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Trustees of Defiance: Death, Resurrection, and Sacred Imperative in African American Literature

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An abstract of
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Abstract

Trustees of Defiance: Death, Resurrection, and Sacred Imperative in African American Literature

By Jimmy Worthy II

Trustees of Defiance argues that African American literature from 1772 to 1987 employs the motif of death and resurrection as a strategy of defying racially imposed identities. By focusing on West-Central African cosmology and Christianity as engendering belief systems, *Trustees of Defiance* situates resistance to life destroying ideologies within an inherited, religious endeavor to achieve fundamental transformation. This work not only investigates existential treatments of death and resurrection in African derived cosmologies and the Judeo-Christian tradition, it also posits that through syncretism these orientations proclaim the necessity of transgressing the death boundary to attain resurrected embodiment. As an extension of African American culture and collective conscious, African American literature illustrates resurrected embodiment as a prevailing method of total renewal, demonstrating authors' preoccupation with resuscitated subjectivity after radical dislocation from a confining reality. This work argues that at the root of African American authors' endeavor to articulate defiance and fundamental renewal lies a faith tradition of claiming a new, edified self that has undergone a process of death and resurrection. My study of the nexus between West-Central African cosmology and Afro-Protestantism evidences transgressing the death boundary and achieving resurrected embodiment as an African American sacred ritual of total transformation. Through its critical appraisal of the relationship between resurrected embodiment and African American literature, *Trustees of Defiance* shows the ways in which authors' portraits of death and resurrection establish, further, or edify communities of renewed people. African American authors' insistence on illustrating communal rejuvenation demonstrates this desire as an abiding sacred imperative.

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And to those who could not finish this journey with me, I am always grateful to you, and your spirit rests in these pages

Reverend Jimmy Worthy

Luther Clarence Banks

Louise Banks

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Eddie Willis

Contents

Introduction

Trustees of Defiance argues that African American literature from 1772 to 1987 employs the motif of death and resurrection as a strategy of defying racially imposed identities. By focusing on West-Central African cosmology and Christianity as engendering belief systems, *Trustees of Defiance* situates resistance to life destroying ideologies within an inherited, religious endeavor to achieve fundamental transformation. This work not only investigates existential treatments of death and resurrection in African derived cosmologies and the Judeo-Christian tradition, it also posits that through syncretism these orientations proclaim the necessity of transgressing the death boundary to attain resurrected embodiment. As an extension of African American culture and collective conscious, African American literature illustrates resurrected embodiment as a prevailing method of total renewal, demonstrating authors' preoccupation with resuscitated subjectivity after radical dislocation from a confining reality. This work argues that at the root of African American authors' endeavor to articulate defiance and fundamental renewal lies a faith tradition of claiming a new, edified self that has undergone a process of death and resurrection. My study of the nexus between West-Central African cosmology and Afro-Protestantism evidences transgressing the death boundary and achieving resurrected embodiment as an African American sacred ritual of total transformation. Through its critical appraisal of the relationship between resurrected embodiment and African American literature, *Trustees of Defiance* shows the ways in which authors' portraits of death and resurrection establish, further, or edify communities of renewed people. African American authors' insistence on illustrating communal rejuvenation demonstrates this desire as an abiding sacred imperative.

Through acute attention to the historical record, scholars have documented the ubiquity of resistance enacted by African descended people.[1] From the colonial period to the present moment, demonstrations of resistance offer new interpretative modes for understanding how individuals of African descent resisted discrimination, institutionalized racism, and sexual violence. Yet when situated within the African American literary imagination, demonstrations of defiance further reveal acts of resistance as pronouncements of personhood. Although the critical lens used to interpret literary expressions of resistance accurately views ownership of an esteemed self or announcement of a restored psyche as the enduring spirit of defiance, it has not fully explained the origins of such defiance or the internal disposition necessary for a substantially different psychological orientation. Through the study of enslaved African Americans and the belief systems that sustained them, this work illuminates the origins and unique character of defiance as expressed in African American culture and its attendant literary imagination. Moving beyond the Frazier-Herskovits debate regarding the existence of African retentions, accepting that African retentions exist in the historical record, and examining how they manifest in literary productions, allows for a more nuanced portrait of African descended peoples' relationship with transformation.[2] Investigating how African retentions inform

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[1] See note 13 in chapter one.

[2] In his book, *The Negro Family in the United States*, E. Fanklin Frazier states that African cultural retentions in the United States are "forgotten memories." He concludes, "never before in history has a people been so nearly completely stripped of its social heritage as were the Negroes who were brought to America" (21). In a later text, *The Negro Church in America*, Frazier maintains that in American slavery "the process by which the Negro was stripped of his social heritage and thereby, in a sense, dehumanized was completed" (10). Melville J. Herskovits' critique of Frazier's hypothesis and response to his position in *The Myth of the Negro Past* established what would come to be known as the Frazier-Herskovits debate. Through his documentation of Africanisms, or cultural carryovers, Herskovits argued that the observation of African American cultural productions reveals the existence of African retentions in North America. His position insists that American slavery had not recreated African descended people as cultural orphans. Frazier, E. Franklin. *The Negro Family in the United States*. Chicago: U of

Christianity allows us to direct critical attention to the ways in which the endeavor to enter death as a threshold to elevated being is deeply embedded in African American cultural memory and practices. Acknowledging the existence and interconnectivity of enduring African and Christian belief systems in literature acts to imbue African American authors' works with added political complexity. In addition, it rearticulates the central role of authors as trustees, or artists, responsible for maintaining cultural ties to the strategy of death and resurrection.

Reframing African American authors as trustees of defiance suggests that they participate in sustaining and advancing a unique form of restoration and empowerment. This designation also expresses authors' participation as a conscious choice. Therefore, this work uses the term "trustee" to indicate the ways in which authors show devotion to pursuing and nuancing the character and embedded nature of defiance from the eighteenth to the twentieth century. We can observe in the literature authors produce the process by which they confront and undermine racial oppression by employing the strategy of death and resurrection. This structure of fundamental transformation not only communicates defiance of racially imposed identities, but it also articulates the seemingly impossible task of resisting and becoming anew in societies deeply invested in the religious, political, and gendered sanctioning of African American unbeing. Perhaps no surprise should arise when authors employ the seemingly impossible strategy of defying death. In other words, authors help to magnify the inherent authority of resurrected embodiment by suggesting that the undergirding power of claiming a reformulated existence lies in the strength to choose permanent separation from a cancerous world. This work defines protagonists' permanent separation as a radical dislocation. The term radical dislocation not only

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Chicago, 1939. 21, Print. Frazier, E. Franklin. *The Negro Church in America*. New York: Schocken, 1964. 10, Print. Herskovits, Melville J. *The Myth of the Negro past*. Boston: Beacon, 1941, 1958. Print.

identifies the departure from normalized modes of Black being, but it signals a deliberately new psychological orientation rooted in dignity. Trustees illuminate the newly achieved psyche and reveal how that psyche results in resurrection.

By demonstrating the ways in which trustees interpret death as an avenue for renewed being, this work not only advances criticism on the relationship between sacred belief systems and African American literature,[3] but it also complicates previous articulations of how death signified for enslaved Africans and in African American culture. Orlando Patterson's contention that enslavement served as a "substitute for death, usually violent death," suggests that for enslaved Africans and their descendants the metaphorical living death of slavery signified the cessation of audacious hope and the possibility of restored existence.[4] This work shows the transgressive interpretation of death and restoration as expressed in African American literature across the eighteenth, nineteenth, and twentieth centuries and locates the origins of this prevailing motif in West-Central African belief systems.

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[3] Some of the criticism that demonstrates the value of spirituality, sacred beliefs, religious expression, communal reconstruction and African resonances in African American literature include, Philip Page's *Reclaiming Community in Contemporary African American Fiction*; Tuire Valkeakari's *Religious Idiom and the African American Novel, 1952-1998*; Bernard Bell's *Contemporary African American Novel: Its Folk Roots and Modern Literary Branches*; Josiah U. Young's *Dogged Strength within the Veil: Africana Spirituality and the Mysterious Love of God*; Joanna Brooks' *American Lazarus: Religion and the Rise of African-American and Native American Literatures*; Robert Stepto's *From Behind the Veil: A Study of Afro-American Narrative*; James W. Coleman's *Faithful Vision: Treatments of the Sacred, Spiritual, and Supernatural in Twentieth-Century African American Fiction*; Sharon Patricia Holland's *Raising the Dead: Readings of Death and (Black) Subjectivity*.

[4] Patterson, Orlando. *Slavery and Social Death: A Comparative Study*. Cambridge: Harvard UP, 1982. 5, Print.

II

In order to examine the manner through which African American literature chronicles resurrected embodiment, *Trustees of Defiance* begins with an examination of the initiatory rituals of ultimate transformation performed by African societies and African descended people. African initiatory rituals are defined by the investiture of esoteric knowledge and prestigious communal membership. Such rituals formalize the process of attaining new life and communal status after dying to the former self. West African initiatory rituals serve to further this argument. These initiatory rituals designate passage into the communal group of the living and dead by pronouncing the initiate "twice born." The second birth, a social birth, acts to forever distance the previous, individual self from an esteemed, eternal new self. The new self is understood to have links with ancestors and is respected in the physical world through communal membership, added privileges, and responsibilities. The Ga dramatize the distinction between the former and new self in their initiatory rituals. Ga boys are beaten and treated as corpses. "Prepared for the grave, they are then reborn as new men who assume a place with the adults."[5] In addition to the Ga, through their ritual of becoming, Yoruba young men must submit to circumcision as if they were dead. The Ibo preform a "formal dying of the old selves and a rebirth to a higher, better life."[6] Although the specific process of becoming through initiation rites differ, many West African societies share the necessity for initiates to leave the community

[5] Sobel, Mechal. *Trabelin' On: The Slave Journey to an Afro-Baptist Faith*. Westport, CT: Greenwood, 1979. 15, Print.
[6] Ibid., 15

to fast and suffer as a symbol of their deaths. Girls are often secluded at puberty to emerge fattened and as possessors of a new wisdom: new human beings.[7]

If we understand these sacred rites as the most fundamental exercises in transition, then it makes sense to evaluate the essence of African American transformation as a process of death and rebirth that facilitates communal membership. In other words, the African American cultural memory of ritualized exercises of death and rebirth present death as a radical dislocation from a former self that makes possible the creation of a new, resurrected self proclaiming a value system for communal belonging. While enacting then embodying death and resurrection as a ritual of becoming finds further expression in East Africa, the Kongo of West-Central Africa not only adheres to this method of becoming, but their variation on this method proves essential to my study of the manner through which African retentions influence African American cultural productions. Represented by four stages which symbolically illustrate the rotation of the sun around the earth, and through water as a method used to describe the passage to rebirth, the specific elements of this Kongo initiation ritual situates the process of becoming and belonging as an extension of the physical world. Through this extension natural spaces become conduits of the spiritual world. In the endeavor to investigate the persistence of Kongo death and resurrection rituals and manifestations in America, *Trustees of Defiance* focuses particular attention on antebellum Gullah communities. Because forty percent of African Americans, and the majority of Gullah communities, trace their ancestry to West-Central Africa, and because slaves from West-Central Africa often labored as field hands, a position that afforded a level of

[7] Ibid., 15. Although chapter one will offer additional examples of African ritual practices and their significance, the Ga, Yoruba, and Ibo make clear the extent to which death as the pathway to new being informs African societies and belief systems.

separation through which retentions could survive, slaves' initiatory rituals in South Carolina's lowcountry greatly influence my analysis of death and resurrection.[8]

By highlighting slave communities' unique ritual of Seeking as an example of Christian and African syncretism, *Trustees of Defiance* suggests that we can observe death and resurrection as an African governing structure of life and community formation. This observation debunks the notion of slaves accepting Christianity as a way of colluding in their own oppression. Additionally, this work reveals that understanding African Americans' relationship with Christianity as an acceptance of supernatural damnation largely denies the continuity of African faith systems and slaves' spiritual agency. Contrary to the belief that the first and second Great Awakenings stripped Blacks of their African heritage and forced slaves to accept Christianity as a supernaturally sanctioned damnation of Black bodies, enslaved Africans in South Carolina's lowcountry and throughout the South chose to follow Christianity because of its spiritual proximity to established beliefs, death and resurrection chief among them. By analyzing the ubiquity of Kongo resonances and the convergence of West-Central African philosophies and Christian tenets, my work shows that syncretism was not limited to one Southern locale, but prolific throughout the American South and North during the eighteenth and ninetieth-centuries. My analysis provides a counter-narrative to the notion of "Christian imposition" and suggests that embodying death and resurrection in initiation rituals is a structured process within African American pronouncements of identity transformation, spiritual

[8] Holloway, Joseph E. *Africanisms in American Culture*. Bloomington: Indiana UP, 1990. 3-9, Print.

agency, and religious expression. The compulsion to gain or facilitate community through these pronouncements serves as a sacred imperative that affirms Black personhood.

When we view renderings of early African American life in literature, it is no surprise that we observe multiple presentations of death and renewal. The use of this governing structure enables African American authors to covertly employ a strategy of defiance while overtly contesting ideologies of inferiority. This work shows that because eighteenth-century Enlightenment arguments point to the capability of reason as evidence of human consciousness, African American authors' devotion to writing illustrates dedication to political motivations aimed at writing themselves into Eurocentric conceptions of humanity. Although this work begins by evidencing the ways in which cosmographic philosophies and Afro-Protestantism converged to announce resurrection as an African American cultural production, it also demonstrates that efforts to express renewed personhood began with eighteenth-century African American authors. While James Gronniosaw was not a member of a Southern slave community in which the desire for death and resurrection took on unique characteristics and structures, his narrative, *A Narrative of the Most Remarkable Particulars in the Life of James Albert Ukawsaw Gronniosaw, an African Prince, as Related by Himself* (1772), reveals the capacity for restored Black identity. Gronniosaw's narrative, then, attest to the project of renewal in eighteenth-century African American literature. While different from cosmographic and Afro-Protestant orientations, his narrative still relies on a protagonist progressing through death experiences in order to attain enlightened personhood. This work shows that the works of early African American authors announce Black intellectual capacity, but also demonstrates that James Gronniosaw's presentations of death and renewal suggests a more subtle and nuanced counter to Eurocentric conceptions of humanity. By insisting on renewed personhood through Protestant

Christianity's insistence on salvation through rebirth, Gronniosaw combines the possibility of spiritual redemption within his counter-narrative to Black inferiority. As his narrative asserts the capacity for literacy and reason, two necessary components of humanity by Enlightenment standards, it also suggests that new life in Christ offers distance from a chaotic and hazardous world. This distance not only implies defiance of ideologies and accepted beliefs rooted in White supremacy, but also the possibility of renewal following fundamental separation. By uniting an overt argument for Black intellectual worth with a covert argument for Christian transformation, Gronniosaw's literary project challenges popular eighteenth-century beliefs regarding Africans' intellectual inability and spiritual degeneration. *Trustees of Defiance* understands these motivations as the essence of a literary enterprise that defies scientific, philosophical, and religious attempts to delegitimize then erase African humanity.

This work pursues the trope of death and resurrection at the center of the African American literary enterprise in ninetieth-century African American women's spiritual narratives. Like Gronniosaw, Jarena Lee traces the reclamation of the self back to the acquisition of saving knowledge and to an awakening of awareness within. Her autobiography "chronicles the soul's journey not only from damnation to salvation but also to a realization of one's true place and destiny in the divine scheme of things."[9] Although Lee was born free and did not experience the ubiquity of religious instruction to slaves through catechisms, her conversion experience shows a rejection of doctrinal instruction, and an acceptance of Christ's redeeming power through the process of knowing him personally. Claiming personal knowledge of God's will because of

[9] Andrews, William L., Jarena Lee, Zilpha Elaw, and Julia A. J. Foote. *Sisters of the Spirit: Three Black Women's Autobiographies of the Nineteenth Century*. Bloomington: Indiana UP, 1986. 10-11, Print.

Christ's indwelling spirit is not unique to this autobiography or this century, but an acute reading of this narrative reveals that Lee foregrounds her Christian conversion with a secular conversion and resurrection. Additionally, Lee shows that her secular conversion and resurrection are made possible by having first progressed through a death and restoration experience that closely resembles cosmographic philosophies. I show that the personhood Lee attains and the new position she claims in restrictive religious, racial, and gendered spaces speak directly to the authority inherent in defying entrenched expectations. Not only does this work demonstrate how such authority enables Lee to advance communities of renewed peoples, but it also illustrates how her method of attaining personhood informs the slave narrative tradition.

Whereas Lee's spiritual narrative asserts the possibility of death and resurrection outside of a Judeo-Christian framing, in his short story, "Going to Meet the Man," James Baldwin further nuances the motif of death and resurrection by reconceptualizing the character and significance of secular resurrection in the lives of African Americans. While Lee's use of the motif includes African resonances and reclaims her African American female self, Baldwin focuses acute attention on the ways in which his White, racist protagonist uses his own formulation of death and resurrection to restore his racial identity. Yet Baldwin reveals that as his protagonist, Jesse, endeavors to restore an identity rooted in a White supremacist ideology, he terrorizes himself while participating in the torture and murder of Black Male bodies and masculinity. Baldwin, then, demonstrates the connection between a fraudulent White, masculine character and the fiction of White supremacy. He also makes clear that Jesse's confrontation with African Americans who assert political agency and understand whiteness as vulnerability masquerading as supremacy, produces Jesse's racial and sexual impotency. Baldwin's portrait of White supremacist ideology that collapses on itself certainly speaks to twentieth-century African

American authors use of death and resurrection as a strategy for defying racially imposed identities. Yet exposing the fallacies ungirding the notion of superior whiteness also functions to edify, or further, communities of renewed African Americans.

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III

Chapter one, "Death Memories and the Ritual function of Resurrected Embodiment," details the cultural manifestation of death boundary transgressions and fundamental renewal. Chapter one also identifies the West-Central African origin and Christian adaptation of African Americans' endeavor to proclaim total renewal through the ritual of death and resurrection. The study of origin and adaptation help frame death and resurrection through the prism of radical dislocation and renewal that culminates in elevated knowledge and heightened responsibility for new communal members. This study also highlights and describes the outward performance of resuscitated subjectivity as resurrected embodiment. Chapter one views resurrected embodiment through the lens of a ritual of defiance, rooted in history and cultural memory that facilitates sacred belonging which preserves or establishes communities of the renewed. To illustrate the embedded nature of this phenomenon in African American history and cultural expression, chapter one illuminates the significance of Kongo rituals of initiation and their manifestation in American slaves' relationship with Christianity.

Chapter two, "Authoring Humanity in Promiscuous Prose: The Strategy of Dislocation and Renewal in *A Narrative of the Most Remarkable Particulars in the Life of James Albert Ukawsaw Gronniosaw*," argues that because the essential nature of African American literature declares visibility while critiquing social norms, the inherently political constitution of African American literature offers fruitful terrain for demonstrating defiance and resurrected embodiment

in literature. By accepting the function of African American literature and the process of resurrected embodiment as creating ruptures in accepted racial and existential truths, it makes sense that early African American authors would present death and renewal experiences. Chapter two amplifies this point and argues that we see a preoccupation with death and renewal in the earliest forms of African American literature. Literature produced in the eighteenth-century indicates a particular form of resistance and rebirth that while different than the unique pattern outlined in chapter one, demonstrates fidelity to the reconstituted self. Chapter two evidences resistance and rebirth in the literature of early African American authors, but particularly in James Gronniosaw's *A Narrative of the Most Remarkable Particulars in the Life of James Albert Ukawsaw Gronniosaw, an African Prince, as Related by Himself*. Analysis of early African American literature reveals the ways in which appeals for Black intellectual capacity and spiritual value defied racial, religious, and Enlightenment expectations.

Chapter three, "Resuscitated Subjectivity: Presentations of Regeneration, Resurrection, and Womanhood in *The Life and Religious Experience of Jarena Lee*," highlights Jarena Lee's treatments of the trope. Whereas Jarena Lee's spiritual narrative, *The Life and Experiences of Jarena Lee*, proclaims Christian membership and transformation, it also announces secular conversion and resurrection as well as the engendering presence of cosmographic philosophies. Lee's endeavor to use her narrative to not only lead readers to Christian rebirth, but also to the possession of a regenerated self formed after two distinct conversion and resurrection experiences suggests her investment in African resonances, African American interiority, and an African American sacred imperative. However, because the outward performance of Lee's Christian resurrection manifests in traveling and preaching, two actions that transgress "proper" feminine comportment, she imbues her narrative with moments that reassert her femininity, and

thus, redefine the relationship between personhood, Christianity, and Black womanhood. Furthermore, Lee's nuance of the death and resurrection motif to include secular resurrection serves to anticipate nineteenth and twentieth-century African American authors' presentation of secular resurrection.

Chapter four, '"To Be Thinking About a Thing Like That:' Black Bodies as Sites of Terror and Resurrection in James Baldwin's 'Going to Meet the Man,"' illustrates the ways in which twentieth-century African American authors further the concept of secular resurrection to expose the fiction of White supremacist ideologies. Through his protagonist, Jesse, Baldwin reveals the psychological instability of White racists and how racial terror maims Black bodies and disfigures the minds of its practitioners. Chapter four also interrogates the ways in which Jesse not only confronts his emaciated identity as White, masculine authority, but also his memories of Black subjection and mutilation as the path to restoring such authority. Baldwin, then, illustrates that Jesse's racist identity is intricately bound to his sexuality and rooted deeply in his notion of proper masculine and societal decorum. By exploring Jesse's interiority, Baldwin shows that Jesse's observation of African American political agency produces racial impotency which manifest as sexual impotency. Attempting to serve as dramatic counter to his weakened self-conception, Jesse's memories of racial violence intend to restore his failed racial and White, masculine identity. However, Baldwin undermines Jesse's resurrectionary project and reveals that Jesse's cherished memories serve to further disconnect him from his racial and gender ideal.

Trustees of Defiance concludes by reaffirming the salient presence of death and resurrection as an abiding strategy of defiance in African American literature and culture. The conclusion returns to the ways in which African American authors from 1772 to 1987 present

and nuance radical dislocation, fundamental transformation, and the implications of these illustrations in African American communities. This conclusion reaffirms the origins of the death and resurrection motif and literature as a particularly effective genre for African Americans to maintain this culturally formed strategy of resistance. Additionally, it reasserts the death and resurrection motif as a political pronouncement of defiance and conveys how this motif informs African American authors' desire to establish or further communities of renewed peoples. Yet this conclusion reaches the apex of its value by arguing that through their investment in the death and resurrection motif, African American authors provide a new language for and demonstration of the African American jeremiad tradition. It also shows that authors engagement with the concepts of fundamental transformation and imposed racial identities functions to clarify and contextualize W.E.B. Du Bois' theory of "double consciousness."

