American marriages have increasingly become a topic of interest among social scientists and writers of fiction, they remain secondary to larger discussions on African American families. Despite their secondary role in these conversations, and as I have aimed to reveal through this

thesis, the marriages of African Americans in slavery and freedom have proven a wonderful resource for explorations into African America.

When I began this paper, I was led to the representations of marriage in the works of fiction writers out of a desire to further contemporary conversations on the often neglected topic. In writing this paper, it was not my goal to make a definitive statement on the state of black marriages or to necessarily just compare the representations of marriage by fiction writers and social scientists. Rather, my goal has been to further the discussion of black marriage and to offer up a new direction for scholars to move and speak from beyond the often politically charged debates in the social sciences over the black family that followed the 1965 publication of the Moynihan report. On the latter point, I think that in reading the writings of social scientists and fiction writers, especially black women fiction writers, together, we can, if nothing else, more fully speak and write about black marriages.

Bibliography

Abbandonato, Linda. "'A View from Elsewhere': Subversive Sexuality and the Rewriting of the Heroine's Story in *The Color Purple*." PMLA 106. 5 (1991): 1106-1115.

Abel, Elizabeth. "Emerging Identities: The Dynamics of Female Friendship in Contemporary Fiction by Women." Signs 6.3 (1981): 413-435.

Bentley, Nancy. "White Slaves: The Mulatto Hero in Antebellum Fiction." American Literature 65.3 (1993): 501-522.

Bobo, Jacqueline. "Sifting Through the Controversy: Reading *The Color Purple*." Callaloo 39 (1989): 332-342.

Brooks, Gwendolyn. *Maud Martha*. New York: Harper & Brothers, 1953.

Brown, William W. *Clotel; or, the President's Daughter*. 1853. The Norton Anthology: African American Literature. Ed. Henry L. Gates and Nellie Y. McKay. New York, London: W.W. Norton Company, 1997. 255-276.

Cognard-Black, Jennifer. "'I Said Nothing': The Rhetoric of Silence and Gayl Jones' Corregidora" NWSA Journal 13.1 (2001): 40-60.

DuCille, Ann. *The Coupling Convention: Sex, Text and Tradition in Black Women's Fiction*. New York: Oxford University Press, 1993.

Elizabeth, Vivienne. "Co-habitation, Marriage, and the Unruly Consequences of Difference." Gender & Society 14.1 (2000): 87-110.

Elkins, Stanley. *Slavery: A Problem in American and Institutional Life*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1959.

Farrison, W. Edward. "The Origin of Brown's *Clotel*." Phylon 15. 4 (1954): 347-354.

- Ferguson, Sallyann. "Folkloric Men and Female Growth in Their Eyes Were Watching God." Black American Literature Forum 21.1/2 (1987): 185-197.
- Frazier, E. Franklin. *The Negro Family in the United States*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1939.
- Genovese, Eugene. *Roll, Jordan Roll: The World the Slaves Made*. 1972. New York: Pantheon Books, 1974.
- Gutman, Herbert. *The Black Family in Slavery and Freedom, 1750-1925*. New York: Pantheon Books, 1976.
- Harris, Trudier. "On The Color Purple, Stereotypes, and Silence." Black American Literature Forum 18.4 (1984): 155-161.
- Hernton, Calvin. "The Sexual Mountain and Black Women Writers." Black American Literature Forum 18.4 (1984): 139-145.
- Hurston, Zora. *Their Eyes were Watching God*. Philadelphia: J.B. Lippincott Company, 1937.
- Jones, Gayl. *Corregidora*. 1975. New York: Random House, 1987.
- Marks, Donald R. "Sex, Violence, and Organic Consciousness in Zora Neale Hurston's *Their Eyes Were Watching God*." Black American Literature Forum 19.4(1985): 152-157.
- Moynihhan, Daniel P. *The Negro Family: A Case for National Action*. Washington, DC: Department of Labor, Office of Policy Planning and Research, 1965. December 22, 2008 <<http://www.dol.gov/oasam/programs/history/webid-meynihhan.htm>>
- Morrison, Toni. *The Bluest Eye*. New York: York, Rinehart, and Winston, 1970.
- Moses, Cat. "The Blues Aesthetic in Toni Morrison's *The Bluest Eye*." African American

Review 33.4 (1999): 623-637.

Neal, Larry. "The Black Arts Movement." The Drama Review 12.4 (1968): 29-39.

Perrett, John J. "Victor Sejour, Black French Playwright from Louisiana." The French Review 57.2 (1983): 187-193.

Phillips, Ulrich Bonnell. *American Negro Slavery: a Survey of the Supply, Employment, and Control of Negro Labor as Determined by the Plantation Regime*. New York, London: D. Appleton & Company, 1918.

Pyrse, Marjorie. "Zora Neale Hurston, Alice Walker, and the "Ancient Power" of Black Women." *Conjuring: Black Women, Fiction, and Literary Tradition*. Eds. Marjorie Pryse and Hortense J. Spillers. Bloomington: Indiana UP, 1985. 1-24.

Rushdy, Ashraf H.A. "'Relate Sexual to Historical': Race, Resistance, and Desire in Gayl Jones's *Corregidora*." African American Review 34.2 (2000): 273-297.

Sejour, Victor. "The Mulatto." 1837. *The Norton Anthology: African American Literature*. Ed. Henry L. Gates Jr. and Nellie Y. McKay. New York, London: W.W. Norton & Company, 1997. 287-299.

Stampf, Kenneth. *The Peculiar Institution: Slavery in the Antebellum South*. New York: Knopf, 1956.

Stowe, Harriet Beecher. *Uncle Tom's Cabin: Life Among the Lowly*. 1852. New York: Penguin, 1998.

Tucker, Lindsey. "Alice Walker's *The Color Purple*: Emergent Woman, Emergent Text." Black American Literature Forum 22.1(1988): 81-95.

Walker, Alice. *The Color Purple*. 1982. New York: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1992.

Washington, Mary Helen. "'Taming All That Anger Down': Rage and Silence in Gwendolyn Brooks' *Maud Martha*." The Massachusetts Review 24.2(1983): 453-466.

White, Deborah Gray. *Ar'nt I a Woman: Female Slaves in the Plantation South*. New York: W.W. Norton, 1985.