A Note on Text Selection

In "The Literature of Slavery and Freedom 1746-1865,"[10] Henry Louis Gates Jr. and Nellie Y. McKay write that the "engendering impulse of African American literature is resistance to human tyranny. The sustaining spirit of African American literature is dedication to human dignity" (151). Texts I investigate in *Trustees of Defiance* demonstrate the engendering impulse and sustaining spirit endemic to early African American letters. While the works I engage that were published before 1865 confront questions of human tyranny and dignity by redefining how blackness signifies in a particular political moment, works I explore post-1865 show no less devotion to this endeavor. Whether during the years Gates and McKay specify or throughout the twentieth century, the primary texts upon which this work focuses, reveal African American authors' investment in death and resurrection, and in doing so, articulates authors' nuance on the two foundational values of African American literature. By situating figurations of death and resurrection at the center of their historical, artistic, and personal projects, authors illuminate resistance to the multivalent forces of tyranny. These texts, then, preserve the political mission of African American literature and convey the abiding significance of the African American literary enterprise. *Trustees of Defiance* not only advances conventional analysis of the texts on which it focuses, but in doing so, it seeks to promote a critical reevaluation of the relationship between an African sacred past, Afro-Protestantism, and African American literature outside my interpretative purview.

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[10] Gates, Henry Louis, and Nellie Y. McKay. "The Literature of Slavery and Freedom 1746-1865." *The Norton Anthology of African American Literature*. New York: W.W. Norton, 2004. Print.

Chapter One:
Death Memories and the Ritual function of Resurrected Embodiment

In *Thoughts Upon the African Slave Trade* (1788), John Newton, Anglican priest and former captain of slave ships *Duke of Argyle* and *African*, presents a treatise on abolishing the transatlantic slave trade. Attempting to enlighten readers to the unique inhumanity and anguish that defined the middle passage for African slaves, he writes:

> With our ships, the great object is, to be full. When the ship is there [an African slave port], it is thought desirable, she should take as many [slaves] as possible. The cargo of a vessel of a hundred tons, or little more, is calculated to purchase from two hundred and twenty to two hundred and fifty slaves. Their lodging-rooms below the deck, which are three, (for the men, the boys, and the women,) besides a place for the sick, are sometimes more than five feet high, and sometimes less; and this height is divided towards the middle, for the slaves lie in two rows, one above the other, on each side of the ship, close to each other, like *books upon a shelf*.[1]

Incensed by the limited dimensions of "lodging-rooms" and the further restricted space for individual slaves, English abolitionists "conducted numerous calculations regarding the number of captives that could be humanely carried on board."[2] A petition delivered to the House of Commons in 1791 advocated that "every man slave is to be allowed six feet by one foot four inches for room, every woman five feet ten by one foot four, every boy five feet by one foot two,

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[1] Newton, John. *Thoughts upon the African Slave Trade*. London: J. Buckland and J. Johnson, 1788. 33, Print. Emphasis added.
[2] Young, Jason R. *Rituals of Resistance: African Atlantic Religion in Kongo and the Lowcountry South in the Era of Slavery*. Baton Rouge: Louisiana State UP, 2007. 159, Print.

and every girl four feet six by one foot."[3] Although the abolitionist agenda of Newton and petitioners sought to reveal the deplorable conditions of captivity on slave ships and establish more "humane enslavement," their static language of mathematical precision "belied the violence inherent in the slave trade, replacing it with a certain commodified efficiency."[4] Yet this efficiency takes on another level of meaning when used to reinterpret enslaved Africans as "books upon a shelf." Framing enslaved persons as a collection of assembled books not only suggests the further commodification of slaves' bodies and the attendant silencing of agony, but it articulates a violence of erasure.

Newton and petitioners as well as white supremacist ideologies undergirding African enslavement did not confront pertinent questions regarding these "books." Questions such as, "What memories, traditions, and beliefs are held in these books?" and "What governing motif is threaded through these books' narrative?" were apparently never inquires worth pursuing. Through an investigation of West-Central African faith retentions in the United States, this chapter seeks to mitigate the violence of erasure by presenting answers to these questions. Yet more than helping to highlight absences in the historical record, this chapter revises the bookshelf metaphor. If the "bookshelf" was a space used to mark the dimensions of "books," dimensions that connote coffin measurements and reiterate slave ships as "floating tombs," then the bookshelf functions as a structure of erasure that contains death. The "bookshelf's" ability to keep "books" together in an orderly arrangement conveys this structure as a stable foundation

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[3] *An Abstract of the Evidence Delivered before a Select Committee of the House of Commons in the Years 1790, and 1791; on the Part of the Petitioners for the Abolition of the Slave-Trade*. Great Britain: House of Commons, 1791. 37, Print.

[4] Young, Jason R. *Rituals of Resistance: African Atlantic Religion in Kongo and the Lowcountry South in the Era of Slavery*. Baton Rouge: Louisiana State UP, 2007. 159, Print.

that aids in giving meaning to the "books" it holds. No difficulty arises when interpreting the "bookshelf" as a symbol of white supremacy with the power to redefine Black being. However, during and after the middle passage, enslaved Africans would show that the sustaining spirit upholding, connecting, and ordering them was resistance to the inherent tyranny of white supremacy. This chapter, then, also reveals the specific nature of resistance and how that mode of resistance animated the content within these "books."

II

Orlando Patterson's discussion of death and slavery further explains the inextricable connection between white supremacist rule and nonbeing. He contends, "perhaps the most distinctive attribute of the slave's powerlessness was that it always originated (or was conceived of as having originated) as a substitute for death, usually violent death."[5] Ali Abd Elwahed anticipates Patterson's argument, writing, "all the situations which created slavery were those which commonly would have resulted…in the death of the individual."[6] These scholars affirm slavery as analogous to death. More than doing so, they identify "powerlessness" as the condition which ensures slave existence as a living death. Newton and petitioners' inability to read slave bodies as anything more than material objects on a structure that rendered them nonbeings validates Patterson and Elwahed's contention. Yet it also accurately describes slave existence after slavers reached the New World. Upon reaching the United States, the "bookshelf" continued to arrange "books" into orderly groupings, maintaining the project of

[5] Patterson, Orlando. *Slavery and Social Death: A Comparative Study*. Cambridge: Harvard UP, 1982. 5, Print.
[6] Elwahed, Ali Abd. *Contribution à une théorie sociologique de l'esclavage : étude des situations génératrices de l'esclavage*. Paris: A. Mechelinck 1931. 243, Print.

positioning the enslaved in death. But when we remove these "books" from the "bookshelf" and actually peruse them, we read death not simply as the byproduct of powerlessness. We read African societies investment in framing death as a threshold to achieving new identity.[7] At the center of memories, beliefs, and traditions defining Africans' lives before captivity in slave ships and the United States, we read initiation rituals of dying to a former self to attain personhood and communal belonging. Whether Ga, Yourba, Ibo, Mandé, Kongo, or another ethnicity, African captives retained their understanding of death as a space to be entered and transgressed. Fundamental to individual and collective identity, initiation rituals of becoming an adult, fully-fledged member of society demanded that initiates perform a radical dislocation from their previous lives to attain total transformation. Completing these rituals pronounced initiates twice born, having successfully died to the former, individual self to achieve new communal life. The elevated communal status of the twice born evidenced a social birth, one that announced privileges and responsibilities as well as sacred unity with ancestors and the spiritual world.

Captives understood that death was a threshold that offered passageway to complete renewal. While enduring unspeakable horrors, they remembered the formal process of achieving renewal and knew that death offered the path for edified being and communal formation.

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[7] Arnold Van Gennep's argues that throughout African societies traversing the threshold indicates crossing the boundary that separates differing belief systems. He not only observes that crossing the "threshold is to unite oneself with a new world" (20), but he describes the ceremonial practices and sacred objects used to consecrate the threshold as a space denoting sacred transition. Solon T. Kimball's observation of Van Gennep's more notable concept, rites of passage, further explains sacred transition. Kimball writes, "He [Van Gennep] pointed out that, when the activities associated with such ceremonies were examined in terms of their order and content, it was possible to distinguish three major phases: separation (séparation), transition (marge), and incorporation (aggrégation). Considered as a whole, he labeled these the *schéma of rites de passage*. *Passage* might more appropriately have been translated as 'transition'" (vii). Van Gennep, Arnold. *The Rites of Passage: A Classic Study of Cultural Celebrations*. Trans. Solon T. Kimball, Monika B. Vizedom, and Gabrielle L. Caffee. Chicago: U of Chicago, 1960. Print.

Although white supremacist ideology framed death as the site of erasure and nonbeing, captives held to an opposite, culturally formed belief system. So while enslaved Africans were treated as material commodities, the institution of slavery, those who purported it, and some who decried it, did not realize that captives were cultural retainers of life affirming beliefs that conceived of death differently. Whereas perpetrators of the slave system devised death as a space to unbind personhood and humanity, captives believed in the restorative nature of death. While the enslaved, as "books," held renewal through death in their "pages," for them, their "bookshelf," the structure connecting and upholding them, was defiance of existential ruin. Fidelity to death, renewal, and defiance served as dramatic counter to the White supremacist design undergirding the slave system. In other words, when confronting efforts to relegate them to living death status, the enslaved relied on their awareness of death's potential in order to resist complete destruction. Retaining memories of rituals rooted in death and renewal gave captives the psychological and spiritual courage to transcend the "metaphorical death that is slavery."[8] Memory and experience of a ritual past, and the spirit of defiance activated by it, enabled captives to die away from slavery's death status. This chapter is a study of the ways in which the ritual function of death and renewal engendered defiance and became translated in African American cultural pronouncements.

III

The majority of captives enslaved in North America were from the central and western areas of Africa—from Congo-Angola, Nigeria, Dahomey, Togo, the Gold Coast, and Sierra

[8] Young, Jason R. *Rituals of Resistance: African Atlantic Religion in Kongo and the Lowcountry South in the Era of Slavery*. Baton Rouge: Louisiana State UP, 2007. 19, Print.

Leone.[9] The transatlantic slave trade "brought an estimated half-million Africans to what is now the United States over some two hundred years."[10] Even after the 9th United States congress, on January 1, 1808, outlawed the importation of African captives, the illegal importation of captives continued as late as 1860.[11] As Sterling Stuckey notes, "that the trade continued illegally until the Civil War meant African cultural values were steadily being replenished.[12] Since the early twentieth-century, scholars have examined African American history to ascertain the form and New World manifestations of these values.[13] Their findings illustrate that the "institution of slavery did not destroy the cultural legacy of slaves nor erase the memories of an African past."[14] Not only have scholars demonstrated the fiction of "the African tabula rasa," their work also evidences African retentions as essential to captives resisting the religious, economic, political, and philosophical ideals that bolstered the slave system. By maintaining religious rituals, rites,

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[9] Stuckey, Sterling. *Slave Culture: Nationalist Theory and the Foundations of Black America*. New York: Oxford UP, 1987. 10-11, Print.
[10] Holloway, Joseph E. "The Origins of African-American Culture." *Africanisms in American Culture*. Bloomington and Indianapolis: Indiana UP, 1990. 1, Print.
[11] Hall, Robert L. "African Religious Retentions in Florida." *Africanisms in American Culture*. Bloomington and Indianapolis: Indiana UP, 1990. 112, Print.
[12] Stuckey, Sterling. *Slave Culture: Nationalist Theory and the Foundations of Black America*. New York: Oxford UP, 1987. 43, Print.
[13] Far from an exhaustive list, these scholars and their works include, Berlin, Ira. *Slaves Without Masters: The Free Negro in the Antebellum South*. New York: Vintage, 1974. Print. Genovese, Eugene D. *Roll, Jordan, Roll: The World the Slaves Made*. New York: Pantheon, 1974. Print. Blassingame, John W. *The Slave Community: Plantation Life in the Antebellum South*. New York: Oxford University Press, 1981. Print. Mullin, Gerald W. *Flight and Rebellion: Slave Resistance in Eighteenth-Century Virginia*. London: Oxford UP, 1972. Print. Haynes, Robert V. *Blacks in White America before 1865*. New York: David McKay, 1972. Print. Herskovits, Melville J. *The Myth of the Negro past*. Boston: Beacon, 1941, 1958. Print. Sobel, Mechal. *The World They Made Together: Black and White Values in Eighteenth-Century Virginia*. Princeton: Princeton UP, 1989. Print. Levine, Lawrence W. *Black Culture and Black Consciousness: Afro-American Folk Thought from Slavery to Freedom*. New York: Oxford UP, 1977. Print. Bascom, William Russell. *African Folktales in the New World*. Bloomington: Indiana UP, 1992. Print. Bastide, Roger. *African Civilizations in the New World*. London: C. Hurst, 1972. Print.
[14] Maultsby, Portia K. "Africanisms in African-American Music." *Africanisms in American Culture*. Bloomington and Indianapolis: Indiana UP, 1990. 185, Print.

signs, and symbols, captives developed, as Jason R. Young argues, a form of cultural resistance that helped shield them from some of the horrid conditions of slavery, while enabling them to "attack directly the ideological underpinnings of slavery."[15] While not all retentions were religious in nature, just as in Brazil, Cuba, Haiti, Jamaica, and other Black Atlantic locales, African belief systems gave American captives the spiritual and psychological resilience to not only resist soul crushing dehumanization, but to reaffirm personhood, communal value, and ancestral ties. Combining Stuckey's observation with the engendering effects of retentions suggests that belief systems, as a source of resistance and empowerment, were employed and replenished in the United States throughout much of the nineteenth-century.

Despite American scholars' significant contributions, their work often "implies that the cultural heritage of the North American slave population was West African."[16] While some scholars identify "West Africa" as "the entire Atlantic coast from Senegal to Angola, others envision the same area but…omit Kongo-Angola almost entirely."[17] The incomplete assessment of Kongo-Angola, or West-Central Africa, on retentions reiterates the general perception advanced by Melville Herskovits and others in the mid-twentieth century "that black Caribbean and South American cultures exhibited greater incidences of 'Africanisms' relative to the black cultures of British North America."[18] Implicitly, these claims identify African captives in South America and the Caribbean as more authentically Black than those enslaved in the United States.

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[15] Young, Jason R. *Rituals of Resistance: African Atlantic Religion in Kongo and the Lowcountry South in the Era of Slavery*. Baton Rouge: Louisiana State UP, 2007. 12, Print.
[16] Holloway, Joseph E. "The Origins of African-American Culture." *Africanisms in American Culture*. Bloomington and Indianapolis: Indiana UP, 1990. 1, Print.
[17] Hall, Robert L. "African Religious Retentions in Florida." *Africanisms in American Culture*. Bloomington and Indianapolis: Indiana UP, 1990. 99, Print.
[18] Young, Jason R. *Rituals of Resistance: African Atlantic Religion in Kongo and the Lowcountry South in the Era of Slavery*. Baton Rouge: Louisiana State UP, 2007. 6, Print.

However, recent research has shown that "Angola and the Kongo are relevant to studying retentions, not only in the Caribbean and Brazil but also in the southern United States."[19] The preponderance of personal accounts and forensic evidence gathered not only in Southern states, but Northern states as well reveals the palpable presence of West-Central African beliefs and values in African America. The existence of West-Central African retentions in America repositions captives far from the status of North American anomalies. Instead, the West-Central African philosophies, rituals, and sacred observances practiced in the United States help to better frame captives as participants in established faith systems that mended spiritual fracture and defied racist regimes.

Because West-Central African beliefs must figure prominently in studies of retentions and resistance in the United States, it makes sense to investigate these beliefs and the ways in which captives used them to reinterpret their enslavement. Specifically, we should examine the Kongo Kingdom, a collection of societies that "held sway over much of West-Central Africa, with zones of influence that extended from the north in the Bateke plateau southward to Benguela."[20] Fundamental to Kongo ontology were ideologies of kinship that "maintained that all power and authority in this world derived from the otherworld."[21] Kongo societies united these ideologies with detailed descriptions and a total orientation regarding their presence in this world and the other. Life in the physical world was not divorced from life in the spiritual world.

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[19] Hall, Robert L. "African Religious Retentions in Florida." *Africanisms in American Culture*. Bloomington and Indianapolis: Indiana UP, 1990. 99, Print.
[20] Young, Jason R. *Rituals of Resistance: African Atlantic Religion in Kongo and the Lowcountry South in the Era of Slavery*. Baton Rouge: Louisiana State UP, 2007. 26, Print.
[21] Ibid., 27

While the two worlds were separate, they were also two interconnected realms of existence with boundaries that could be transgressed.

The permeability of these two realms enabled the living to maintain spiritual unity with ancestors. Not only did a porous death boundary allow for the continuity of ancestral reverence, but ancestors were able to influence the living, guiding them to greater levels of edification and communal responsibility. Influence from ancestors served as a form of restorative intervention, a form of healing power that pointed the living to a righteous life and afterlife. As Robert Farris Thompson observes, from the beginning of their seven-hundred-year history, "Kongo was immersed in a vision of leadership and healing."[22] That ancestors continued to direct the living serves as testament to the immutability of inner being. Yet more than this, communication and instruction from the spiritual realm shortened the distance that measured the physical realm as completely distinct from the spiritual realm. The Kongo regard for these two realms prepared the living for their own responsibility upon entrance into the otherworld. In other words, spiritual unification with ancestors, while aiding the livings' physical life, also readied them for communal responsibilities after death. Following relocation to the spiritual realm, the lordly dead's direction restored the living. Death, then, was a threshold to an active spiritual realm wherein ancestors, imbued with the authority to renew, restored and prepared the living. The spiritual realm also prepared ancestors for their eventual reincarnation as children or immortal simbi spirits.[23]

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[22] Thompson, Robert Farris., and Joseph Cornet. *The Four Moments of the Sun: Kongo Art in Two Worlds*. Washington, D.C: National Gallery of Art, 1982. 34, Print.

[23] Ibid 28., Thompson and Cornet describe the simbi as immortal spirits found in "time-resistant natural forces or natural forms, such as pools, strange rock formations, streams, ravines, waterfalls, oceans, and shells *(zinga)*. Ras Michal Brown discusses the significance of simbi

Kongo understood death as a passageway to new being and elevated knowledge. Although individual value, communal rejuvenation, and authority in death are fundamental elements of new being and knowledge, we can obtain a richer understanding of these elements by acknowledging the spirit of defiance connecting them. These beliefs rest on framing death and temporality not as obstacles to communal solidarity, but rather as natural occurrences that must be reinterpreted. Opposing the static reality often associated with death indicates Kongo resisting death as a permanent break from ancestors and cultural continuity. Whereas conventional readings of death suggest that deceased individuals and their attendant information cannot be accessed, Kongo beliefs defy those conventions. Their sacred approach to existence shows the necessity of death boundary transgressions, but also the necessity for defying any natural or unnatural occurrence thought to separate the living from the realm and influence of the dead. Undergirding their sacred beliefs, then, is a mode of defiance that resists communal fracture. Kongo resolute defiance, when combined with their existential perspectives, reveals death as a space of restoration and resistance rooted firmly in cultural and ontological solidarity.

Kongo societies, particularly the Bakongo, reflected their sacred values in a cosmogram. The Kongo cosmogram *(Yowa)* illustrated the formal presentation of sacred values and defiance in a circular pattern that linked being, community, and cosmogram. When forming the cosmogram, Kongo placed intersecting horizontal and vertical lines at the center, creating a cross that extended through the circle. The horizontal line *(Kalunga)* is represented as a river, sea, another watery boundary, or even dense forestation.[24] This line divides the world of the living, represented as a mountain *(ntoto)* in the cosmogram, "from its mirrored counterpart in the

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spirits in natural spaces and slaves' lives in his book, *African-Atlantic Cultures and the South Carolina Lowcountry*.

[24] Ibid., 28

kingdom of the dead."[25] The mirrored mountain and terrain of the dead were "called mpemba land of kaolin, land of things all white."[26] "Through powers commensurate with the relative goodness of their life once lived on earth," mpemba's spiritual inhabitants "lose the impurities acquired in life, acquire a new freshness of existences, and reenter the world as spirits reincarnated."[27] The vertical line symbolized the eternal connection of the physical and spiritual realms. Its highest point indicated "maleness, north, and the peak of a person's strength on earth."[28] To reinforce the belief that an individual's life had no end but instead moved in an eternal cycle, Kongo drew small circles at each end of both lines. These four circles symbolized the sun shining on the four moments of life. The sun was understood to move in a counterclockwise pattern around the circle. Robert Farris Thompson and Joseph Cornet describe this process:

> The right-hand sphere or corner stands for dawn which, in turn, is the sign of a life beginning. Noon, the uppermost disk or corner, indicates the flourishing of life, the point of most ascendant power. Next, by the inevitable organic process as we know it, come change and flux, the setting of the sun, and death, marked by the left-hand median point or disk. And then, assuming a life well lived, we may return within another dawn,

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[25] Thompson, Robert Farris. *Flash of the Spirit: African and Afro-American Art and Philosophy*. New York: Random House, 1983. 109, Print.
[26] Thompson, Robert Farris., and Joseph Cornet. *The Four Moments of the Sun: Kongo Art in Two Worlds*. Washington, D.C: National Gallery of Art, 1982. 43, Print.
[27] Ibid., 43
[28] Thompson, Robert Farris. *Flash of the Spirit: African and Afro-American Art and Philosophy*. New York: Random House, 1983. 109, Print.

> emerging from the midnight world, carried back into the mainstream of the living, in the name of grand children or succeeding generations.[29]

For Kongo, then, extraordinary individuals—those generous, strong, and wise—die twice. "They die once 'here,' and once 'there,' beneath the…Kalunga" as the sun shines on the kingdom of the dead.[30] A second death in the spiritual world as well as the attendant reincarnation reveal Kongo positioning time under their authority. Kongo reimaginings of time not only ensured immortal existence and constant contact between the living and the dead,[31] but it further conveys their orientation regarding death. As Margaret Washington Creel notes, "In the four moments of the sun, earthly death, the setting of the sun, is only the third moment. Thus death was not the end of life nor the cemetery a final resting place."[32] Rather, death was "a door *(mwelo)* between two worlds, a 'threshold' marking the line between the two worlds, of the living and of the dead, circumscribed by the cosmic journey of the sun."[33] Written into the cosmogram, then, was an implicit argument regarding Kongo sacred philosophy and the temporal limitations of earthly existence. Kongo posited that resisting death as synonymous with ruin allowed them to know death for what it was, a twin world of restoration for spiritual inhabitants that also influenced the living.

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[29] Thompson, Robert Farris., and Joseph Cornet. *The Four Moments of the Sun: Kongo Art in Two Worlds*. Washington, D.C: National Gallery of Art, 1982. 28, Print.
[30] Ibid., 27-8
[31] Ibid., 28. The Kongo cosmogram and other signs that expressed cosmographic philosophies have a history worth addressing. Thompson and Cornet observe that "corporeal renderings of the Kongo sign of cosmos possibly extends back many centuries. For example, a corpus of signs appearing in rock paintings in Bas-Zaïre which are associated with a necropolis recently dated archaeologically to around the 1660s includes this sign."
[32] Creel, Margaret Washington. "Gullah Attitudes toward Life and Death." *Africanisms in American Culture*. Bloomington and Indianapolis: Indiana UP, 1990. 82, Print.
[33] Thompson, Robert Farris., and Joseph Cornet. *The Four Moments of the Sun: Kongo Art in Two Worlds*. Washington, D.C: National Gallery of Art, 1982. 27, Print.

While such influence conveyed through ancestors, as described above, guided, edified, and healed the living, it also informed initiation into Kongo society. Serving as rites of passage for entrance into Kongo, initiations determined full-fledged membership in an eternal community. So essential was the cosmogram to this effort that there was scarcely an initiation or ritual transformation of a person that did not involve the circle and sun.[34] Gaining entrance into Kongo or its secret Lemba society of healers meant engaging the cosmogram correctly.[35] After drawing the cosmogram on the earth, initiates stood upon the sign, conveying that they understood the meaning of life and death as a process shared with the dead below the Kalunga line—"the real source of power and prestige."[36] As Thompson states, "this sign was thus a seal and witness of sacred equity, justice, truth."[37]

Standing on the sign bound initiates to time-resistant values and fundamental beliefs by the unblinking gaze of God and the dead. Even in neighboring civilizations persons were "sworn into societies in the presence of cognate signs written on the earth, as exemplified by the Bapende, Ndembu, and Tu-Chokwe rituals."[38] Thus, the cosmogram was implemented or adapted to help root membership and consciousness in the unshakable ground of cultural continuity. Standing on the sign not only connected the body to sacred meaning, but it suggested that initiates' past, future, and total being were an extension of sacred meaning. Yet just as the

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[34] Ibid., 43
[35] Thompson, Robert Farris. *Flash of the Spirit: African and Afro-American Art and Philosophy*. New York: Random House, 1983. 109, Print.
[36] Stuckey, Sterling. *Slave Culture: Nationalist Theory and the Foundations of Black America*. New York: Oxford UP, 1987. 43, Print. Thompson, Robert Farris. "Kongo Influences on African-American Artistic Culture." *Africanisms in American Culture*. Bloomington and Indianapolis: Indiana UP, 1990. 153, Print.
[37] Thompson, Robert Farris. "Kongo Influences on African-American Artistic Culture." *Africanisms in American Culture*. Bloomington and Indianapolis: Indiana UP, 1990. 153, Print.
[38] Ibid.,153

significance of the cosmogram was translated in the body, when Kongo took oaths while standing on the sign, they linked the authority in their voices with the inherent power of the sign. According to Wyatt MacGaffey, "the person taking the oath stands upon the cross, situating himself between life and death, and invokes the judgement of God and the dead upon himself."[39] In other words, their very lives were implicated in the truthfulness of what was sworn.[40] Although an ancient practice, when observing the Bakongo in 1886, Lievin van de Velde noted, "I have frequently seen blacks trace a cross on the earth when they wanted to swear with all their force the taking of a vow."[41]

IV

The intricates of the cosmogram and its polyvalent significance in Kongo lives and societies illustrate the sacred knowledge informing many enslaved Africans' perception of themselves, this world, and the next. If we return to the metaphor of books and the bookshelf, the cosmogram explains in greater specificity the orientation to death as renewal retained in "books." We can also better understand the "bookshelf," the structure connecting and upholding them. At the core of defiance of existential ruin, we view the presence of spiritual continuity and an assurance of immortality, two life affirming creeds that made defiance possible. Not only does religion constitute the centerpiece of African survivals,[42] but the cosmogram helps reveal

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[39] MacGaffey as quoted in Thompson, Robert Farris. *Flash of the Spirit: African and Afro-American Art and Philosophy*. New York: Random House, 1983. 108, Print.
[40] Thompson, Robert Farris. "Kongo Influences on African-American Artistic Culture." *Africanisms in American Culture*. Bloomington and Indianapolis: Indiana UP, 1990. 153, Print.
[41] Velde, Lievin van de. "La region de bas-Congo," Bulletin Société Royale Belge de Geographie. 10: 383
[42] In *The Myth of the Negro Past*, Herskovits writes, "African religious practices and magical beliefs are everywhere to be found in some measure as recognizable survivals and are in every

the nuances of particular survivals and religious beliefs throughout the Americas. Thompson maintains, "there is a clear connection between cosmographic signs of spiritual renaissance in the classical religion of the Bakongo and similarly chalked signs of initiation among blacks of Cuba, Haiti, the island of St. Vincent, the United States, and Brazil where numerous Kongo slaves arrived."[43] He further suggests that the "cosmogram marked on the ground for purposes of initiation and mediation of spiritual power between worlds" serves as a discernable form of artistic and religious expression in the western hemisphere."[44] Thompson's observations help to reinforce Jason R. Young's contention that "the slave trade conspired to send not only men and women but also cultural meanings, signs, and symbols around the Atlantic realm"[45]

Kongo and their embedded philosophies arrived in the United States in the greatest numbers between 1733-1807. While ports in Georgia, Louisiana, Virginia and other Southern states served as points of cultural entry, none served in this capacity more than the port of Charleston. Between 1733-44, 60 percent of Africans imported to South Carolina were from Angola in Central Africa. Moreover, between the years 1735 and 1740, 70 percent of all incoming Africans were from this region.[46] However, during the middle years of African importation into South Carolina, 1741-1787, slave owners came to rue the large number of

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region more numerous than survivals in other realms of culture" (111). Robert L. Hall suggests that for Herskovits, "if one cannot find African survivals or influences in African-American religious practices and magical beliefs one cannot find them anywhere (99). Herskovits, Melville J. *The Myth of the Negro past*. Boston: Beacon, 1941, 1958. Print. Hall, Robert L. "African Religious Retentions in Florida." *Africanisms in American Culture*. Bloomington and Indianapolis: Indiana UP, 1990. 99, Print.

[43] Thompson, Robert Farris. *Flash of the Spirit: African and Afro-American Art and Philosophy*. New York: Random House, 1983. xvi, Print.

[44] Ibid., 109

[45] Young, Jason R. *Rituals of Resistance: African Atlantic Religion in Kongo and the Lowcountry South in the Era of Slavery*. Baton Rouge: Louisiana State UP, 2007. 3, Print.

[46] Wood, Peter H. *Black Majority: Negroes in Colonial South Carolina from 1670 through the Stono Rebellion*. New York: W.W. Norton, 1998. 301, Print.

Angolans among the slave population.[47] This apprehension stemmed from Angolans participation in the 1739 Stono Rebellion,[48] an event that caused owners to reduce the number of imported Angolans to 15 percent. Following these years, owners again prized Angolans, increasing importation to 53 percent between 1787 and 1807.[49] Additionally, as Margret Washington Creel notes, "an even larger number went to up-country plantations and to planters in states refusing to import."[50]

The presence of slaves from the Angola region of Africa not only reflects the significant number of Kongo throughout the United States, but also the large number of Kongo culture bearers in these states. Although slaves from West-Africa constituted the majority of the estimated half-million Africans brought to America, Joseph E. Holloway reminds us that "the Bantu of Central Africa had the largest homogeneous culture among the imported Africans and the strongest impact on the development of African-American culture."[51] As noted earlier,

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[47] Young, Jason R. *Rituals of Resistance: African Atlantic Religion in Kongo and the Lowcountry South in the Era of Slavery*. Baton Rouge: Louisiana State UP, 2007. 32, Print.

[48] Jason R. Young maintains that because the Stono Rebellion erupted only twenty miles outside of Charleston, South Carolina's commercial and political capital, colonial officials deemed it prudent to reduce the number of West-Central Africans in the colony and levied a series of duties to decrease the number of direct imports from West-Central Africa. Margret Washington Creel and Peter Wood argue that as the number of West-Central Africans decreased, planters began to import Africans from other regions, especially Senegambia and Sierra Leone. Planters also imported Africans from Haiti, Cuba, and Puerto Rico. Because Africans from these islands practiced religions such as Santería and Vodun, religions that were a combination of African retentions and New World adaptions, Afro-Carribean belief systems also entered the United States and enslaved communities. Young, Jason R. *Rituals of Resistance: African Atlantic Religion in Kongo and the Lowcountry South in the Era of Slavery*. Baton Rouge: Louisiana State UP, 2007. 32, Print.

[49] Holloway, Joseph E. "The Origins of African-American Culture." *Africanisms in American Culture*. Bloomington and Indianapolis: Indiana UP, 1990. 6, Print.

[50] Creel, Margaret Washington. "Gullah Attitudes toward Life and Death." *Africanisms in American Culture*. Bloomington and Indianapolis: Indiana UP, 1990. 69, Print.

[51] Bantu is a Central African culture that shares a similar language. Bantu is comprised Cabinda, Bakongo, Malimbo, Bambo, Ndungo, Congo, Balime, Badondo, Bambona, Luba, Loango, Luango, Umbundu, Ovimbundu, Pembe, and Imbangala. Holloway, Joseph E. "The Origins of

slaves from Central Africa used the cosmogram's sacred meaning to reaffirm personhood in a system determined to erase it. Thus, the shared knowledge of renewal and resistance helped develop a culture of value and defiance among slave communities. Because Central Africans worked principally as field hands, a position relatively removed from the controlling and "civilizing" influence of their owners,[52] their culture remained dominant. While I do not mean to suggest that only slaves of Kongolese descent drew on established practices to announce inherent worth and group solidarity, I am arguing that Kongo specific orientation to renewal, resistance, life and death, as well as the position that these slaves worked, helped them articulate and reinforce a more complex and lasting vision of liberation. Do to their willingness to accept cosmographic principles, enslaved Africans, as Michael Gomez notes, developed a more unified approach to seeing themselves, an approach that prized Black, cultural authority over distinct ethnic identities.[53]

Yet eschewing particular identities for communal solidarity did not erase the cultural embeddedness of the cosmogram. Instead, enslaved Africans who maintained a connection with cosmographic philosophies, found in Christianity a similar system of beliefs and the possibility

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African-American Culture." *Africanisms in American Culture*. Bloomington and Indianapolis: Indiana UP, 1990. 6, Print.

[52] When addressing field-hands as culture bearers, Holloway writes, "Given the constraints imposed on artists and domestic servants by plantation owners, one my logically conclude that the cultures of the Congo-Angola region of Central Africa rather than those of West Africa were dominant in North America. West African culture nevertheless supplied mainstream southern southern society with Africanisms through a process of reciprocal acculturation between Africans and European-Americans." Ibid., 16

[53] Gomez, Michael A. *Exchanging Our Country Marks: The Transformation of African Identities in the Colonial and Antebellum South*. Chapel Hill, NC: U of North Carolina, 1998. 3-4, Print. It's important to note that in the book, *The Empire of Necessity,* Greg Grandin reconstructs the ways in which an Islamic cosmic view informed the "prophetic sense of journey," "promise of delivery from suffering," and necessity of Black leadership for enslaved Muslims. Grandin, Greg. *The Empire of Necessity: Slavery, Freedom, and Deception in the New World*. Picador, 2015. 172.

of transforming a religion to reflect their circumstances. While slavery did not erode the established culture of value and defiance, "how long could these attributes alone sustain cultural life among slaves, no matter how their spirits struggled against degradation?"[54] Creel suggests that "Christianity offered cohesion of a kind needed to develop a homogeneous people."[55] Through their interpretation of Christianity, slaves heard an egalitarian invitation to Christian membership and affirmation of inherent worth that was not evident in planters' approach to Christianity. In other words, Christianity offered another language through which value and defiance were translated. Christianity, then, while serving to strengthen a culture rooted in an African past, also presented the possibility to coalesce around shared expectations for the future. The enslaved saw in the figure of Jesus Christ the ultimate representative of their present circumstance and future deliverance. In hush harbors and secret meetings, they worshiped and communicated with a God who knew personally of their infirmities, who bore the scars of persecution and rejection. Precious moments spent with Christ conveyed powerfully his accessibility and knowledge of their plight. Yet the enslaved understood that just as Christ was manifested in flesh, the dirty, work clothes of redemption, they too had been manifested in the role of slaves, the dirtied and disinherited. They connected Christ's body with their social position. Just as Christ's flesh had to die in order for him to proclaim resurrection and omnipotence, enslaved Africans knew that their imposed identities within the living death of slavery had to die for them to achieve new life and authority. Thus, Christianity reiterated in

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[54] Creel, Margaret Washington. "Gullah Attitudes toward Life and Death." *Africanisms in American Culture*. Bloomington and Indianapolis: Indiana UP, 1990. 76, Print.

[55] Ibid., 76-7. That Christianity existed in the Kongo since the fifteenth-century suggests that Kongolese slaves were not ignorant of Christianity before arriving in the United States. Also, the historical record shows that some slaves found in humanistic orientations and other religions a path for psychological and communal recuperation.

similar language the central tenet of the cosmogram: death as the threshold to fundamental renewal.

Enslaved Africans chose to accept Christianity because it bridged established beliefs with new spiritual and personal authority. Christianity not only offered divine sanction to slaves' assurance of future deliverance, but their interpretation of Christianity "operated on an internal logic that excluded planters, overseers, even white Christian ministers."[56] It is not surprising, then, that they emphasized and manipulated particular conversion experiences and worship practices to reflect African retentions. In *Trabelin' On: The Slave Journey to an Afro-Baptist Faith*, Mechal Sobel argues that enslaved Africans' acceptance and adaptation of Christianity provided them a unified sense of being, an orientation that simultaneously maintained the cherished past while proclaiming wholeness in America.[57] She defines this fusion of sacred values as a "new sacred cosmos." Sobel further suggests that the tenets and relative freedom within the Baptist faith created the atmosphere for the new sacred cosmos. Although large numbers of slaves were attracted to Methodism, especially during the Second Great Awakening, Sobel argues convincingly that slaves became Baptists not simply because of this domination's "historical willingness to allow blacks some modicum of self-determination."[58] While this factor is important, the Baptist faith's focus on the necessity of being born again, of knowing Christ personally, of performing ecstatic worship as proof of the spirit's indwelling, and of the connection between voice and internal disposition offered fertile ground for the continuity of African belief systems.

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[56] Ibid., 91
[57] Sobel, Mechal. *Trabelin' On: The Slave Journey to an Afro-Baptist Faith*. Princeton, NJ: Princeton UP, 1988. Xxii, Print.
[58] Ibid., 79

If we investigate the manner in which enslaved Africans adhered to the Baptist faith's priorities, we see not simply the presence of African beliefs, but, more specifically, the fusion of cosmographic philosophies and Christianity. The indwelling of the spirit resonates powerfully during conversion experiences. Throughout Southern states, but particularly in Gullah communities on South Carolina's sea islands, slaves practiced "seeking," a process of striving for and communing with God's spirit. The term "seeking" derives from Methodist missionaries call to "seek Jesus" and "become seekers of religion."[59] Ras Michael Brown observes that "the actual outcome of the introduction of the Methodist seeking process did not conform to the expectations of the missionaries. Instead, it appears that African-descended people incorporated seeking Jesus into existing ideas and practices of spiritual transformation that derived from Lowcountry manifestations of African spiritual cultures."[60] As early as the 1840s, Missionaries noted the Gullah seeking ritual. They described it as beginning with a dream in which Gullah youth realize their disconnection from Christ and become warned of their souls' grave condition. The youth then selects a church member, usually female, as a spiritual guide who interprets the seeker's visions, or "travels." Lastly, missionaries noted that seekers attained church membership only after the spiritual guide was convinced that the seeker had communed and was filled with God's spirit. So different was this approach to securing God's spirit and church membership that missionaries questioned if this ritual was devoid of Christian meaning.[61]

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[59] Creel, Margaret Washington. "*A Peculiar People*"*: Slave Religion and Community-Culture among the Gullahs*. New York: New York UP, 1988. 285-6, Print.
[60] Brown, Ras Michael. *African-Atlantic Cultures and the South Carolina Lowcountry*. Cambridge: Cambridge Univ, 2013. 211, Print.
[61] Southern Christian Advocate , 30 October 1846 and 30 October 1847, quoted in Creel, "*A Peculiar People.*"

Missionaries did not understand that "outward expressions of doctrine,…considered essential to the proper conversion to Christianity, were not fundamental to spiritual transformation and did not figure in any significant way in the early formulations of Christianity of African-descended people."[62] Likewise, they did not understand or register the significance of where seeking occurred. Those seeking Christ's indwelling spirit did so alone often at night in forests or secluded areas. As Morris Hamilton of Johns Island asserts, "that's the only way you can find Jesus; go in the wilderness and wait on him until he comes."[63] The wait typically lasted for a period of weeks or months. When they entered the wilderness, seekers not only prayed, but also received visions and dreams that they later relayed to their spiritual guide as proof of God working with their souls. Because it was thought to advance the process, seekers routinely fasted for stretches of three days to two weeks. Night excursions of the literal and metaphorical hungry seeker was deemed the most effective way to, paraphrasing Toni Morrison, know God by his first name. Moreover, "the experience of liberation or getting through at the end of the wilderness period marked the most important point of spiritual transformation."[64]

Yet the imperative to access God's spirit through seeking reveals more than a unique formulation for Christian and church membership. Instead, it demonstrates the intertwining presence of cosmographic and Christian attitudes toward death, resurrection, and community.

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[62] Brown, Ras Michael. *African-Atlantic Cultures and the South Carolina Lowcountry*. Cambridge: Cambridge Univ, 2013. 212, Print.

[63] Interview with Morris Hamilton, Johns Island, South Carolina, 24 May 1932, LDTC, Disc 12-3305 AI. Ras Michael Brown notes that in performing the ritual of seeking first, slaves "inverted the baptism-wilderness sequence in the scriptures, as the wilderness phase came first and baptism occurred last." This inversion further signals how African retentions informed slaves' adaptation of Christianity. Revising the sequence of events suggests the deliberate effort to both announce Christianity on their own terms and reiterate the interconnectivity of ancient and adapted faith practices. Brown, Ras Michael. *African-Atlantic Cultures and the South Carolina Lowcountry*. Cambridge: Cambridge Univ, 2013. 214, Print.

[64] Ibid., 215

As noted earlier, in the cosmogram, beneath the Kalunga line, the world of the dead was represented as a body of water or forestation. Gullah communities, like many slave cultures throughout the United States, were deeply influenced by Kongo religious beliefs and practices.[65] For Gullahs and other slave communities that practiced seeking, then, entering into the forest symbolized entrance into the space of death. Just as the terrain beneath the Kalunga line was a land full of active spirits that communicated with the living while awaiting rebirth, the forest was a place wherein God's spirit acted upon the seeker as he or she awaited new spiritual life. Additionally, the necessity of conveying dreams and visions, or how God's spirit manifested in consciousness, to the spiritual guide suggests communication between the spiritually dead and spiritually alive.

So essential was obtaining God's spirit in a forest that "those who could not go to the woods attempted to replicate the meaning of the forest as best as they could."[66] Gullah Joe, born in Africa and brought to the Congare River Valley of South Carolina to work as a slave, explicitly connects the forest to the space of death. He recalls, "I is a ole man now, but I has a longin' to walk in de feenda. I wants to see it one more time. I has a wife an' chillin here but when I thinks er my tribe an' my friends an' my daddy and my mammy an' de great feenda, a feelin' rises up in my th'oat an' my eye well up wid tear."[67] While the "feenda,"[68] refers to a literal forest, Ras Michael Brown posits, "Gullah Joe may have experienced or at least heard

[65] The term "Gullah" may also reflect Kongo influences. Some scholars believe that "Gullah" is an abbreviated form of "Angola."
[66] Brown, Ras Michael. *African-Atlantic Cultures and the South Carolina Lowcountry*. Cambridge: Cambridge Univ, 2013. 214, Print.
[67] Adams, Edward C. L. "Gullah Joe: (The Story of an African Slave)." *Tales of the Congaree*, edited by ROBERT G. O'MEALLY, University of North Carolina Press, 1987. 277–278, www.jstor.org/stable/10.5149/9781469616179_adams.140.
[68] In KiKongo, feenda is written as "finda" or "mfinda" but still refers to the forest.

stories of the forest as a place where the powers of the other world reigned through the doings of various spirits and ancestors."[69] Jason R. Young furthers this sentiment, arguing that "in invoking the feenda, Joe calls to mind a particular Kongelese conception of the geography of power, death, and rebirth in the natural world. Joe implies that his tribe, friends, mammy, and daddy are in the feenda and their spirits roam in its expanse."[70] While Gullah Joe and seekers realized the possibilities for renewal upon entering the space of death, communities that practiced seeking reinforced the significance of death by often performing the ritual at night. Just as the sun shining on the land of the dead signified an active spiritual realm that culminated in its inhabitants' reincarnation, seeking at night dramatized seekers work in the space of death and the desired presence of new light, Christian rebirth. In other words, the ritual of seeking at night situated seekers in the space of death as they believed that Christ's, or the son's, spirit would shine in them. The lack of food and water while fasting, then, was not only intended to hasten the spirit's indwelling, but to reiterate the symbolic value of death. Communities that practiced seeking used this ritual to formalize sacred belief: death as the precondition for new life.

Seeking should not be understood simply as a new world invention, but as an adaptation of ritual initiation rooted in a precious past. When noting seeking's African antecedent, Creel observes that upon leaving the wilderness, "if transformation was not evident, the initiate did not return."[71] Thus, seekers knew the significance of their initiation in terms of communal and

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[69] Brown, Ras Michael. "Walk in the Feenda": West-Central Africans and the Forest in the South Carolina-Georgia Lowcountry." *Central Africans and Cultural Transformations in the American Diaspora*. Ed. Linda M. Heywood. New York: Cambridge UP, 2002. 290, Print.
[70] Young, Jason R. *Rituals of Resistance: African Atlantic Religion in Kongo and the Lowcountry South in the Era of Slavery*. Baton Rouge: Louisiana State UP, 2007. 176, Print.
[71] Creel, Margaret Washington. "Gullah Attitudes toward Life and Death." *Africanisms in American Culture*. Bloomington and Indianapolis: Indiana UP, 1990. 81, Print.

spiritual membership.[72] The goal was entrance into Christian community, yet the character of initiation further announced the coexistence of cosmographic philosophy and Christian belief. Whereas Kongo initiates stood on a cosmogram to convey their knowledge of life as a process shared with the dead, when speaking to their spiritual guides, seekers needed to understand and articulate convincingly how God granted them new life while they strove in the space of the dead. In other words, seekers had to show the relationship between new, internal disposition and the location in which transformation occurred. Additionally, the location of seeking and the new spiritual life it helped create evidenced initiates' realization that renewal was only possible after coming through death.

When initiates successfully sought God in the wilderness, they detailed these experiences to spiritual guides. Because voice is the conduit for interiority, seekers' voices offered proof of spiritual metamorphosis and anticipated the next challenge for communal membership. Spiritual guides as well as the larger Black Christian community worshipped in praise houses, plantation churches. Collective identity and "personhood was attained through praise house

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[72] African antecedents to the ritual of seeking are best observed in West and West-Central African rituals of initiation into secret societies. Margret Washington Creel pioneered the theory that Poro and Sande initiation societies found in Sierra Leone, Liberia, and Guinea provided the structure and essential components for seeking. In accordance with this theory, Michael Gomez questions how the egalitarian nature of the male Poro society and female Sande society confronted diverse African and Christian gender expectations in the New World. Additionally, scholars such as Betty Kuyk and Jason R. Young posit that the Lemba and Kimpasi societies of Kikongo speaking West-Central Africans also contributed to the ritual of seeking. Creel, Margaret Washington. *"A Peculiar People": Slave Religion and Community-Culture Among the Gullahs*. New York: New York UP, 1988. 288-90, Print. Gomez, Michael A. *Exchanging Our Country Marks: The Transformation of African Identities in the Colonial and Antebellum South*. Chapel Hill, NC: U of North Carolina, 1998. 97, Print. Kuyk, Betty M. *African Voices in the African American Heritage*. Bloomington: Indiana UP, 2003. 95-143, Print. Young, Jason R. *Rituals of Resistance: African Atlantic Religion in Kongo and the Lowcountry South in the Era of Slavery*. Baton Rouge: Louisiana State UP, 2007. 78-80, 95, Print.

membership,"[73] so seekers were examined by praise house elders to validate the claim of spiritual renewal.[74] Brown suggests that "examination before elders brought the seekers together and reestablished the connection of individual seekers with the larger community from which they had been separated…in the wilderness."[75] Seekers whose accounts were judged authentic became, in James Baldwin's words, members of a spiritual aristocracy. Similar to successful initiates in Kongo, seekers now held added responsibilities, privileges, and esteem as members of the praise house community. Whereas new praise house members were baptized, seekers whose accounts were judged false or incomplete were sent back into the wilderness because, as Demus Green affirms, "you got to be ready."[76] That elders placed enormous worth in seekers' accounts and examined them critically not only expresses discernment, but again reiterates the value of voice. Seekers' accounts articulated that God's spirit resided internally while implicitly announcing that their futures would be bound by Christian precepts and praise house regulations.

These characteristics, internal orientation, and future comportment, suggests that accounts functioned as oaths. Although the location wherein accounts, or oaths, were given seems to disconnect new Christians' experience from Kongo who took oaths while standing on the cosmogram, the two realities are linked. When Catholic missionaries arrived in West-Central Africa and introduced Kongo to Christianity in the fifteenth-century, they translated the word church into KiKongo as nzo a kisi, "house of the holy." Nzo a nkisi, in fact, "was the common

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[73] Creel, Margaret Washington. "Gullah Attitudes toward Life and Death." *Africanisms in American Culture*. Bloomington and Indianapolis: Indiana UP, 1990. 79, Print.
[74] Brown, Ras Michael. *African-Atlantic Cultures and the South Carolina Lowcountry*. Cambridge: Cambridge Univ, 2013. 215, Print.
[75] Ibid., 216
[76] Green, Demus. "Conversation" (interviewed by Alice D. Doyle, 1975), Alice D. Boyle Collection, SFC.

word used by the Kongolese to mean 'grave."'[77] While I am not arguing that all praise house members or all American slaves of Kongolese descent interpreted Christian places of worship as the grave, I am rehearsing a historical and linguistic relationship between spaces that held the dead and structures wherein the born again worshiped. When seekers gave their accounts in praise houses, whether consciously aware or not, they swore oaths in buildings that represented death and new spiritual life. In other words, the structure of the praise house repeated the defining trait of seeking: individuals had to enter into death to become born again in a Christian community on earth and in heaven. Viewing the praise house in this way also attests to the similarity of fundamental renewal in cosmographic and Christian orientations.

The ritual of baptism further linked these orientations. Brown concludes that the submersion of new church members beneath a natural, flowing body of water represented another penetration of the Kalunga line.[78] In baptism, new members solidified "the process of Christian conversion as a ritual death."[79] The submersion of the faithful beneath murky baptismal water illustrated a plunge into the land of the dead. The Kongolese resonances found in baptism amplify the "complexities and subtleties that often attend ritual belief and practices."[80] Young maintains that these nuances posit conversion not as a clear and discrete movement from a precessional realm of belief to a successional one."[81] Rather, baptism, along with seeking, helped unify the precessional belief of cosmographic reincarnation with the

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[77] Young, Jason R. *Rituals of Resistance: African Atlantic Religion in Kongo and the Lowcountry South in the Era of Slavery*. Baton Rouge: Louisiana State UP, 2007. 151, Print.
[78] Brown, Ras Michael. *African-Atlantic Cultures and the South Carolina Lowcountry*. Cambridge: Cambridge Univ, 2013. 215, 248, Print.
[79] Young, Jason R. *Rituals of Resistance: African Atlantic Religion in Kongo and the Lowcountry South in the Era of Slavery*. Baton Rouge: Louisiana State UP, 2007. 18, Print.
[80] Ibid., 43
[81] Ibid., 43

successional Christian tenets of symbolic death and resurrection. Baptismal water became what Cécile Fromont has termed a space of correlation.[82] As with the historical context of the word church, not every praise house member or candidate for baptism was consciously aware of the resonances between conversion rituals and Kongolese rites.[83] Although some were, the value of baptism in save communities resided in the ritual symbolism of living water. The conscious and subconscious effort to represent the Kalunga line with baptismal water points to memories of a sacred past. Yet because baptism functioned as Christian ritual, baptismal water should also be understood through Christian meaning. For new praise house members, submersion beneath baptismal water and rising from this watery grave did not only signify ancient belief. Rather, it also dramatized the unification of their spiritual lives with Christ's lived experience of death and resurrection. In other words, while respecting a sacred past rooted in spiritual continuity, captive Africans accepted renewal through Christ's example of death and resurrection.

The enslaved read Biblical justification for the Christian model of ultimate renewal in the Apostle Paul's declaration: "We are buried with him [Christ] by Baptism into death: that like as Christ was raised up from the dead by the glory of the Father, even so we also should walk in the newness of life."[84] Their acceptance of the symbolic death of baptism and the subsequent newness of life suggests that captive Africans found in baptism another avenue for total regeneration, one not rooted in reincarnation but just as powerful. The resurrected self following baptism had become born again by dying to the former, sinful self. Just as in the cosmogram, the

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[82] Cécile Fromont defines this term in *The Art of Conversion*. Fromont, Cécile. *The Art of Conversion: Christian Visual Culture in the Kingdom of Kongo*. U of North Carolina, 2014. Print.
[83] Young, Jason R. *Rituals of Resistance: African Atlantic Religion in Kongo and the Lowcountry South in the Era of Slavery*. Baton Rouge: Louisiana State UP, 2007. 92, Print.
[84] Romans 6:3-4

function of death in the ritual of baptism distanced the new Christian from his or her previous life. Yet because baptism and new spirituality culminated in resurrection, an achievement, and not reincarnation, a cycle, embracing baptism ensured new Christians that their transformation would remained unchanged. Thus, the fixed nature of becoming symbolically resurrected held tremendous implication. While dying to the old self and attaining new life clearly attests to spiritual renaissance, as enslaved persons, dying to the old self also proclaimed death to their imposed identities under slavery. Returning to Patterson's contention, if slavery represented social death and in fact replaced actual death, then dying away from a spiritually dead self not only communicated dying away from the soul's grave condition, but also from the spiritual and social death of slavery. In choosing Christ's death and resurrection as the model of total transformation, then, slaves radically dislocated themselves from the undergirding aims of slavery, declaring themselves autonomous persons and spiritually renewed. In other words, enslaved Africans saw possibilities for liberation in Christ's death and resurrection, then enacted their own ritualized performance of death and resurrection to die away from the death of slavery.

Interpreting resurrection as a strategy through which captive Africans attained spiritual renewal and audacious value offered richer readings of scripture. When slaves heard or read John assert that belief in Christ exhibited passage from "death unto life"[85] and remembered Jesus' edict that "except a man be born of water and the spirit he cannot enter the Kingdom of God,"[86] they further understood the salience of Christian conversion and baptism but also the transgressive character of resurrection in their lives as slaves. Their capacity to assert personhood and Christian membership through resurrection gave them license to defy ideologies

[85] John 5:24
[86] Ibid., 3:5

that situated identity inside degraded black bodies. That those who were baptized preserved their baptismal robes "to serve as their [burial] shrouds one day" highlights the multivalent interpretations of death and resurrection and the extent to which death and resurrection informed new Christians' consciousness.[87] No surprise arises, then, that worship in praise houses reflected renewed spirituality and self-conception. The Baptist faith's acceptance of "enthusiastic and highly charged emotional expression of faith" enabled slaves throughout South Carolina's sea islands and Southern states to understand and present their bodies and voices apart from servitude.[88] Worship that expressed dying to the death of slavery manifested in the ring shout[89]

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[87] Peterkin, Julia Mood, and Doris Ulmann. *Roll, Jordan, Roll: The Text by Julia Peterkin*. Indianapolis: Bobbs-Merrill, 1933. 88, Print.

[88] Young, Jason R. *Rituals of Resistance: African Atlantic Religion in Kongo and the Lowcountry South in the Era of Slavery*. Baton Rouge: Louisiana State UP, 2007. 77, Print.

[89] "This counterclockwise dance involves people moving around in a circle, rhythmically shuffling their feet and shaking their hands while bystanders outside the ring clap, sing, and gesticulate. This religious circle dance is a spiritual outpouring which symbolizes community integration" (80). Observing that slaves, the self-freed, and free Blacks performed the ring shout throughout Southern and Northern states (South Carolina, North Carolina, Georgia, Louisiana, Washington D.C., Virginia, Pennsylvania, Rhode Island, and other New England states), Sterling Stuckey claims that "the ring shout was the main context in which Africans recognized values common to them" (16). He suggests that the ubiquitous presence and initiatory function of the ring shout rooted memories of Africa, African heritage, and African worship practices deeply in individual and collective consciousness. With acute attention given to Bakongo peoples and slaves of Kongolese descent, Stuckey highlights the circular form of the cosmogram and argues that the Kongo circle was so powerful and elaborate that it gave form and meaning to Black religion and art (11, 13-16, 89-90). African Methodist Episcopal Church leader Bishop Daniel Payne's difficulty with converting Blacks speaks to this reality. When he objected to the ring shout in a service he attended, Payne writes that the "young leader of the singing and clapping ring" admonishes him that "sinners won't get converted unless there is a ring" (253-4). Similar to Bishop Payne, Jonathon Gibbs, a Dartmouth educated Presbyterian minister and Florida's first Black Secretary of State, described the ring shout as a wild and heathenish habit. In 1873 Gibbs apologizes for the ring shout, writing that the ring shout is "in defiance of health, sound sense, or other considerations supposed to influence a reasonable being" (23). These ministers did not realize what Aunt Venie of St. Paul's church in Jacksonville knew. Recalling his childhood observations of Aunt Venie, James Weldon Johnson suggests that her solitary ring shout was essential for praising a Christian God (22). Johnson also states that when his great-grandmother Sarah was a child, she heard sounds similar to those made by Aunt Venie. Johnson's inclusion of his great-grandmother while discussing the ring shout is noteworthy because Sarah was born and

and lyricized conversion language.[90] Against violence, coercion, the reality of death, the racist manipulation of Christianity, and the ever-present threat of communal fracture, slaves "engaged in rituals of Christian conversion as a means to resist the conditions of slavery, assert their free will, and articulate new theologies of resistance."[91] Throughout the nineteenth-century, new Christians embodied their transformations and repurposed their bodies and voices during ring shouts and praise house meetings to "challenge the very underpinnings of slavery."[92]

That new Christians throughout the South reinterpreted their bodies and voices in accordance with Christianity shows the extent to which resurrection exemplified total renewal and rooted itself in slave culture. Although enslaved Africans' adaptation of Christianity reflects the deep significance of previously established philosophies and belief systems, their emphasis on embodying and expressing new personhood and authority further explains their attraction to Christianity. However, belief in Christ and his resurrection did not mean acceptance of all Biblical interpretation. In his book *Jesus and the Disinherited*, Howard Thurman remembers reading the Bible to his grandmother. When he asks why she will not allow him to read the Pauline letters, she recalls that when enslaved, "'Always the white minister used as his text

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raised in Africa. Robert L. Hall relates that Sarah "was aboard a slave ship headed for Brazil wen the ship was captured by a British man-of-war and taken to Nassau" (108). *Southern Christian Advocate*, October 30, 1846; October 30, 1847. (qtd in Creel, Margaret Washington. "Gullah Attitudes toward Life and Death." *Africanisms in American Culture*. Bloomington and Indianapolis: Indiana UP, 1990. Print). Payne, Daniel Alexander. *Recollections of Seventy Years*. Nashville: Publishing House of the A.M.E. Sunday School Union, 1888. Print. Gibbs, Jonathan. Florida Agriculturist. January 17, 1874. Johnson, James Weldon. *Along This Way: The Autobiography of James Weldon Johnson*. New York: Viking, 1933; Rpt. in 1973 edition. Hall, Robert L. "African Religious Retentions in Florida." *Africanisms in American Culture*. Bloomington and Indianapolis: Indiana UP, 1990. Print.

[90] Riggins R. Earl Jr. uses the term "lyricized conversion language" to denote the spirituals slaves sung.

[91] Young, Jason R. *Rituals of Resistance: African Atlantic Religion in Kongo and the Lowcountry South in the Era of Slavery*. Baton Rouge: Louisiana State UP, 2007. 102, Print.

[92] Ibid., 103

something from Paul. At least three or four times a year he used as a text: '"Slaves be obedient to them that are your masters…, as unto Christ."'[93] Because she remembers that Paul's letters were manipulated in support of slavery, she declares, '"I promised my Maker that if I ever learned to read and if freedom ever came, I would not read part of the Bible."'[94] Although she disregarded particular books of the Bible, Thurman's grandmother remained a Christian. As with many enslaved Christians, Thurman's grandmother eschewed Biblical readings that sanctioned slavery as God's will, choosing instead to live out the promise of the reconstituted self in Christ. In other words, slaves chose to accept Christianity not simply because of its similarities with established beliefs and not simply because of Christianity's overwhelming presence in Southern states. Rather, Christ's offer of spiritual rejuvenation that would manifest in individual and collective dignity for those who emulated his example of death and resurrection justified converting to Christianity.

By radically dislocating themselves from imposed identities, enslaved Christians died to the ideological foundations of the slave system and created the precondition for their resurrection into resilient and elevated personhood. It makes sense, then, that praise houses became spaces wherein the resurrected not only celebrated their esteemed status, but reinforced the distinction between freedom of expression and violent regulation. The combination of new purpose and sacred space allowed for the incorporation of African derived worship practices into Christian rituals and services, an achievement that Will Coleman terms "organic syncretism."[95] The result

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[93] Thurman, Howard. *Jesus and the Disinherited*. New York: Abingdon-Cokesbury, 1949. 30-1, Print.
[94] Ibid., 31
[95] Coleman, Will. "Coming through 'Ligion." Ed. George C.L. Cummings. *Cut Loose Your Stammering Tongue: Black Theology in the Slave Narratives*. Ed. Dwight N. Hopkins. Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 2003. 48, Print. For more on the ways in which African worship practices influenced slaves' unique for of Christianity, see Matthews, Donald

of this combination produced Afro-Protestantism, "their own unique form of African American Christianity."[96] That the resurrected developed a new form of Christianity that emphasized the necessity of rebirth reveals that "slaves never interpreted their conversion experiences as conditioning them to better serve their masters."[97] Instead, conversion to Christianity "meant that God had freed them to be self-assertive," that he had "radically transformed them into agents of critical self-awareness."[98] Albert J. Raboteau argues that the self-awareness, beliefs, and

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Henry. *Honoring the Ancestors: An African Cultural Interpretation of Black Religion and Literature*. New York: Oxford UP, 2012. Print.

[96] Ibid., 48

[97] Earl, Riggins R., Jr. *Dark Symbols, Obscure Signs God, Self, and Community in the Slave Mind*. Knoxville: U of Tennessee, 2003. Xiii, Print.

[98] Ibid., xiv, 7. In the introduction to *God Struck Me Dead: Voices of Ex-Slaves*, Albert J. Raboteau writes, "conversion, literally 'a turning,' is an ancient and perennial concept in Christian piety that ultimately derives from Christianity's origins in Judaism. The biblical prophets' calls to Israel to turn from sin to God, as well as the rhetorical power of their exhortations, served as models for Christian preachers and congregations for centuries, inspiring the long-lived sermonic tradition of the jeremiad as well as supplying countless texts, images, and exempla for the unceasing effort of the church to change people's attitudes and values. Conversion represented not just a change in behavior, but *metanoia*, a change of heart, a transformation in consciousness—a radical reorientation of personality, exemplified in the classic Christian conversion stories of Saint Paul the Apostle and Saint Augustine of Hippo as a singular life-changing event brought by the direct intervention of God" (xx). The thirty-eight conversion experiences collected by A.P. Watson in the 1920s that comprise the *God Struck Me Dead* narratives not only illustrate former slaves' radical reorientation, but also frame conversion as a death and resurrection experience. Mechal Sobel notes that these experiences and their unique character have been recounted by slaves and self-freed Blacks since the 1750s (108). Conversion in the thirty-eight narratives often begins with former slaves recognizing their soul's grave condition. Through the irresistible power of God's authority, former slaves are then "struck dead." While the body lies inanimate, the spirit journeys to a supernatural realm in which it confronts the inevitable and eternal damnation of the soul. After witnessing hell's fire and horrors, a guide, typically depicted as Christ, guides the spirit away from destruction and into God's presence. The spirit dramatizes the distinction between hell and heaven by commenting on heaven's overwhelming beauty and serenity. God informs the spirit that turning from sin and to belief in him means that he will dwell internally, as part of the spirit, and, upon the body's death, the soul will commune eternally with God in heaven. Following this realization, the spirit returns to the body. With new knowledge and comfort assured by God, the individual is reborn and immediately converted. Not simply visions or travels, these experiences foretold the new convert's future. The new convert did not need to wonder about the details or setting of eternal life that awaited him or her because the new convert had already experienced heaven and

sacred observances that enslaved Christians ritualized in Afro-Protestantism constituted an "invisible institution" throughout the antebellum South.[99] Yet slaves' orientation to Christianity suggests that undergoing death and achieving resurrection was the central component, the animating feature, of their institution. In other words, while they embraced Christianity, it was the certainty of fundamental renewal and critical distance from slavery that anchored enslaved Christians to their faith. While I agree that crafting their own religion from ancient principles and new world necessities demonstrates remarkable cultural ingenuity, I posit that the *why* of their conversion, access to everlasting redemption, warrants as much critical attention as their relationship with Christianity. Enslaved persons' desire for total transformation and capacity to model their lives to reflect Christ's persuasive example of renewal meant that their resurrection was legitimized and made permanent by the highest authority.

Although the ubiquity of Afro-Protestantism throughout the antebellum South seems to isolate the desire and achievement of resurrection to slave communities, Sterling Stuckey reminds us that, upon escaping slavery, the self-freed influenced the religious life and self-conception of free Blacks in Northern states. He writes, "the scores of thousands of slaves who escaped to the North in the antebellum period served to assist in the sharing of cultural values."[100] He argues that the similarity of the African regions from which Blacks were taken and the retention of cultural patterns from these regions, suggests that "Northern and Southern

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communicated with God. Righteous living was the prerequisite for returning to the heaven they had previously accessed. Watson, A.P., Clifton H. Johnson, eds, Albert J. Raboteau. *God Struck Me Dead: Voices of Ex-Slaves*. Eugene: Wipf & Stock Pub, 2010. Print. Sobel, Mechal. *Trabelin' On: The Slave Journey to an Afro-Baptist Faith*. Westport, CT: Greenwood, 1979. 15, Print.

[99] Raboteau, Albert J. *Slave Religion the "Invisible Institution" in the Antebellum South*. Oxford: Oxford UP, 2004. Ix, Print.

[100] Stuckey, Sterling. *Slave Culture: Nationalist Theory and the Foundations of Black America*. New York: Oxford UP, 1987. 83, Print.

Blacks…shared an essentially common culture."[101] Stuckey maintains that the presence of the self-freed in Northern states helped to strengthen Blacks' cultural connection to Africa. Yet the self-freed's relationship with resurrection renders Stuckey's analysis incomplete. While the self-freed certainly shared how the enduring rhythms of African heritage informed their lives, it makes sense that they would have also shared their adapted form of Christianity and its most cherished component. While I'm not arguing that free Blacks in the North encountered Afro-Protestantism solely from the self-freed, I am suggesting that the self-freed's devotion to renewal through symbolic death and resurrection appealed powerfully to free Blacks in the North. As slave narratives throughout the nineteenth-century affirm, Northern states were not devoid of racism and race prejudice. Resurrection, then, offered free Blacks a strategy for resisting the ideologies and manifestations of racially based restriction. Even in the twentieth-century, writers such as Nella Larsen and James Baldwin explored the promise of resurrection in Harlem's Afro-Protestant churches.[102] That the self-freed shaped Northern Blacks' perception of restoration underscores resurrection as an endeavor of defiance and deliverance in African American culture. Furthermore, it demonstrates that those who achieved resurrection sought to establish communities of resurrected individuals.

V

My examination of the Kongo cosmogram and Afro-Protestantism seeks to trace the development of specific modes of renewal throughout enslaved and free Black communities. My account does not serve as a comprehensive history of Black communities' engagement with

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[101] Ibid., 83

[102] Larsen, Nella. *Quicksand*. New York: Knopf, 1928. Print. Baldwin, James. *Go Tell It on the Mountain*. New York: Knopf, 1953. Print.

African retentions or Christianity. Instead, my analysis offers a theoretical lens through which we might view how enslaved Africans used Kongolese philosophies and rituals of spiritual continuity as the foundation for their own Christian beliefs and worship practices. I contend that enslaved communities "drew on a shared set of ritual practices, beliefs, and presumptions to mobilize Christianity as a crucial space for cultural resistance, community construction, and identity formation."[103] Through this same lens we see that when slaves confronted captivity and its attendant ideologies, they also vivified "cultural resources rooted both in their own memories of Africa and innovative New World community creations."[104] I argue that symbolic death and resurrection served as chief representatives of African memories and New World creations. Slaves make clear that embracing Christ's model of death and resurrection illustrated devotion to another form of restoration that was similar to their already established beliefs and an extension of their understanding of Christ. However, I posit this orientation toward Christianity reveals that enslaved persons prized their faith not necessarily because of devotion to Christian dogmas, but because it offered divine and enduring legitimation to new being.

Accepting resurrection as a strategy of radical dislocation and new embodiment meant that enslaved and free communities exhibited power over life through the power of redefining death. Furthermore, housing this strategy within Afro-Protestantism situated resurrection firmly within Black culture, creating the conditions for resurrection to be translated in other Black cultural pronouncements. David Scott's analysis of "tradition" aids in contextualizing the

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[103] Young, Jason R. *Rituals of Resistance: African Atlantic Religion in Kongo and the Lowcountry South in the Era of Slavery*. Baton Rouge: Louisiana State UP, 2007. 184, Print.
[104] Ibid., 183

presence of resurrection in Black culture and anticipating its existence in other cultural forms. He observes:

> A tradition is an active process…it depends on a social will, on an active and ongoing labor…a tradition is not merely…about received wisdom or…an inheritance, something you get…Rather tradition presupposes an active relation in which the present calls upon the past. In this sense, then, tradition always implies an ensemble of practices and institutions that actively produce and reproduce the virtues understood to be internal to that tradition.[105]

Scott employs this definition to illuminate the ideological similarities and differences of African derived cultural practices across the Black Atlantic. Yet this definition works to frame the essential characteristics of resurrection—total defiance of imposed identities, unimpeachable restoration, the celebration of these achievements, and the communal adaptation and dissemination of a new value system—as forming a tradition, an active process of liberation embedded within Black psychology and community. To counter the threat of psychological ruin and remain autonomous persons, enslaved and free Blacks drew on this established tradition. I have argued that the "social will" or "ongoing labor" of resurrection not only suggests the communal effort of maintaining this mode of defiance, but it authorizes the community to reinterpret present challenges through accepted structures. In this way, as Scott describes, the present calls upon the past to reify tradition, or resurrection, as cultural formation and enduring strategy.

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[105] Scott, David. *Refashioning Futures: Criticism after Postcoloniality*. Princeton: Princeton UP, 1999. 115, Print.

Scott's acknowledgment that tradition implies a collection of practices and institutions to produce or reproduce its virtues indicates the capacity of communal creations to solidify resurrection's cultural value. While Afro-Protestantism housed the tradition of resurrection, as noted above, the desire for resurrection in Christianity did not foreclose the possibility of achieving resurrection in other Black cultural forms. Because Black artistic expression conveys the tropes, complexities, and nuances of Black lived experiences, it makes sense that we would find in an expression the virtues, or characteristics, essential to resurrection. Locating resurrection's essential characteristics in Black artistic expression does more than simply reiterate resurrection as tradition. Rather, it allows for more accurate readings of the specific character of resurrection. It also offers the ability to interpret how artists portray defiance of racially imposed limitations and present death as the threshold for new being. Yet perhaps more important, viewing Black artistic expression as the retainer of resurrection's essential characteristics redefines artists as trustees, as persons responsible for maintaining cultural ties to defiance through death and enlightened personhood in resurrection. The next chapter argues that the engendering impulse and sustaining spirit[106] of African American literature offers fertile ground for displaying and disseminating the strategy of resurrection. Chapter two suggests that as an outgrowth of Black voice, culture, sensibility, and empowerment, African American literature is uniquely positioned to transmit resurrection's essential characteristics. Authors of African American literature, then, are guarantors not only of restorative defiance, but also literature as the most effective means for conveying such defiance.

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[106] Gates, Henry Louis, and Nellie Y. McKay. "The Literature of Slavery and Freedom 1746-1865." *The Norton Anthology of African American Literature*. New York: W.W. Norton, 2004. 151, Print.

Chapter Two:
Authoring Humanity in Promiscuous Prose: The Strategy of Dislocation and Renewal in *A Narrative of the Most Remarkable Particulars in the Life of James Albert Ukawsaw Gronniosaw*[1]

Evidence that African American literature is uniquely qualified to transmit resurrection's essential characteristics lies in eighteenth-century Afro-British and African American texts. Ironically, Afro-British and African American texts published in the eighteenth-century do not often, if at all, explicitly engage the specific African retentions and Afro-Protestant orientations outlined in chapter one. However, authors of such texts use their literary projects to write themselves into Eurocentric conceptions of humanity, an endeavor that occasions reinvention. Although science, religion, and the broader cultural conscious relegated Black individuals to the margins of society and humanity, authors such as Briton Hammon, Phillis Wheatley and John Marrant author texts that counter these ideological conventions.[2] Yet perhaps no Black writer of

[1] Gronniosaw published the first edition of his narrative in 1772. His narrative represents the first autobiography written by an African and published in Britain. The narrative's complete title is *A Narrative of the Most Remarkable Particulars in the Life of James Albert Ukawsaw Gronniosaw, an African Prince, as Related by Himself*.

[2] The three authors mentioned do not represent the extent of early Afro-British and African American writers' engagement with marginality and Eurocentric conceptions of humanity. My identification of Hammon, Wheatley, and Marrant reflects their investment in a death and resurrection motif to frame their experiences with exclusion and Western social structures. Hammon's narrative, *Narrative of the Uncommon Sufferings, and Surprising Deliverance of Briton Hammon, A Negro* (1760), characterizes multiple escape attempts from Native Americans and a Cuban prison as an endeavor of restoring life. In Wheatley's poem, "An Elegiac Poem on the Death of That Celebrated Divine, and Eminent Servant of Jesus Christ, the late Reverend, and Pious George Whitefield" (1760), she "ventriloquizes and thus resurrects the voice of this celebrity preacher and friend to the Wheatley family." Marrant's narrative, *A Narrative of the Lord's Wonderful Dealings with John Marrant, A Black* (1785), presents Marrant as having the capacity to offer new, Christian life to his Native American captors and emphasizes the transformative power of spiritual enlightenment as he is unrecognized upon his return home. Rather than offering a captivity narrative in the mode of Hammon and Marrant's texts, or only reiterating themes of inclusiveness in Wheatley's Whitefield poem, Gronniosaw's narrative asserts that his "trials and tests grew mainly out of" his "status as slave and servant." Dickson D. Bruce writes, "more than Hammon's work…Gronniosaw's explored the kinds of linkages between color, status, and religious hopes that Wheatley had set forth in her poem, with less of

the eighteenth-century confronts challenges to racial embodiment and the sign of blackness with greater complexity and nuance than James Albert Ukawsaw Gronniosaw. Writing in the late eighteenth-century, Gronniosaw authors a narrative that identifies and transgresses racially imposed identity, and thus, his text demands recognition of his innate intellectual and spiritual capacity. Gronniosaw's narrative not only demonstrates Black intellectual ability through Black literary expression, but in doing so, his text presents him separate from eighteenth-century conceptions of blackness. This chapter argues that by using his literary imagination to defy eighteenth-century conceptions of blackness, Gronniosaw proclaims a reclaimed or resurrected self. I maintain that the authority of literature to redeem the sign of blackness transitioned Gronniosaw's body and mind from markers of absence to symbols of restored subjectivity. This chapter argues that because a literary voice evidenced renewed life, it not only makes sense that the motif of death and resurrection would take the generic form of written expression, but also that Gronniosaw would rely on his narrative to engender resurrected being.

Investigating the eighteenth-century's preoccupation with "The Great Chain of Being" allows us to better contextualize Gronniosaw's confrontation with marginalization and the enormous implication his literature carries. "The Great Chain of Being," the definitive order for all things, stressed that "every existing thing in the universe had its 'place' in a divinely planned hierarchical order, which was pictured as a chain vertically extended."[3] With God and angels at the top, humans occupied the next rung while animals, plants, precious metals, and minerals held

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the self-reflection Wheatley's poem implied." Brooks, Joanna. *American Lazarus: Religion and the Rise of African-American and Native American Literatures*. Oxford Univ. Press, 2009. 9, Print. Bruce, Dickson D. *The Origins of African American Literature: 1680-1865*. Univ. Press of Virginia, 2001. 42, Print.

[3] Melani, Lilia. *A Guide to the Study of Literature: A Companion Text*. Brooklyn College, 29 Mar. 2009, http://academic.brooklyn.cuny.edu/english/melani/cs6/ren.html.

positions on successive rungs. We can trace the Western world's affinity with this stratified arrangement from Classical antiquity to the European Renaissance. The eighteenth-century period known as the Enlightenment produced thinkers who embraced "The Great Chain of Being," as they endeavored to designate specific categories for every existing thing. Because the desire to assign name and significance coincided with unprecedented European expansion into Africa, enlightened Europeans defined humanity against the "sub-human African other." Deemed to be lacking in characteristically human traits, Africans were unworthy of placement on the same rung as White Europeans. The objectification implicit in their rejection from the human community not only suggests non-human status, but also aids in framing Africans as non-beings. In this chapter, then, I will investigate the manner in which Gronniosaw writes himself onto the rung of humanity and argue that he utilizes the strategy of death and resurrection to reinforce this effort. The logocentric nature of the Western intellectual tradition meant that Gronniosaw's voice could not transform himself from African other to redeemed human.[4] Only the demonstration of reason through writing could prove his humanity. This chapter reveals the manner in which Gronniosaw uses written language to articulate his transition from non-being status to thinking subject, and thus, from death to new life.

Although the form of Gronniosaw's narrative attests to his capacity for reason, and thus his humanity, the narrative's content also disrupts accepted truths and declares visibility that counters the absences assigned to Black intellect and humanity. I will show that within Gronniosaw's rhetoric, allusions to, and presentations of renewed being we find evidence of him employing the strategy of death and resurrection. I contend that by using the strategy of death

[4] Gates, Henry Louis Jr. *The Signifying Monkey: A Theory of African American Literary Criticism*. Oxford University Press, 2014. 145-6.

and resurrection as a part of his political objective to write himself renewed, Gronniosaw envelops a powerful mode of resistance and restoration into a generic form that implicitly conveys resistance and restoration for the Black writer. In other words, in his writings' form and content we see evidence of death and resurrection as essential to the work of renewal, to the project of transformation. This chapter argues that by using the motif of death and resurrection within a written narrative, Gronniosaw unites a powerful strategy of resistance with a desire to defy Enlightenment proscriptions of racial meaning.

That Gronniosaw relies on written words to perform a reinvention that transgresses the Western world's social order suggests that his writings would encounter voices determined to delegitimize his effort. Eurocentric hegemony sought to invalidate Black authors' literary pronouncements with claims that Black writing was derivative at best. That prominent statesmen and thinkers such as Thomas Jefferson maligned Black literary production as crude imitations of White intellect furthered embedded the belief of White supremacy into Enlightenment ideology.[5] An unwilling participant in a game of capture the humanity, Gronniosaw was expected to use his writings to ascend the mountain of reason to discover, upon reaching the very peak where humanity rested, that the prize was not his to claim, that his Black pen precluded, not included. The Sisyphean nature of his literary endeavor explains the reason why his narrative's content, illustrations of death and resurrection, are worthy of analysis. Because Gronniosaw's narrative would be accepted as proof of his ability to reason or imitate, his illustrations of death and resurrection were preventative measures taken to defend against charges of mimicry and to

[5] In his review of Wheatley's *Poems on Various Subjects, Religious and Moral* (1773), Thomas Jefferson concludes, "Religion indeed has produced a Phyllis Whately; but it could not produce a poet. The compositions published under her name are beneath the dignity of criticism" (234). Jefferson, Thomas. *Notes on the State of Virginia* (1787).

ensure his transformation from non-being to thinking subject. I will argue that the religious character of these illustrations does not simply engage Christian dogmas, but it also proclaims that God has affirmed Gronniosaw's humanity, and thus, garnered him personhood protected from Eurocentric slander.

Evidence of renewed being through the act of writing and evidence that God recognizes and legitimizes his subjectivity are the paralleling aims of Gronniosaw's narrative. If we reinterpret these aims as two intertwining and mutually informing strands connected repeatedly by the quest for total renewal, we observe a double helix that signals the DNA of resurrection, the essence of redemption. Just as rungs sustain the connection between two strands in the DNA structure, the quest for redemption and the two strands of evidence it connects form the substance of resurrection and ensures Gronniosaw's placement on "The Great Chain of Being's" rung of humanity. This chapter suggests that not only does Gronniosaw reveal the complexities of literature as an extension of Black voice, sensibility, and empowerment, he also makes clear the presence of the death and resurrection motif in one of the earliest manifestations of the Black literary imagination. Yet while his narrative offers such articulation and nuance, it is not without issue. I posit that the glaring complication and chief paradox is that his narrative intends to convey his own humanity, not the humanity of other Black individuals. This chapter, then, also highlights the absence or distancing of Black individuals in Gronniosaw's work and interprets this rhetorical strategy as commentary on community formation. Such analysis emphasizes the limitations of the strategy of death and resurrection when not rooted in African retentions and Afro-Protestantism.

II

> He used to read prayers in public to the ship's crew every sabbath day; and when I first saw him read, I was never so surprised in my life, as when I saw the book talk to my master; for I thought it did, as I observed him to look upon it, and move his lips.—I wished it would do so with me. As soon as my master had done reading I follow'd him to the place where he put the book, being mightily delighted with it, and when nobody saw me, I open'd it, and put my ear down close upon it, in great hope that it wou'd say something to me; but I was very sorry and greatly disappointed, when I found it would not speak, this thought immediately presented itself to me, that every body and every thing despis'd me because I was black.[6]
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> James Albert Ukawsaw Gronniosaw, 1772

In *The Philosophy of History* (1837), G.W.F. Hegel writes that Africa:

> "is no historical part of the World; it has no movement or developments to exhibit. Historical movements in it…belong to the Asiatic or European world…What we properly understand by Africa, is the Unhistorical, Undeveloped Spirit, still involved in the conditions of mere nature, and which had to be presented here only as on the threshold of the World's History.[7]

Hegel's appraisal of Africa, and therefore the African, reiterates the general consensus of Black existence during this time. Hegel's contention that Africans are "capable of no development or culture" and reside on the periphery of history and development, frame Black skin as signifier of stasis, absence, and unredeemable damnation.[8] These descriptions used to interpret black skin present the black body not only as a marker of regression, but also as a space of death. For Hegel, Africans' incapability of betterment and participation in history, the record of human

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[6] Gronniosaw, James Albert Ukawsaw. *A Narrative of the Most Remarkable Particulars in the Life of James Albert Ukawsaw Gronniosaw*. Bath: T. Mills and W. Gye, 1772. Reprinted in *Unchained Voices: An Anthology of Black Authors in the English-Speaking World of the Eighteenth Century*. Ed. Vincent Carretta, University Press of Kentucky, 2004. 38.
[7] Hegel, George Wilhelm Friedrich. *The Philosophy of History*. New York: Dover, 1956. 157.
[8] Ibid., 157

events, suggests that blackness is defined by its separation from the concepts of progression, transformation, and life. Hegel's assessment of blackness lends philosophical "credence" to the African's lower placement on "The Great Chain of Being," but also rehearses earlier sentiments from enlightened Europeans who viewed Africans' failure to "master the art of writing in modern languages" as justification for Africans' rank on the Great Chain.[9] Anticipating Hegel's position, in his essay, "Of National Characteristics" (1748), David Hume maintains that nature forms the unsurpassable gulf between whites and the "naturally inferior" negro species.[10] Addressing the fundamental difference between the two "species of men,"[11] Hume writes, "Such a uniform and constant difference could not happen, in so many countries and ages, if *nature* had not made our original distinction betwixt these breeds of men."[12] What is perhaps most revealing about Hume's indictment is that his evidence for such claims lie in his belief that Africans produce "no arts, no sciences."[13] In other words, for Hume, the absence of written records, or evidence of reason, configured the African within Hegel's formula of Africans' essential lack: absence of writing plus no discernable development produced historical orphans and non-being status. Immanuel Kant reflects Hegel and Hume's conclusions in *Observations on the Feeling of the Beautiful and the Sublime* (1764).[14] Kant, "basing his observation on the

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[9] Gates Jr., Henry Louis. *Figures in Black: Words, Signs, and the Racial Self*. Oxford University Press, 1989. 19, Print.
[10] Hume, David. "Of National Characteristics." *The Philosophical Works*. Ed. Thomas Hill Green and Thomas Hodge Grose. Darmstadt, 1964. 3:252, n. 1.
[11] Ibid., n. 1.
[12] Ibid., n. 1.
[13] Ibid., n. 1.
[14] Henry Louis Gates Jr. notes that "Kant…is one of the earliest major European philosophers to conflate color with intelligence" (18). Gates Jr., Henry Louis. *Figures in Black: Words, Signs, and the Racial Self*. Oxford University Press, 1989. Print.

absence of published writing among Blacks," asserts that "Americans [Indians] and blacks are lower in their mental capacities than all other races."[15]

The writings of Hegel, Hume, and Kant capture the zeitgeist of the enlightenment's preoccupation with race while presenting racist conclusions as scientific fact. Their texts undermine the Black writers' claim to humanity. Yet in his autobiography, *A Narrative of the most Remarkable Particulars,* African born and former slave James Gronniosaw illustrates the racial milieu in which he exists and confounds prevailing racist sentiments. In his narrative, Gronniosaw recalls his first encounter with written words. Written as the epigraph to this section, Gronniosaw's account throws in sharp relief the critical distance between his subject position and his owners'. An African captive situated outside the Rights of Man,[16] in this passage, Gronniosaw reinterprets his subjectivity as objectivity. This interpretation functions as a rhetorical gesture that links his skin's pigmentation with enlightenment ideals that read innate and immutable inferiority on Black skin. As Hegel, Hume, and Kant make clear, the enlightenment is not only famous for "establishing its existence upon man's ability to reason,"[17] but also for using literacy, the principle sign of reason, as the principle sign of humanity and subjectivity. In other words, the ability to read and write in Western languages evidenced humanity and assured an individual's proper placement on "The Great Chain of Being."

As he looks back on his first experience with written language, Gronniosaw remembers not simply his illiteracy, but his *performance* of illiteracy. Witnessing the book "speak" to his

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[15] Ibid., 19. Kant, Immanuel. *Observations on the Feeling of the Beautiful and Sublime*. Trans. John T. Goldthwait. Berkeley: University of California Press, 1960. 113.
[16] Paine, Thomas. *Rights of Man ; Common Sense: and Other Political Writings*. Ed. Mark Philp, Oxford University Press, 2008.
[17] Gates, Henry Louis Jr. *The Signifying Monkey: A Theory of African American Literary Criticism*. Oxford University Press, 2014. 146.

master, his quest for privacy with the book, the placement of his ear near the page, and his realization that his color precluded the book from recognizing him are efforts that declare him lacking in reason and impossibly human. That Gronniosaw details such a performance that concludes with the book, a prayer book or Bible and the symbol of the Western world, refusing to acknowledge him because of his color suggests that he understands his presence in the Western world as objectifying, as intending to validate his dehumanization. Henry Louis Gates Jr. argues that the "book's rather deafening silence renames the received tradition in European letters that the mask of blackness worn by Gronniosaw and his countrymen was a trope of absence."[18] Gates further argues that because Gronniosaw can only speak to the text if the text first speaks to him, Gronniosaw's metaphorical absence prevents him from receiving the text's secrets or "coded language."[19]

Gronniosaw's absence is evident only in his proximity to the book. Because the book symbolizes the Western world, the previous sentence aptly describes his relationship with enlightenment ideals. The racial conventions to which the Enlightenment subscribed, to which Gronniosaw dramatizes using the book, separates voice and presence from identity. The silence and absence he encounters, then, functions to announce his black skin as a symbol of absent being. This imposed meaning assigned to Gronniosaw's skin recreates him as a negative, as a canvas of dark flesh upon which prevailing racial ideologies inscribe his worth and humanity. In other words, standing before the silent book not only reiterates Gronniosaw's objectification, but it suggests that his objectification necessarily defines him against his owner's humanity. Recounting his position as an enslaved African standing before the representation of a world he

[18] Ibid., 152
[19] Ibid., 153

cannot access, Gronniosaw's description of this experience underscore the dehumanizing character of his bondage.

Yet before the book refuses to recognize him, Gronniosaw demonstrates his attempt to employ silence and absence in his quest to hear the book speak. Because his slave status declares him a nonbeing, his desire for privacy with the book invites the text into the silent space of his living death status. Although, as I will later show, Gronniosaw achieves new spiritual life before he is sold onto this slave ship, new life that counters his racially imposed identity, he details his confrontation with total rejection and living death status to highlight the Western world's orientation to blackness. His manipulation of silence and absence, two characteristics of nonbeing, emphasizes the destitute nature of enslavement, but also Gronniosaw's endeavor to transcend it.

Gronniosaw expresses the significance of silence and absence by revealing that only when he is alone does he open the book. Emphasizing his intentional absence from the crew also functions to highlight his presence with the book. Before the text's silence and his metaphorical absence affirm his slave status, Gronniosaw uses silence and absence not simply to engage the book directly, but to establish privacy with the book in order to access the text's power. Because his owner can hear the text speak, Gronniosaw understands that the text's voice has the authority to proclaim subjectivity, and thus, humanity. A private audience with the book intends to unlock the power of its words to undue his status. Gronniosaw, then, relies on the very symbol of the Western world to redeem him, to disconnect him from nonbeing status and offer him renewed life. However, although Gronniosaw informs readers that the book, and thus the Western world, refuses to legitimize his humanity, he also reveals that the text prevents him from using silence and absence to access subjectivity. Whereas Gronniosaw attempts to use silence and absence to

assert personhood, when the book forces him to reevaluate his black skin, these qualities that characterize the private moment he creates again become evidence of his inhumanity. Without access to the book's content, Gronniosaw cannot prevent the privacy he establishes with the book from further binding him to living death status. While he manipulates the characteristics of nonbeing for the book to speak to him only, and therefore declare him human, Gronniosaw demonstrates that his illiteracy ensures that such declaration remains unannounced.

More than serving as the first instance of what Gates describes as the "trope of the talking book,"[20] Gronniosaw's account repositions literacy at the nexus of power, personhood, and renewal. Gronniosaw not only recognizes the transformative power of words, but he also realizes that without literacy, he cannot convincingly assert his ability to reason, and therefore, his subjectivity. He posits that only the acquisition and exhibition of literacy can transition him from nonbeing to human being. He also understands that literacy can offer him access to the "Word" and engender a conversion experience that unites him with orthodoxy Christianity, and therefore his White readership. In other words, Gronniosaw understands that literacy is uniquely positioned to offer new life and liberation from how his body signifies. Therefore, Gronniosaw's autobiography not only serves as an account of his experiences, but also as corroborating evidence for his claim to humanity. Gates argues that some forty years after the book refuses to speak, "Gronniosaw writes a text that speaks his face into existence among the authors and texts

[20] Leon Jackson accurately charts and describes the development of what Gates terms "the trope of the talking book." He writes, "subsequent Afro-British and African American autobiographers—including John Marrant (1785), Quobna Ottobah Cugoano (1787), Olaudah Equiano (1789), and John Jea (c.1815)—claimed similar encounters, leading critic Henry Louis Gates Jr. to argue…that the talking book, or more strictly the nontalking book, constituted a foundational trope for the African American literary tradition." Jackson, Leon. "The Talking Book and the Talking Book Historian." *Book History*. Johns Hopkins University Press, vol. 13, no. 1, Nov. 2010, 251.

of the Western tradition."[21] Such an accomplishment radically dislocates Groniosaw from nonbeing status.

It is important to note that in multiple narrative moments before his encounter with written words, Gronniosaw attempts unsuccessfully to assert membership in Western society. In one moment he does so by repeatedly reminding readers of his affinity for his sister, Logwy, who was "quite white and fair, with fine light hair."[22] His affection for Logwy over his darker skinned mother and father intends to suggest affection for her proximity to European Whites. His appreciation of these features and his description of her genteel disposition reveals that he interprets whiteness as a signifier of aesthetic value and inherent virtue. Such recognition signals his ability to fit within a society that reinforces these beliefs. In another moment, Gronniosaw expresses relief after his owner removes the gold rings with which he is fitted before leaving Bournou. That he is unburdened by the removal of these rings powerfully symbolizes the willful divestment of his African heritage. With his cultural heritage "eagerly abandoned,"[23] Gronniosaw can be "washed and clothed," or as Gates argues, baptized, "in the Dutch or English manner."[24] Gronniosaw, then, frames himself as having adopted a European identity. These two moments demonstrate his preoccupation with ascending "The Great Chain of Being" and reveal the inadequacy of these moments to offer such ascension. Even though his humanity should be affirmed after aligning himself with Western ideals and following his secular baptism, the book's

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[21] Gates, Henry Louis Jr. *The Signifying Monkey: A Theory of African American Literary Criticism*. Oxford University Press, 2014. 153.
[22] Gronniosaw, James Albert Ukawsaw. *A Narrative of the Most Remarkable Particulars in the Life of James Albert Ukawsaw Gronniosaw*. Bath: T. Mills and W. Gye, 1772. Reprinted in *Unchained Voices: An Anthology of Black Authors in the English-Speaking World of the Eighteenth Century*. Ed. Vincent Carretta, University Press of Kentucky, 2004. 36.
[23] Gates, Henry Louis Jr. *The Signifying Monkey: A Theory of African American Literary Criticism*. Oxford University Press, 2014. 152.
[24] Ibid., 152

silence makes clear that membership in Western society still eludes him. Only by authoring his own text can Gronniosaw achieve fundamental transformation. In other words, Gronniosaw shows that only literacy can offer him the visibility and new life he seeks.

Gronniosaw's reliance on literacy to engender his renewal further explains the reason why the strategy of resurrection finds expression in the written word. Yet while Gronniosaw's narrative, the material object of his resurrection, radically dislocates him from nonbeing status by evidencing his mastery of reason, his narrative's content preforms a similar task. He reinforces the human status that his written words proclaim through illustrations of his relationship with God. Gronniosaw understands that in accordance with prevailing scientific and religious sensibilities, he exists as an absence unrecognized by enlightened Europeans *and* God. If the Western world maintains that Gronniosaw's illiteracy removes him from human status and that God affirms such removal, then Gronniosaw's illustrations must prove that God recognizes him as beloved human, not dark object worthy of enslavement. If Gronniosaw's narrative evidences reason, and therefore, his resurrection into personhood from the living death of nonbeing status, then, to ensure his resurrection, his illustrations of God's favor toward him must resound as equally convincing. In other words, Gronniosaw's illustrations must combine the intention of his narrative (writing himself onto the rung of humanity and spiritual journey to Christianity) with a subtextual argument for God's recognition of him. Gronniosaw accomplishes this endeavor by framing his illustrations within a discourse of divine affirmation.

This discourse articulates his relationship with God before his American introduction to Christianity and how this relationship manifests in God's protection and acceptance. Gronniosaw's discourse also maps his development as an adherent to Calvinism. Because a way of "displaying British values was through the endorsement of Christianity," particularly "the

predestinarian Calvinism preached by George Whitefield," Gronniosaw's discourse also suggests fidelity to England, and therefore expresses a more convincing argument for his membership in the Western world.[25] More than expressing devotion to a particular faith, Gronniosaw's orientation to Calvinism reasserts his claim to humanity through national and orthodox religious affiliation. It also helps Gronniosaw frame himself transgressively, as being worthy of and having received God's direct attention. His ability to show that God recognizes him, indeed favors him, undermines White supremacy's contention of divinely sanctioned inferior Blackness. Because God recognizes and favors him, Gronniosaw suggests that God affirms his humanity and implies that those who refuse to recognize his humanity stand outside of God's will. Therefore, Gronniosaw's discourse endeavors to confound and nullify white supremacist ideology as an extension of God's will.

Gronniosaw begins his discourse by illustrating his belief in a Christian God's existence. While Gronniosaw depicts his belief in God, or the "great man of power,"[26] to indicate that he and his White, Christian readership are spiritually akin, he conveys these illustrations within a discourse of divine affirmation to ensure the resurrection his literacy produces. After a brief paragraph conveys his birthplace and royal linage, Gronniosaw's narrative opens with a description of his uniquely "grave and reserved" disposition. He then implies that his disposition, along with the unanswerable questions he asks, convinces his siblings that he "was either foolish, or insane."[27] Gronniosaw's self-characterization and peculiar behavior function to

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[25] Carretta, Vincent. *Unchained Voices: An Anthology of Black Authors in the English-Speaking World of the Eighteenth Century*. Ed. Vincent Carretta. University Press of Kentucky, 2004. 7.
[26] Gronniosaw, James Albert Ukawsaw. *A Narrative of the Most Remarkable Particulars in the Life of James Albert Ukawsaw Gronniosaw*. Bath: T. Mills and W. Gye, 1772. Reprinted in *Unchained Voices: An Anthology of Black Authors in the English-Speaking World of the Eighteenth Century*. Ed. Vincent Carretta, University Press of Kentucky, 2004. 34.
[27] Ibid., 34

set him apart from his family and countrymen. This presentation not only conveys his fundamental difference from those who surround him, but it also suggests that Gronniosaw's intellect and body are animated by a source that does not act upon his siblings. He offers his emotional state and identifies the animating power by writing, "'twas certain that I was, at times, very unhappy in myself: it being strongly impressed on my mind that there was some GREAT MAN of power which resided above the sun, moon, and stars, the objects of our worship."[28] Here, Gronniosaw informs readers that God is responsible for his disposition, inquisitive nature, and depression. Gronniosaw also implies that God strongly impresses his existence onto Gronniosaw's mind. Additionally, in his positioning of God above fellow citizens' celestial objects of worship, Gronniosaw suggests that absolute power lies only with God. Gronniosaw then seeks to reinforce his difference by revealing his own mother's ignorance of the "superior power" that lived in the sky.

Gronniosaw's interaction with his mother and siblings help to exhibit God's deliberate recognition of him. Impressing himself onto Gronniosaw's mind after creating Gronniosaw's character essentially different from family members' evidences God's intent to manifest sacred knowledge within Gronniosaw. Therefore, God not only establishes a relationship with Gronniosaw, but through that relationship, God imbues him with knowledge that shapes his existential reality and spiritual development, knowledge only useful to human beings.[29] By choosing to inform Gronniosaw's perception and interiority, Gronniosaw shows that God affirms his humanity and personhood. This scene's depiction of the direct intervention of God into

[28] Ibid., 34

[29] Because God imbues Gronniosaw, and not Gronniosaw's mother and siblings, with such knowledge, Gronniosaw not only argues that God affirms his humanity, but that God chooses not to recognize the humanity of his mother and siblings.

Gronniosaw's life shows God favoring Gronniosaw and validating his humanity before his interaction with Europeans, and thus, before the prayer book or Bible refuses to speak. That this scene asserts God's identification of Gronniosaw as human with intellectual and spiritual capacity demonstrates Gronniosaw engaging in a particular discourse. Because Gronniosaw's discourse intends to declare that God legitimizes his humanity, this scene emphasizes God's divine authority in his life. Gronniosaw further highlights his discourse and shows God's overwhelming authority by describing himself as having been placed in the space of death. Gronniosaw's description of himself as possessing a "grave" disposition in a society in which he is ostracized and philosophically separate, does not simply situate him in a metaphorical death space, but it characterizes him as the dead. Although Gronniosaw implies that his family's idolatry renders them spiritually dead, as God's chosen, the sacred knowledge he receives works to place him in a metaphorical space of death that allows him to anticipate new life in Christ. Thus, his placement in the space of death implies a reinterpretation of the baptismal ritual wherein Gronniosaw enters death, but can only anticipate resurrection. Instead of immediately rising from the grave as a new creature in Christ,[30] Gronniosaw reinforces the significance of his future, resurrected state by prolonging his time in the space of death and anticipating his deliverance from it.

Not only does Gronniosaw's metaphorical distance from light bearing celestial objects of worship suggest overwhelming darkness, and thus death, to pagan beliefs, but Gronniosaw further coveys his experience with undergoing death in the portrayal of his baptism. He observes that while walking home after "the duty of our Sabbath was over," "a remarkable black cloud

[30] In 2 Corinthians 5:17, the Apostle Paul writes, "Therefore if any man *be* in Christ, *he is* a new creature: old things are passed away; behold, all things are become new." *The Bible*. King James Version, Zondervan, 1994.

arose and covered the sun; then followed very heavy rain and thunder more dreadful than ever I had heard."[31] His experience of being "more distressed and afflicted than ever" before the dark cloud arises compounds as he writes, "the heav'ns roared, and the earth trembled…I was highly affected and cast down…and could not follow my relations and friends home."[32] Standing alone in the rain, a position which mirrors his spiritual isolation, Gronniosaw remarks, "I was obliged to stop and felt as if my legs were tied, they seemed to shake under me: so I stood in great fear of the man of power that I was persuaded in myself, lived above."[33] When a friend returns to ask why he "stood still in such very hard rain," Gronniosaw simply replies, "my legs were weak, and I could not come faster."[34] The scene concludes with the friend leading Gronniosaw home. More affected by her son's unrelenting questions concerning the great man of power than his "tarrying out in such terrible weather," upon reaching home, Gronniosaw's mother maintains that "there was no power but the sun, moon, and stars" before his father warns of severe punishment if such questions persist.[35]

No difficulty arises when interpreting the rain that flows over Gronniosaw's stationary body as baptismal water. What is more significant here is how Gronniosaw articulates this experience and the manner this baptism conforms to his earlier sentiments on the unique position he occupies in Bournou. Because God has removed Gronniosaw from pagan beliefs and situated him in the space of death, Gronniosaw reveals the black cloud which covers the sun as further

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[31] Gronniosaw, James Albert Ukawsaw. *A Narrative of the Most Remarkable Particulars in the Life of James Albert Ukawsaw Gronniosaw*. Bath: T. Mills and W. Gye, 1772. Reprinted in *Unchained Voices: An Anthology of Black Authors in the English-Speaking World of the Eighteenth Century*. Ed. Vincent Carretta, University Press of Kentucky, 2004. 35.
[32] Ibid., 35
[33] Ibid., 35
[34] Ibid., 35
[35] Ibid., 35

evidence of his spiritual congruence with God's supremacy and God's displeasure with his friends and relatives. In a display befitting the title, "great man of power," God not only blocks the sun, but by again acting upon Gronniosaw, God ensures that only Gronniosaw experiences the full extent of the rain he sends. Whereas God previously impressed his existence on Gronniosaw's mind, here, he persuades Gronniosaw of his awesome power in the midst of cloud cover and rain meant to reflect and convey Gronniosaw's changed status. Indeed, by sending the dark cloud, the shield against the influence of a false deity, and rain, Gronniosaw's baptismal water, God manipulates the natural world to mirror Gronniosaw's inner transformation. That Gronniosaw describes the cloud as "black" immediately before characterizing the rain as "very heavy" and announcing his "distressed" state further shows Gronniosaw linking his metaphorical death, watery grave, and interiority with God's powerful display. Yet Gronniosaw reinforces the symbolic meaning of the black cloud and rain by solidifying their relationship with his presence in the space of death. Not only does the remarkable blackness of the cloud and the immense rainfall function as death signifiers, but Gronniosaw's body does as well. Gronniosaw's description of his legs as tied suggests that his legs are stiff and metaphorically bound together in rigor mortis. Similarly, his characterization of them as shaking and weak denotes the absence of vigor, or life.

Gronniosaw's careful portrait of weather and himself as conduits of God's will expresses his presence in the space of death and allows Gronniosaw to anticipate new life in Christ. His portrait dramatizes the Apostle Paul's edict that to receive salvation, one must be "buried with him [Christ] through baptism into death in order that, just as Christ was raised from the dead through the glory of the Father, we too may live a new life."[36] Paul explicitly links living anew

[36] Romans 6:4

with resurrection, writing, "for if we have been united with him in a death like his, we will certainly also be united with him in a resurrection like his."[37] Thus, Gronniosaw's illustration declares an intimate relationship with God while implying an inability to attain new life in Bournou with friends and relatives who are spiritually dead. Because he interprets his mother and father as chief proponents of pagan dogma immediately after witnessing God's power, his parents' beliefs serve as obstacles to his, and their own, spiritual development. When Gronniosaw's father threatens him with punishment, his warning makes clear him and his wife's rejection of Judeo-Christian tenets, therefore rendering them unredeemable. For Gronniosaw, his unredeemable parents' effort to suppress and silence his spiritual awakening marks a profound fissure in their relationship that foreshadows permanent separation. Gronniosaw's characterization of his parents also shows him advancing the notion that only he, and not fellow citizens, is worthy of spiritual restoration and placement on the rung of humanity. In other words, Gronniosaw exposes his friends and relatives' separation from a God who affirms Black humanity to define himself against their spiritual degeneration. His quest to portray himself as recognized by God rests on his ability to fix his fellow citizens to ignorant and unprogressive blackness. Echoing Hegel's contention of the irreparable, underdeveloped African, Gronniosaw's illustration announces his Christian orientation, in part, by reifying Hegel's condemnation of the "African other."

Joanna Brooks argues that in their narratives, Gronniosaw and Olaudah Equiano remember "their early years in Africa as fantastic or Edenic."[38] Not only does Gronniosaw's description of his friends and relatives belie the prelapsarian innocence suggestive of the term

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[37] Romans 6:5

[38] Brooks, Joanna. *American Lazarus: Religion and the Rise of African-American and Native American Literatures*. Oxford Univ. Press, 2009. 120.

"Edenic," but contrasting the two authors' portrayal of Africa further reveals Gronniosaw framing only himself as God' chosen. Published seventeen years after Gronniosaw's narrative, Equiano's *The Interesting Narrative of Olaudah Equiano: Or Gustavus Vassa, the African,* insinuates that him *and* the citizens of the Kingdom of Benin are God's chosen people.[39] Describing his homeland, he notes, "our land is uncommonly rich and fruitful, and produces all kinds of vegetables in great abundance."[40] Women of this promised land are portrayed as "uncommonly graceful, alert, and modest," while men codify and enforce social codes and regulations."[41] Not only does Equiano detail citizens' "extreme" efforts of "cleanliness on all occasions,"[42] but he also writes, "the natives believe that there is one Creator of all."[43] In accordance with their religion, he observes, "we practiced circumcision like the Jews, and made offerings and feasts on that occasion in the same manner as they did."[44] After indicating that similar to Jewish naming rites, his people named children after events or circumstances, Equiano returns to the subject of cleanliness, revealing, "the natives of this part of Africa are extremely cleanly" who follow a religion with "many purifications and washings."[45]

Contrary to Gronniosaw, Equiano suggests that his and his people's moral conduct, ritual practices, and sacred worship of one God defines them, as with Jews, as God's own people. Equiano's focus on cleanliness serves to amplify his people's uncorrupted interiority. In other

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[39] The Kingdom of Benin is located in present day Nigeria.
[40] Equiano, Olaudah. *The Interesting Narrative of the Life of Olaudah Equiano, or Gustavus Vassa, The African. Written by Himself*. London, 1789. Reprinted in *Unchained Voices: An Anthology of Black Authors in the English-Speaking World of the Eighteenth Century*. Ed. Vincent Carretta, University Press of Kentucky, 2004. 191.
[41] Ibid., 192
[42] Ibid., 190
[43] Ibid., 193
[44] Ibid., 194
[45] Ibid., 194

words, habitual cleaning as both daily ritual and sacred purification suggests inner and outer acknowledgment of the value God has conferred onto them. Evidence of inner and outer cleanliness also problematizes the belief that Africans needed to be enslaved by Europeans to experience civilization and salvation. By framing the citizens of Benin as untarnished by sin and recipients of God's favor, Equiano inverts the prevailing racial paradigm and designates White Europeans as rapacious and uncivilized nonbelievers who prey on God's people. Not only does Equiano's *Interesting Narrative* confirm his claim to reason, and thus humanity, but because members of the House of Commons used this narrative when debating the merits of ending the Trans-Atlantic Slave trade from 1789 to 1792, Equiano's portrayal of his countrymen intends to convey their humanity and reinforce his own.

Equiano's narrative performs what Gronniosaw's narrative refuses: a bold declaration of collective membership in the human family and the individual and communal dignity that lies at its center. Equiano's narrative demonstrates the manner in which another African born former slave addressed the question of renewed being for himself and his people. Although, as Ryan Hanley reminds us, "when Gronniosaw's Narrative was published in 1772, there was little political impetus behind the occasional objections to slavery,"[46] Gronniosaw's choice of framing his friends and relatives as heathens reads less as his hesitation to uphold burgeoning abolitionist sentiment, and more as his willful participation in conveying the spiritually deads' suitability for social death in slavery. Hanley's observation implies that Gronniosaw's narrative could be published because it lacked an outright condemnation of slavery.[47] Yet I posit that it is because

[46] Hanley, Ryan. "Calvinism, Proslavery and James Albert Ukawsaw Gronniosaw." *Slavery & Abolition*, vol. 36, no. 2, June 2015, 361.

[47] That Gronniosaw's narrative lacks an outright condemnation of slavery is consistent with the Huntingdon Connexion's theology concerning slavery. The brand or predestinarian Methodism advanced by the Connexion did not find slavery and Christian identity incompatible, and

his narrative reifies existing racial conventions (sub-human Africans exist removed from salvation and require enslavement) while simultaneously transgressing those norms (he is of African heritage, yet he claims humanity and God's indwelling) that engenders a reading audience. This paradox suggests that if his friends and relatives became slaves to Europeans, their living death status would simply reiterate their internal ruin. Conversely, Gronniosaw's relationship with God asserts that even if he enters the death of slavery, he will remain spiritually alive.

Even before Gronniosaw uses his account of the middle passage to expose the Western world's manipulation of how blackness signifies, he solidifies his spiritual unification with God, a unification that anticipates God's favor and protection when he becomes human traffic. Because Gronniosaw experiences religious persecution from ungodly friends and relatives, it is not surprising that his relationship with God intensifies after he separates from them. Gronniosaw relates that shortly after his father threatens him, a merchant from the Gold Coast arrives in Bournou. Following the merchant's observation of Gronniosaw's "unhappy

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therefore would not have found the publication of Gronniosaw's narrative objectionable. Yet while the Countess of Huntingdon, Salina Hastings, and some of her clergy owned slaves, they also recognized the value of Black persons' claim to Christianity and literacy. Such a recognition allowed the Countess to serve as patron to other Black Atlantic writers such as Phillis Wheatley, Olaudah Equiano, and John Marrant as well as maintain the Connexion's competition with Wesleyan Methodist in regards to converting new members to its particular form of Methodism. Black Atlantic writers, then, produced literary works that while announcing their membership in the human community, also served to endorse the theology and orientation to Blackness of the Connexion. In their fidelity to the Connexion, Black Atlantic writers may have recognized a relationship between their exclusion from the Western world and the Connexion's exclusion from the Anglican Church, as Methodist chapels led by Connexion ministers were forced to register as dissenting chapels in 1783. Although "Huntingdonian Methodists did not officially spread an antislavery message to Black people in North America," Black Atlantic writers remained committed to the Connexion's mission. May, Cedrick. "John Marrant and the Narrative of an Early Black Methodist Evangelical." *African American Review*, vol. 38, no. 4, Winter 2004, 556.

situation,"[48] the merchant expresses concern for him and, with his parents' consent, offers to temporarily relocate him to the Gold Coast. With promises that he would interact with young men his age, see "white folks," and "see houses with wings to them walk upon the water," Gronniosaw is "very desirous of going."[49] His parents, seeking to relieve his dejection and receiving the merchant's assurance of bringing Gronniosaw "safe back again soon,"[50] permit his departure. Yet Gronniosaw prepares his readers for God's further intervention in his life. More than simply desiring respite from home, he writes, "I seemed sensible of a secret impulse upon my mind which I could not resist that seemed to tell me I must go."[51] When he reaches the Gold Coast and the merchant's sons inform him that their king intended to behead him because he suspected Gronniosaw was a spy, Gronniosaw situates his readers as witnesses to his imminent deliverance.

He relates that the morning of his execution he was washed and brought to the King's throne. As he ascends the hill leading to the King, he "went with an undaunted courage, and it pleased God to melt the heart of the King."[52] Gronniosaw writes that the king "sat with his scymitar in his hand ready to behead me; yet, being himself so affected, he dropped it out of his hand, and took me upon his knee and wept over me."[53] Refusing to kill him or permit his return home, the king blesses Gronniosaw, then informs him that he will be "sold for a slave."[54]

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[48] Gronniosaw, James Albert Ukawsaw. *A Narrative of the Most Remarkable Particulars in the Life of James Albert Ukawsaw Gronniosaw*. Bath: T. Mills and W. Gye, 1772. Reprinted in *Unchained Voices: An Anthology of Black Authors in the English-Speaking World of the Eighteenth Century*. Ed. Vincent Carretta, University Press of Kentucky, 2004. 35.
[49] Ibid., 35-6
[50] Ibid., 35
[51] Ibid., 36
[52] Ibid., 37
[53] Ibid., 37
[54] Ibid., 37. "Sold for a slave" indicates that Gronniosaw will be sold into the transatlantic slave trade.

Reiterating Orlando Patterson's contention,[55] Gronniosaw suggests that the king interprets slavery as an exchange for death. More than an exchange, the king understands his decree as an act of kindness. His orientation towards the transatlantic slave trade helps to explain the function of slavery in his kingdom. Gronniosaw, then, uses the King's interpretation of the role of slavery to suggest similarity between the purpose of slavery in the Western world and in the Gold Coast. A captive without rights or ownership of his body, Gronniosaw not only implies that he is a slave in the Gold Coast kingdom, but he shows that God uses his slave status to perform a miracle.[56] Gronniosaw informs readers that the position of death he occupies as a slave and the miracle of his deliverance from a violent death mirror his spiritual development as a Christian. In other words, his encounter with death and deliverance in the Gold Coast dramatizes his position and future in the space of death.

Just as Gronniosaw depicts torrential rainfall and consuming darkness to express his baptism and therefore God situating him in the space of death, his slave status and washing before his scheduled execution reflects the same idea. Because his experiences in the Gold Coast are intended to reflect his inner transformation and spiritual unification with God, Gronniosaw refashions the king as a God-like figure. Not only does the king have the authority to kill Gronniosaw, but his position on a throne atop a hill helps to further assert the omnipotent, great man in the sky he represents. That Gronniosaw confronts the king with "undaunted courage" indicates his knowledge that death is a threshold to new life in Christ. It is his faith in this sacred knowledge, suggested by his baptism and translated as assurance in the face of physical death, that proves he believes himself to be God's chosen. Not only does the "king's" heart melt

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[55] See page 3

[56] Ibid., 37. Gronniosaw describes his deliverance from death as a miracle.

because of Gronniosaw's courage, but, as a metaphor for salvation, the king saves his life. While the king sparing Gronniosaw's life reasserts his intimate relationship with God, it also advances it. Whereas Gronniosaw uses his slave status in this kingdom to symbolize God placing him in the space of death through baptism, the life he possesses, which should have ended, signals that God has granted him new life. In other words, Gronniosaw shows that God has allowed him to arise anew from his symbolic death. Not only do his experiences in the Gold Coast kingdom reflect his metaphorical death, but the "king's" mercy announces that Gronniosaw has transitioned from anticipating new life to living it. With his baptism complete, Gronniosaw achieves a resurrection that intensifies his spiritual vitality. Gronniosaw uses the achievement of resurrection to signify to readers the moment of his Christian conversion and the moment his blackness is redeemed. Although his status as God's chosen with an intimate relationship with God already expresses his uniquely conceived blackness, Gronniosaw employs a conversion motif to reiterate a sacred form of Christian acceptance in the Western world and to further demonstrate his relationship with Western sacred conventions. His resurrection, then, not only further signals his unification with God, but also the aligning of himself with conversion rituals recognizable to a White, evangelical readership.

Gronniosaw's enslavement and deliverance demonstrates a particularly intimate relationship with God that expresses divine affirmation. Faithful to his discourse and rhetorical strategy, he communicates God's full acceptance of him and conveys that his illustration of deliverance performs a resurrectionary function. Yet more than fortifying his spiritual vitality, the symbolic resurrection Gronniosaw achieves through his deliverance intends to amplify the resurrection his written work declares. As a way of ensuring his status as reasoning being, and thus human being, Gronniosaw argues that his divine acceptance legitimatizes his claim to

humanity. The illustration he presents of achieving new life, or resurrection, then, furthers the redemptive work that his narrative exhibits. This scene makes clear that Gronniosaw combines the redemptive effect of his written words with another illustration of resurrection to undermine European philosophic and religious conventions that regulate Africans placement on "The Great Chain of Being." Gronniosaw reasons that the written expression and religious content of this scene asserts his rightful place on the rung of humanity. Yet this scene also offers unique insight into Gronniosaw's interpretation of God and slavery. His illustration of resurrection in the Gold Coast indicates that not only is it possible to be spiritually alive in slavery, but that God's works and restorative power manifests fully in slavery. Preparing his readers for God's presence during his bondage in America, he not only suggests that slavery allows for greater expressions of faith, but also new spiritual life. The notion that slavery facilitates renewed being runs counter to slavery engendering living death status. It also seems ironic that immediately following Gronniosaw's resurrection, he is to assume new life in a system that restricts personhood.

These contradictions may arise from Gronniosaw's refusal to upset a potential reading audience by alluding to the proslavery argument that Africans receive salvation and value only through New World enslavement. Another possible reason for these contradictions is the miraculous power of God to engender resurrected being despite the consequences of slavery. This explanation echoes Frances Smith Foster's contention that Gronniosaw's narrative emphasizes his "conversion and other religious experiences."[57] She argues that such an approach by him and other early Black writers meant that "their works were also useful for the religious and moral education and persuasion of their readers."[58] Such an orientation intends to inspire

[57] Foster, Frances Smith. *Witnessing Slavery: The Development of Ante-Bellum Slave Narratives*. The University of Wisconsin Press, 2005. 20.
[58] Ibid., 20

Christian devotion by highlighting his own devotion despite bondage. Yet, Gronniosaw's desire to chart his journey to Calvinism perhaps better clarifies these contradictions. By suggesting that slavery in the New World will accommodate renewed being and God's favor, Gronniosaw seems to rehearse the Calvinist interpretation for the existence of transatlantic slavery. Termed "providentialism," Gronniosaw advances the doctrine of slavery "as a scourge with which God chastised his favorite people."[59] Jonna Brooks writes that as a way of situating the horrors of the slave trade within God's benevolent omnipotence, eighteenth-century ministers maintained that "all human events and conditions—even sin—belonged to a grand historical design appointed to achieve the redemption of the regenerate, the damnation of the unregenerate, and the glorification of God."[60] Therefore, religious thinkers "reconciled the historical fact of the slave trade to the grand historical design."[61] Not only did God use African enslavement to declare Africans worthy of his grace, but according to Lemuel Haynes' 1805 sermon,[62] "Divine Decrees," God uses "wickedness" as a "means…calculated to exhibit his wisdom, power, and goodness."[63]

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[59] Saillant, John. *Black Puritan, Black Republican: The Life and Thought of Lemual Haynes, 1753-1833*. Oxford University Press, 2003. 178.

[60] Brooks, Joanna. *American Lazarus: Religion and the Rise of African-American and Native American Literatures*. Oxford Univ. Press, 2009. 29.

[61] Ibid., 29

[62] An accomplished New Divinity thinker, Haynes accepted the New Divinity's dispensationalist interpretation of slavery but rejected its colonizationist agenda. Brooks, Joanna. *American Lazarus: Religion and the Rise of African-American and Native American Literatures*. Oxford Univ. Press, 2009. 30.

[63] In his view of the divine providence of the slave trade, Haynes asserts, "God *permitted* or *suffered* sin to take place; but if, on the whole, it is not promotive or made subservient to the highest good, then he cannot be vindicated in *permitting* it to be; but if it is best that sin should have existence, why cannot the divine Character be cleared in *causing* it to take place.?" In his 1776 sermon, "Liberty Further Extended: Or Free Thoughts on the Illegality of Slave-Keeping," Haynes posits that while slavery and the slave trade may represent God's grand historical design means neither that they were "a great Blessing instead of a Curs," "nor that the slave-traders and

The Huntingdon Connexion,[64] the Calvinist sect to which Gronniosaw belonged at the time he authored his narrative, and Salina Hastings, the Countess of Huntingdon and Gronniosaw's benefactor, would certainly have been familiar with Gronniosaw's allusion to providentialism. His coded commentary on African enslavement in the New World reiterates his devotion to the Huntingdon Connexion while also broadening the distance between himself and the subhuman African other. While his natural inclination toward belief in the "great man in the sky" along with God conferring special recognition on him alone suggests that he is counted elect among predestinarian Calvinists, his views on slavery assert a more Arminian belief in the restorative potential of believers. In other words, Gronniosaw appeals to conservative and progressive religious persuasions to ensure a larger audience becomes witnesses to God's intervention in his life and convinced that such intervention asserts his devout nature and godly disposition. He advances the theories of predestination and providentialism to again reiterate his relationship with a humanity affirming God and to announce that his imminent enslavement in the New World will not separate him from God's favor and protection.

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slaveholders are justified in their deeds, as was argued in the second half of the eighteenth century" (243). Jupiter Hammon, the first published African American poet, reiterates Haynes view of the divine overulling of sin "by adding a reference to Romans 5:21" to his poem, "An Address to Miss Phillis Wheatley, Ethiopian Poetess" (1778). Haynes, Lemuel. "Divine Decrees." *Preacher*. 1805. 89-104. Haynes, Lemuel. "Liberty Further Extended: Or Free Thoughts on the Illegality of Slave-Keeping." Reprinted in *Black Preacher to White America: The Collected Writings of Lemuel Haynes, 1774-1833*, Ed. Richard Newman. Brooklyn, New York: Carlson Publishing, 1990. 24-25. Saillant, John. "Origins of African American Biblical Hermeneutics in Eighteenth-Century Black Opposition to the Slave Trade and Slavery." *African Americans and the Bible: Sacred Texts and Social Textures*. Ed. Vincent L. Wimbush. New York, New York: Continuum International Publishing Group Inc, 2000. 243-4. In Romans 5:20-21, the Apostle Paul writes, "But where sin abounded, grace did much more abound: that as sin hath reigned unto death, even so might grace reign through righteousness unto eternal life by Jesus Christ our Lord."

[64] This Calvinist sect separated from the Church of England in 1783.

After his Gold Coast and middle passage experiences, Gronniosaw uses his enslavement in the United States to further communicate his discourse of divine affirmation. He does this by representing himself as the embodiment of predestinarian and providential dogmas. However, as a way of presenting Calvinism as the path for proper Christian development, Gronniosaw conceals his spiritual maturity and frames the renewed life he is to lead within predestinarian and providentialist tenets. Although his spiritual evolution in Africa attuned readers to his divine acceptance, as a slave in America, he conceals his relationship with God to dramatize his progression into orthodoxy Christianity. Though particular moments during his American enslavement are reminiscent of God's previous recognition of him, Gronniosaw overemphasizes his affinity for Calvinism to reiterate God's authority in his life and assert similarity between his religious views and the views of his White readership. He reasons that demonstrating a preoccupation with conservative and progressive religious orientations and situating himself as an adherent to the same proscription for salvation as his audience proclaims equality between his spirituality and his audience's, and thus, his audience's humanity and his own.

Gronniosaw expresses his new, resurrected, self and Calvinist sensibility when describing his duties and interactions as a slave for Vanhorn, his first American owner. Reminiscent of the new attire he receives on the slave ship, Gronniosaw writes, Vanhorn "dress'd me in his livery."[65] He describes his owner as "very good" to him before revealing, "my chief business was to wait at table, and tea, and clean knives."[66] Yet more than addressing obligations, he seems to detail these duties as a way to contrast the ease of completing them with his discomfort

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[65] Gronniosaw, James Albert Ukawsaw. *A Narrative of the Most Remarkable Particulars in the Life of James Albert Ukawsaw Gronniosaw*. Bath: T. Mills and W. Gye, 1772. Reprinted in *Unchained Voices: An Anthology of Black Authors in the English-Speaking World of the Eighteenth Century*. Ed. Vincent Carretta, University Press of Kentucky, 2004. 38.
[66] Ibid., 38

around fellow slaves. Regarding his servitude and other slaves, he observes, "I had a very easy place; but the servants us'd to curse and swear surprisingly; which I learnt faster than anything."[67] By suggesting that slaves create the immoral conditions of slavery rather than his owner, Gronniosaw revises providentialism's argument for the cause of slavery's evils and implies that God's favor and protection of him should distance him from ungodly servants. Yet Gronniosaw's interaction with a slave who seems to share his religiosity ensures that his distance from the ungodly does not jeopardize his Christian devotion. After he calls upon God to damn a slave who cuts bread and butter with the knife he has just cleaned, "an old black servant" admonishes him, stating, "there was a wicked man call'd the Devil, that liv'd in hell, and would take all who said these words, and put them in the fire, and burn them."[68] With this warning, he is not only "entirely broke of swearing,"[69] but this immediate transformation demonstrates his belief in the veracity of the servant's warning. In accordance with his new life in Christ and the notion that God's work manifests in slavery, Gronniosaw accepts the warning as divine directive. His belief in the servant's warning suggests that he recognizes God maintaining benevolent control of his life *because of* his slave status. That he has no knowledge of Satan nor the eternal consequence of sin before his enslavement conveys that slavery creates the conditions to impart Biblical knowledge and salvation.

In his interaction with the first slave, Gronniosaw demonstrates the morally corrupt nature of Vanhorn's slaves and illustrates how he conceals his spiritual maturity with swearing. By swearing, he submerges his Christian devotion, causing readers to anticipate his need for further reform which Gronniosaw eagerly provides through his subsequent conversion to

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[67] Ibid., 38
[68] Ibid., 39
[69] Ibid., 39

Calvinism. While his interaction with the second slave engenders saving knowledge, and thus sharpens his appeal to providentialism, when he shares the servant's warning with his mistress, Gronniosaw uses her and his master's response to affirm his humanity. After he overhears his mistress' desire for God to damn another slave who "had unfortunately sprinkled the wainscot with the mop,"[70] he stresses, "'Madam…you must not say so.'"[71] When she asks the reason for such caution, he replies, "because there is a black man call'd the Devil that lives in hell, and he will put you into the fire and burn you, and I shall be very sorry for that."[72] When Gronniosaw reveals that he learns of this warning from "Old Ned," the mistress informs her husband who orders "that Old Ned should be tyed up and whipp'd" and prevented from coming "into the kitchen with the rest of the servants."[73]

Although critics such as Paul Edwards and David Dabydeen interpret Gronniosaw's exchange with his mistress as having a "tone of obsequious humility" that threatens to disrupt the legacy of Black resistance,[74] Gronniosaw uses this interaction to convey his humanity and assert himself fundamentally different from Old Ned. Consistent with his representation of himself and the citizens of Bournou, here, Gronniosaw escapes punishment designed for slaves while paradoxically creating the conditions that reinforce the tyranny of slavery. Because the warning Old Ned provides intends to regulate a slave's behavior, it makes sense that he would receive punishment for usurping his master's authority. Yet Gronniosaw's greater offense, offering a warning that intends to regulate White behavior, eludes anger and penalty. In order to claim the

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[70] Ibid., 39
[71] Ibid., 39
[72] Ibid., 39
[73] Ibid., 39
[74] Edwards, Paul, and David Dabydeen. *Black Writers in Britain: 1760-1890*. Edinburgh University Press, 1991. 7. Hanley, Ryan. "Calvinism, Proslavery and James Albert Ukawsaw Gronniosaw." *Slavery & Abolition*, vol. 36, no. 2, June 2015, 361.

same humanity as his mistress and master, Gronniosaw cannot be chastised for his indiscretion. Indeed, his comment reads less as indiscretion and more as the earnest sharing of religious conviction. Not only does his lack of correction reassert God's protection, but it further suggests that he is God's chosen while repurposing Old Ned as simply a conduit for God's message. Old Ned's beating assures readers that he is only masquerading as Christian disciple. As in Bournou, Gronniosaw defines himself against the Black other and again links new, resurrected life with distance from Black individuals. In other words, along with illuminating his predestinarian and providentialist sensibilities, he shuns membership in the slave community from which Old Ned is banned. Whereas chapter one demonstrated the ways in which slaves and the self-freed established and maintained communities using the trope of resurrection, Gronniosaw's use of the trope only advances himself.

Gronniosaw more starkly relays his paradoxical relationship with the sign of blackness through his language. In his warning to the mistress, he revises Old Ned's description of Satan to include Satan's race and sex. In the statement, "there is a black man call'd the Devil that lives in hell," "devil" is secondary to "Black man," the only description Gronniosaw uses. Gronniosaw's description replaces Old Ned's designation of Satan as "wicked," expressing an overdetermined link between blackness and evil. Although he appears to unwittingly align himself with Satan's characteristics, and thus, Satan's essential nature, Gronniosaw relies on readers to interpret his union with God and confrontations with friends, relatives, and slaves as evidence of his uniquely redeemed blackness. Not only does such redemption reiterate his new Christian life and claim to humanity, it privileges his interiority over his race. This rhetorical strategy redirects attention toward his spiritual constitution and capacity for reason and away from his damnable black exterior. Therefore, while Satan and ungodly individuals share

Gronniosaw's race, they can never claim his intellectual capacity or religious orientation. If his description of Satan, then, is not intended to announce his race, it makes sense that he uses it to magnify Old Ned's. The wickedness implied in the characteristic "Black," transforms "Black" from description to accusation, exhibiting a rhetorical sleight of hand that elevates Gronniosaw while demeaning Old Ned. Whereas Gronniosaw circumvents the fixed value assigned to blackness, he also legitimizes the subjection and "diabolical nature" of others of the same race. He proclaims his humanity while simultaneously rejecting another's.

Gronniosaw's interaction with Old Ned and his orientation toward Vanhorn's slaves shows that he refuses to practice what Ian Finseth terms, "covenanting together."[75] Finseth notes that in the early slave narrative, "this phrase aptly captures both...religious and personal dimensions…in which the Christian doctrine of duty to God is mirrored and supplemented by, and at times even secondary to, an ethic of interpersonal obligation."[76] Gronniosaw's absence of obligation and responsibility for his fellow slaves transgresses Christian duty not only prevalent in narratives, but throughout the Western world. Such a refusal to exercise "covenanting together" should necessarily separate Gronniosaw from Christianity. While he shows that his edification and protection as a slave articulate God's favor, his failure to covenant with other slaves threatens to weaken his claim to divine approval. As a way to further announce himself as

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[75] The theatrical foundation for Finseth's argument stems from the views of Adam Smith, Scottish economist and philosopher. In *The Theory of Moral Sentiments* (1759), Smith contends, "Man is accountable to God and his fellow creatures. But tho' he is, no doubt, principally accountable to God, in the order of time, he must necessarily conceive himself as accountable to his fellow creatures, before he can form any idea of the Deity, or of the rules by which that Divine Being will judge of his conduct." Finseth, Ian. "Irony and Modernity in the Early Slave Narrative: Bonds of Duty, Contracts of Meaning." *Early American Literature*, vol. 48, no. 1, Mar. 2013, 29. Smith, Adam. *The Theory of Moral Sentiments*. London: A. Miller and A. Kincaid and J. Bell, 1759. 257-8.

[76] Finseth, Ian. "Irony and Modernity in the Early Slave Narrative: Bonds of Duty, Contracts of Meaning." *Early American Literature*, vol. 48, no. 1, Mar. 2013, 29.

a thinking subject and remain faithful to concealing his spiritual maturity, Gronniosaw suggests the possibility for a mode of Christianity that resists "covenanting together." His decision to shun responsibility for fellow slaves, then, intends to highlight his need for a form of Christianity that embraces interpersonal obligation. In other words, while Gronniosaw uses the beating he escapes and the information Old Ned imparts to reify his relationship with God, his intentional failure to covenant with Old Ned and others helps readers anticipate his conversion to Calvinism.

Gronniosaw does not prolong his readers' anticipation, as immediately following his conversation with his mistress he describes his association with Mr. Freelandhouse,[77] a Dutch Reformed minister. Because the tenets of the Dutch Reformed Church are rooted in Calvinism and Freelandhouse has theological ties to George Whitefield,[78] it makes sense that Gronniosaw would depict this association as his formal introduction to Calvinism. Gronniosaw writes that when Freelandhouse, "a very gracious, good minister,"[79] hears the mistress retell the encounter with Gronniosaw, Freelandhouse purchases him, and, upon reaching home, instructs Gronniosaw to "kneel down" as he and Gronniosaw pray.[80] Pondering prayer, Gronniosaw reveals, "I could not make out what it was for, nor the meaning of it,…I thought it comical but I lik'd it very

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[77] Mr. Freelandhouse is Theodorus Jacobus Frelinghuysen (1691-1748), "Reformed Dutch clergyman in the Colony of New Jersey…His success as a preacher made him an influential figure in…The Great Awakening, during the second quarter of the eighteenth century, winning him the praises of…Jonathan Edwards…and…George Whitefield." Vincent Carretta notes that "the misspellings of 'Frelinghuysen' as 'Freelandhouse'" is very plausibly an attempt by Gronniosaw "to inscribe from memory" a name "he may never have seen written down." Carretta, Vincent. *Unchained Voices: An Anthology of Black Authors in the English-Speaking World of the Eighteenth Century*. Ed. Vincent Carretta. University Press of Kentucky, 2004. 36, 55.

[78] On one of his trips to North America, Whitefield visited Frelinghuysen's church.

[79] Gronniosaw, James Albert Ukawsaw. *A Narrative of the Most Remarkable Particulars in the Life of James Albert Ukawsaw Gronniosaw*. Bath: T. Mills and W. Gye, 1772. Reprinted in *Unchained Voices: An Anthology of Black Authors in the English-Speaking World of the Eighteenth Century*. Ed. Vincent Carretta, University Press of Kentucky, 2004. 39.

[80] Ibid., 39

well."[81] After he "had been a little while with" his new master,[82] Gronniosaw asks the meaning of prayer, to which Freelandhouse responds "that he pray'd to God, who liv'd in Heaven." Freelandhouse adds that God is Gronniosaw's "Father and BEST Friend."[83] When Groniosaw insists that Freelandhouse must be mistaken because his father "lived at Bournou," he adds, "I wanted very much to see him, and likewise my dear mother, and sister."[84] Upon hearing Gronniosaw's desire to see his family and his request for Freelandhouse's aid with such an endeavor, the "good master was so affected, that tears ran down his face."[85] Through his outpouring of emotion, Freelandhouse relates that "God was a Great and Good Spirit, that He created all the world, and every person and thing in it…everywhere."[86] In a response meant to remind readers that God has selected him among the elect, Gronniosaw shouts, "I always thought so when I liv'd at home! Now if I had wings like an eagle, I would fly to tell my dear mother that God is greater than the sun, moon, and stars; and that they were made by Him."[87]

In this exchange, Freelandhouse's emotion and theological lesson expresses interpersonal obligation, and thus, suggests that his behavior toward Gronniosaw is an example of Christian duty. More than simply offering an account of Freelandhouse's kindness, then, Gronniosaw uses this exchange to assert the validity of Freelandhouse's faith. Legitimizing a belief system rooted in Calvinist doctrine not only allows Gronniosaw to depict his "proper" Christian instruction, but it also forces him to confront the Christian duty he denies to Vanhorn's slaves. Therefore, as Gronniosaw again alludes to providentialism by recalling his religious edification under a new

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[81] Ibid., 39
[82] Ibid., 39
[83] Ibid., 39
[84] Ibid., 39
[85] Ibid., 39
[86] Ibid., 39
[87] Ibid., 39

master, he shows readers that through Calvinism he understands how to become a "proper" Christian. That Gronniosaw links "proper" Christianity with Calvinism further highlights the reason why he conceals his spiritual maturity. Gronniosaw's framing of himself as the beneficiary of "correct" Christian comportment and instruction intends to supplant his established relationship with God. His desire to silence his relationship with God and emphasize his experience with Calvinism, here, provoke his audience into acknowledging the similarity between their faith and his, and ostensibly, their humanity and his. Gronniosaw concludes that the interpersonal obligation of his Christian audience combined with his Calvinist sensibilities necessarily means his readers must accept his religious and human value.

It is not a coincidence that Gronniosaw stresses "proper" Christianity and religious congruence between himself and his audience immediately before remembering his family. Through this narrative sequence, he secures his orientation toward Calvinism and his readers, and thus "proper" Christianity and humanity, before again concealing his knowledge of Christianity. When Gronniosaw responds that his father "lived at Bournou,"[88] and not in heaven, his expressed ignorance obscures his intimate knowledge of God. In other words, Gronniosaw's decision to masquerade as passive learner announces himself ready to accept Christian dogma through Calvinist instruction. Such an acceptance suggests that he desires to convert to Calvinism. While conversion to Calvinism would reiterate his new life in Christ and further unify him with his audience, Gronniosaw's desire to see his family, the same family from which he needed separation, seems to distance him from efforts to prove his Christian legitimacy. Yet he only revives the memory of his family to illustrate Freelandhouse's compassionate, Christian disposition and to again amplify his fundamental difference from "pagan Africans." While it

[88] Ibid., 39

makes sense to conclude that Gronniosaw misses his family, and thus, wishes to see them again, this interpretation does not address the larger project of demonstrating new Christian life and the character it assumes. Rather, Gronniosaw's participation in an envisioned family reunion would only rehearse Freelandhouse's claims regarding God's omnipotence. In addition to alluding to himself as one of God's elect, then, Gronniosaw's desire to remind family members of his innate virtue not only intends to legitimizes his received instruction, but also undermine any effort to link him with unredeemable blackness. He communicates this point clearly when he reveals that he "would fly" to family members to disabuse them of their beliefs. Invoking this mode of transportation emphasizes his physical, and by implication his theological, distance from the spiritually dead "African other."[89]

Gronniosaw's preoccupation with framing himself as potential Calvinist convert who is fundamentally different from every Black person echoes his earlier attempts to both defy and reify racially imposed identity. Situating himself as the narrative's singular resurrected African and "properly" Christian slave underscores his commitment to proving his unimpeachable humanity. In other words, his strategy for aligning himself with his White readership rests on declaring a new mode of blackness. As Gronniosaw makes clear, his revised or sanitized blackness is rooted in feigning ignorance of God to affirm and embrace Calvinist doctrine. This means that he combines his orientations toward essential difference and Calvinist principles to further declare his resurrected state. Yet Gronniosaw's affinity for concealing prior knowledge of God, and his joyful reception of Freelandhouse's instruction, also serve as subtextual

[89] After expressing his desire to fly to family members, Gronniosaw reiterates his earliest inclination toward God's existence and further characterizes his potential return to Bournou, writing, "I was exceedingly pleas'd with this information of my master's, because it corresponded so well with my own opinion; I thought now if I could but get home, I should be wiser than all my country-folks, my grandfather, or father, or mother, or any of them." Ibid., 40

illustrations of resurrection. Gronniosaw's effort to submerge or bury prior devotion to Christianity, then vivify such devotion with "proper" instruction, amplifies his resurrectionary project. It also reiterates to readers that his physical text, narrative content, *and* rhetorical style proclaim renewal. That Gronniosaw's audience must read his narrative to fully comprehend the resurrectionary impulse of his rhetorical style suggests that readers participate in affirming his resurrected status. By accepting Gronniosaw as one of God's elect, then believing that his ignorance of God in the new world is trumped by providentialist intervention, readers legitimize the renewal he claims.

Gronniosaw further expresses the burial and restoration of Christian devotion when he hears Freelandhouse preach. Prefacing his commentary on these sermons, he insists, "I never was sensible in myself nor had any one ever told me, that He [God] would punish the wicked, and love the just."[90] While this statement falsely implies no knowledge of God before Freelandhouse's instruction, it more importantly anticipates the contrast between Gronniosaw's "limited knowledge" of God and further edification through Freelandhouse's sermons. Of the sermons he hears, Gronniosaw recalls his master preaching from Revelation 1:7. He writes, "I heard my master preach these words…'Behold, He cometh in the clouds and every eye shall see him and they that pierc'd Him.'"[91] It is particularly revealing that Gronniosaw remembers this Biblical verse. Because this verse not only articulates the return of a resurrected Christ, but also frames Christ's followers and persecutors as witnesses to his omnipotence, Gronniosaw links his experiences and aspirations with Biblical insight and prophecy. Gronniosaw informs readers that just as Revelation 1:7 suggests the necessity of resurrection for Christ to proclaim ultimate

[90] Ibid., 40
[91] Ibid., 40

power, it also reveals that through Freelandhouse's continued instruction, he will demonstrate the authority of new Christian membership. This subtextual argument figures into his strategy for asserting his humanity because it signals a future wherein his own persecutors will bear witness to his renewed state. Before he articulates the significance of the sermon, then, Gronniosaw depicts himself as Christ-like and implies that Christ endorses his strategy of renewal. With his prefacing remarks and the scripture he remembers, Gronniosaw again uses his rhetorical style to bury Christian devotion, then restore this devotion while legitimizing his tactics for renewal.

When he does comment on how the scripture and sermon move him, he writes, "these words affected me excessively…I thought my master directed them to me only…I look'd round the church, and could see no one person besides myself in such grief and distress as I was."[92] Helen Thomas observes that "on hearing his master read from the Book of Revelation…Gronniosaw's spiritual pilgrimage towards Christ is inaugurated."[93] While I contend that Gronniosaw only progresses further towards orthodoxy Christianity here, Thomas' characterization of Gronniosaw on a pilgrimage holds deeper implications. Not only does the notion of pilgrimage "strategically reiterate" Gronniosaw's "'transcultural' voyage across the middle passage,"[94] it also revises his interaction with the symbol of the Western world and offers language that parallels his experiences on the middle passage and in Freelandhouse's church. Before the book refuses to speak to Gronniosaw, he ensures that he is alone with the text. When he notes that upon hearing Freelandhouse preach, he "could see no one person" besides himself "in such grief and distress, Gronniosaw parallels this immediate feeling of isolation and

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[92] Ibid., 40
[93] Thomas, Helen. *Romanticism and Slave Narratives: Transatlantic Testimonies*. Cambridge Univ. Press, 2004. 198.
[94] Ibid., 198

exclusion with his middle passage experience. Indeed, for Gronniosaw, the sanctuary of Freelandhouse's church seems to transform into the salve ship's hull. Whereas his interaction with the book that refuses him illustrates irreversible rejection from the Western world, the book that speaks directly to him offers membership in this world through conversion. The "grief and distress" Gronniosaw experiences on the slave ship and in the sanctuary, then, can be resolved with conversion. In other words, conversion has the power not only to legitimize his relationship with Christ, but also pronounce him possessor of humanity in the minds of his readers.

Gronniosaw's owners also figure prominently in his narrative revision. The ship's captain does not use the prayer book or Bible to affirm Gronniosaw's subjectivity. Thus, the captain's readings of scripture on the Sabbath reinforce Gronniosaw's subhuman status. Weekly readings by the captain function to distance Gronniosaw from personhood and communicate that he embodies an affront to the Western world. Whereas the captain uses the book to amplify his own voice and presence, Gronniosaw characterizes moments with the book as issuing silence and absence. This contrast not only serves to depict the gulf between master and slave, but to anticipate the manner in which he and Freelandhouse differ from this construct. Although Freelandhouse reads from the Bible on another Sabbath, his authority to speak on God's behalf and the particular scripture he chooses aggrandizes Gronniosaw, not himself. Whereas silence and absence best describe the overwhelming sense of dehumanization and powerlessness when the book refuses to speak, after hearing from Freelandhouse's text, silent and absent characterize those around Gronniosaw, allowing the Bible to affirm his literal and symbolic presence. Instead of presenting another text that refuses to speak to Gronniosaw, Freelandhouse is a conduit for a text that speaks *only to* Gronniosaw. That the particular words the Bible offers unites his strategy of renewal with the promise of supreme authority shows that Gronniosaw interprets

Freelandhouse's function differently than the captain's. While Gronniosaw address both men as master, only Freelandhouse presents a belief system rooted in divine favor and protection, thereby evidencing the providentialist design of slavery. While the silence emanating from the prayer book or Bible repositions Gronniosaw's black skin foremost in his mind, the mention of his skin's color is conspicuously absent when Freelandhouse's text speaks. This absence intends to emphasize his interiority, and thus magnify his spirituality and capacity for reason. Whereas the captain's ship transported Gronniosaw to the new world, in Freelandhouse's sanctuary, Gronniosaw presents a reimagined middle passage experience that transports himself to the shores of orthodox Christianity.

Yet before he steps onto new land, Gronniosaw permanently disconnects himself from his prior relationship with Christianity and takes another opportunity to parallel his life with Christ's. He further binds himself to Christ and orthodoxy Christianity not only to demonstrate the similarity of readers' faith and his own, but also to suggest that belief in his redemption is tantamount to belief in Christ. In other words, Gronniosaw seems to anticipate nineteenth-century slave narratives that identify White readers' belief in Black dignity and spirituality as advancing their own Christian faith. Because feigning ignorance of Christ helps him illustrate the virtues of orthodoxy Christianity, after leaving Freelandhouse's church, he again conceals devotion to Christ, insisting that the "heavy burden" of his sinful nature prevented his immediate conversion.[95] Gronniosaw asks readers to believe that his burden, and the deplorable condition it

[95] Gronniosaw's choice not to expound upon the feeling of this "heavy burden" seems to reflect the endeavor to conceal his initial relationship with Christianity. Refusing to detail how his burden informs his emotional state distances him from the "grave" condition he describes at the narrative's beginning. Because a full characterization of his "heavy burden" could remind readers of his prior relationship with Christianity, Gronniosaw does not offer such description. Instead, he presents himself as having reached a fallen state because of the burden of sin. Gronniosaw, James Albert Ukawsaw. *A Narrative of the Most Remarkable Particulars in the*

elicits, convince him to commit suicide. He writes, "I took one of the large case-knives, and went into the stable with an intent to destroy myself; and as I endeavored with all my strength to force the knife into my side, it bent double."[96] A sharp object piercing his side as he suffers intends to reflect Christ's suffering and pierced side during his crucifixion. Gronniosaw, then, links his lived experience to the very foundation of Christianity. He solidifies this connection when he reveals that following his unsuccessful attempted suicide, he "continued very ill for three days and nights."[97] To ensure that he remains ill, he "would admit of no means to be taken" for his recovery.[98] Gronniosaw's intentional three day and night illness vivifies Matthew 12:40.[99] In other words, Gronniosaw provokes readers to remember Christ's three day and night entombment before his resurrection, then interpret his own life as an analogy for Christ's death and restoration.

More than binding himself to Christ, these narrative moments also illustrate the ways in which Gronniosaw unbinds himself to his prior relationship with Christianity. Although Gronniosaw uses the knife and three-day sickness to further his connection to Christ's suffering, death, and resurrection, his Christian orientation and lived experiences in America have already linked him with Christ. Because Gronniosaw previously shows readers an established association with Christ, the attempted suicide and three-day illness signal greater significance. If Gronniosaw frames the attempted suicide and three-day illness as the fundamental moments

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Life of James Albert Ukawsaw Gronniosaw. Bath: T. Mills and W. Gye, 1772. Reprinted in *Unchained Voices: An Anthology of Black Authors in the English-Speaking World of the Eighteenth Century*. Ed. Vincent Carretta, University Press of Kentucky, 2004. 41.

[96] Ibid., 41

[97] Ibid., 41

[98] Ibid., 41

[99] "For as Jonas was three days and three nights in the whale's belly; so shall the Son of man be three days and three nights in the heart of the earth."

before his conversion, then he must use these moments to permanently disconnect himself from his prior relationship with Christianity. With the strategy of separating himself completely from unredeemable blackness and proclaiming total religious congruence with readers, he dislocates himself from the unorthodox mode of Christianity he practices in Africa. He does this by metaphorically "killing" prior Christian devotion, and therefore preventing its further revival. While the knife fails to pierce his side, it succeeds in severing his prior relationship to Christianity. Just as Christ's body remained entombed for three days, Gronniosaw's three-day illness suggests that he entombs any devotion to a prior relationship with Christianity. Whereas Christ arises three days later, the severed relationship stays dead as Gronniosaw's resurrected self finds new, unhampered fulfillment in orthodox Christianity.

With his prior relationship with Christianity rendered dead and entombed, Gronniosaw reveals the moment of his conversion. Readers become witnesses to his new membership in the body of Christ, a membership designed only for human beings. While "one day in a most delightful frame of mind,"[100] Gronniosaw expresses belief in and appreciation for God's presence in his life. He writes, "my heart so overflowed with love and gratitude to the author of all my comforts."[101] God is not only pleased with Gronniosaw's spiritual disposition, but he demonstrates his delight as Gronniosaw maintains, "I was so drawn out of myself, and so fill'd and awed by the presence of God that I saw (or thought I saw) light inexpressible dart down from heaven upon me, and shone around me for the space of a minute."[102] Gronniosaw's love and

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[100] Gronniosaw, James Albert Ukawsaw. *A Narrative of the Most Remarkable Particulars in the Life of James Albert Ukawsaw Gronniosaw*. Bath: T. Mills and W. Gye, 1772. Reprinted in *Unchained Voices: An Anthology of Black Authors in the English-Speaking World of the Eighteenth Century*. Ed. Vincent Carretta, University Press of Kentucky, 2004. 42.
[101] Ibid., 42
[102] Ibid., 42

gratitude toward God as well as the divine approval he receives shows readers that he now holds the same religious beliefs and attendant moral and social values as they. Gronniosaw even stresses to readers his revised Christian orientation by paralleling his moment of conversion with Christ's baptism. The Bible records that following Christ's baptism, "the heavens were opened unto him [Christ], and he saw the Spirit of God descending like a dove, and lighting upon him: And lo a voice from heaven, saying, This is my beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased."[103] Gronniosaw's description of "light inexpressible" illuminating and surrounding him, then, validates his conversion experience and suggests that he too has been baptized.[104] Yet because Gronniosaw emphasizes Christ's, and his own, divine approval, or favor, readers understand that his conversion experience reiterates the providentialist concepts of favor and protection, and thus alludes to his Calvinist leanings. In other words, Gronniosaw does not convert to Freelandhouse's Dutch Reformed faith, but rather to the Calvinist belief system at its center. The subtle suggestion of providentialism during his moment of conversion allows Gronniosaw to fully endorse Calvinist doctrine.

III

In the remainder of his narrative, Gronniosaw identifies pivotal experiences that amplify his spirituality, and he secures the connections between voice, literacy, and personhood.[105] Yet

[103] Matthew 3:16-17

[104] To complete his conversion experience and convincingly present himself to readers as having been reborn in Christ, Gronniosaw must offer another baptismal scene.

[105] Following his conversion experience, Gronniosaw receives his freedom after Freelandhouse, Freelandhouse's wife, and Freelandhouse's sons die. In one remarkable moment that connects Christian faith, written words, and God's providence, Gronniosaw reveals that while "privateering," a fellow sailor threw Gronniosaw's book overboard. Gronniosaw not only notes that this man was first among them to die, but also asserts, "I thought 'twas a very awful

because these moments only reiterate or magnify his illustration of fundamental renewal, the significance and demonstration of claiming his rightful place on the rung of humanity rests in the passages this chapter explores. Gronniosaw effectively challenges the ideology of White supremacy by radically dislocating himself from "unredeemable" blackness. He does this by presenting himself resurrected from the death of non-being and non-Christian status. Therefore, not only does his narrative articulate his mastery of reason, it also attests to his intimate relationship with a God that affirms humanity and his spiritual congruence with White readers. That he embraces Calvinism and adheres to its attendant providentialist tenets, links the narrative's early investment in divine election with its most seminal moment, the more arminian depiction of his conversion experience.[106] Gronniosaw's appeal to conservative and progressive forms of Calvinism serve to communicate fidelity to the Huntingdon Connexion, while also presenting his resurrectionary project to a broader, more spiritually diverse audience. Neither detractors nor proponents of the White supremacist ideology undergirding much of Enlightenment preoccupations could deny Gronniosaw's demonstration of reason and Christian orientation. Using a literary imagination he is not supposed to possess, Gronniosaw lures readers into believing they are simply reading a conversion narrative. He then captivates readers with his predestinarian subtext, achieves resurrection, then conceals his Christian devotion to assert himself divinely approved and spiritually akin to those considered human. In other words,

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Providence to see how the enemies of the Lord are cut off." Gronniosaw, James Albert Ukawsaw. *A Narrative of the Most Remarkable Particulars in the Life of James Albert Ukawsaw Gronniosaw*. Bath: T. Mills and W. Gye, 1772. Reprinted in *Unchained Voices: An Anthology of Black Authors in the English-Speaking World of the Eighteenth Century*. Ed. Vincent Carretta, University Press of Kentucky, 2004. 44.

[106] Because Arminianism asserts that the evidence of divine election lies in belief and faith, Gronniosaw's "love" and" gratitude" for God, then subsequent divine approval during his conversion experience, shows God's approval is conditioned on Gronniosaw's faith.

Gronniosaw manipulates the three criteria for declaring humanity in the eighteenth-century (reason through the exhibition of literacy, faith in and approval from a Christian God, and validation from those accepted as human) and illustrates how they proclaim him irrefutably human.

Gronniosaw's ability to transcend an imposed and confining identity through death, radical dislocation, and resurrection seems to signal an effective strategy for achieving fundamental renewal that does not require African retentions or Afro-Protestantism. The resurrection he achieves and its fulfillment in Calvinism appear perfectly executed as it allows him to reach England, speak fluent Dutch, marry a White English woman,[107] speak on behalf of God as a Calvinist minister, and obtain some measure of wealth before experiencing financial ruin. His resurrectionary project even revises Robert Stepto's description of African American culture's most prominent "pregeneric myth"[108] Stepto contends that "the primary pregeneric myth for Afro-America is the quest for freedom and literacy."[109] As an antecedent to the nineteenth and twentieth-century African American literature Stepto investigates, Gronniosaw's narrative establishes a Black thinking being with Christian orientation as the precondition in the quest for freedom, literacy, and therefore, claiming humanity. His death and resurrection

[107] Gronniosaw married Betty, "an English servant woman with children, against the wishes of his 'friends' or community." While Gronniosaw may have held strong affection for her, "he must have regarded Betty, though materially poor, as rich in cultural knowledge and, as such, indispensable in his successful acculturation." Stevenson, Brenda E. "Family and Community in Slave Narratives." *The Oxford Handbook of the African American Slave Narrative*. Ed. John Ernest, Oxford University Press, 2014.

[108] This designation renames Northrop Frye's term, "canonical stories." Stepto writes that "Afro-American culture, like all cultures, has its store of…'pregeneric myths'—shared stories or myths that not only exist prior to literary form, but eventually shape the forms that comprise a culture's literary canon." Stepto, Robert B. *From Behind the Veil: A Study of Afro-American Narrative*. University of Illinois Press, 1979. Xvi.

[109] Ibid., xvi

experience, then, not only further contextualizes Stepto's pregeneric myth and frustrates efforts to classify him sub-human, it also presents a contested space wherein Gronniosaw negotiates which values will occasion his reinvented self.

While Gronniosaw's narrative accomplishes transformative feats of defiance, a closer examination of his manipulation of the three criteria for declaring humanity reveals the perils of wearing, as Rafia Zafar terms it, a literary "whiteface."[110] Zafar contends that by writing in "whiteface," early Black writers "reached an audience familiar with their literary styles, if not their social objectives," by authoring texts that "sweetened, veiled, or otherwise masked" appeals for racial justice.[111] Gronniosaw's motive for writing his narrative, announcing his unqualified human status, and his interpretation of African enslavement, rehearses Zafar's argument. Yet Nathan Huggins notes that while wearing such a mask allowed Black writers to "move in and out of the white world with safety and profit,"[112] those who adopted this strategy "ran the risk of disappearing into their own performances."[113] The absence of a meaningful African heritage from his narrative, as well as Gronniosaw's refusal to covenant with enslaved Africans and assert pride in a Black self, certainly indicate the extent to which he disappears in his own performance of reinvention. Paradoxically, Gronniosaw's narrative declares him human (visible) by masking (making invisible) his blackness and attesting to his "whiteness." Gronniosaw reasons that his disappearing act will enable him to transcend the status and subjection of the "Black subhuman." And, indeed, it does. However, because he yokes himself to a broad, White readership, he also

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[110] Zafar, Rafia. *We Wear the Mask: African Americans Write American Literature, 1760-1870*. Columbia University Press, 1998. 4.
[111] Ibid., 4
[112] Huggins, Nathan Irvin. *Harlem Renaissance*. Oxford University Press, 1991. 261.
[113] Zafar, Rafia. *We Wear the Mask: African Americans Write American Literature, 1760-1870*. Columbia University Press, 1998. 4.

fixes himself to prevailing racial sentiment. In other words, while Gronniosaw exhibits resurrection and resistance, he unwittingly reifies the same White supremacist ideology he successfully evades. The insidious nature of racism transforms the Enlightenment's three criteria for declaring humanity into three supporting arguments for racist ideology.

Gronniosaw's conversion experience demonstrates these two opposing discourses. His conversion experience expresses the pinnacle of his reinvention. Freelandhouse's Bible speaking directly to him suggests the accusation of literacy and the Western world's acceptance. It therefore serves as the intellectual and spiritual prerequisite for his divine approval and validation from readers. Although Gronniosaw intends for this discourse to represent the extent of his subtextual argument, he does not recognize the racist discourse he advances that reverberates on a lower register. If Gronniosaw effectively persuades White readers that his intellectual capacity and Christian belief separate him from unredeemable blackness, then he also signals God's acceptance of Black intellectual and spiritual delinquency. If Gronniosaw maintains that his humanity rests on his indistinguishable difference from White readers, then he also shows God sanctioning a racial hierarchy wherein those not white, or "Whitening" their faces, necessarily populate a lower rung of being. Focusing solely on transcending a stratified racial order, and not on the ways in which his individual success undermines collective uplift, functions to concretize the ideologies he escapes. Anticipating the problem W.E.B. DuBois describes some one hundred and thirty years later, Gronniosaw makes himself part of a world that he hopes will not (as with Freelandhouse's Bible) recognize his Black face, and thus will not

look on him with "contempt and pity,"[114] while not grasping the damage he inflicts on his African identity and other Africans' claim to human dignity.

That Gronniosaw emboldens White supremacist ideologies make it easy to interpret him regressively, as an early writer who, as James Weldon Johnson terms it, trades his birthright for a "mess of pottage" by refusing to bear witness to African respectability and the magnitude of Black psychological and physical anguish.[115] Although his narrative supports racist belief systems, and therefore, lends credence to "The Great Chain of Being," it also shows the unique suitability of a black text to exhibit the trope of death and resurrection as a strategy of resistance and fundamental renewal. In other words, Gronniosaw's narrative reflects the complexities and nuances of the early Black writer chronicling "cataclysmic change and determined survival" and claiming "authority despite being denied basic humanity."[116] Rather than viewing his choice to abandon his African heritage in order to present himself human as revealing questionable ethnics if not disloyalty to the Black liberation struggle, literary critics should use Gronniosaw's narrative to further indict the ideologies he successfully and unsuccessfully challenges. Choosing the status of "articulate survivor" over "subjugated kinsman"[117] allowed Gronniosaw to demonstrate his fitness for the Western world's social and racial order, and implicitly, his

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[114] DuBois, W.E.B. *The Souls of Black Folk*. Chicago: A.C. McClurg &Co.; [Cambridge]: University Press John Wilson and Son, Cambridge, 1903.
[115] Johnson, James Weldon. *The Autobiography of an Ex-Colored Man*. Sherman, French & Co., 1912. 236.
[116] Brooks, Joanna. *American Lazarus: Religion and the Rise of African-American and Native American Literatures*. Oxford Univ. Press, 2009. 8, Print.
[117] Stepto describes an "articulate survivor" as a protagonist in African American literature who situates him/herself "in the least oppressive social structure afforded by the world of the narrative." My term, "subjugated kinsman," revises Stepto's designation of the "articulate kinsman": a protagonist who returns to a racially oppressive space to forge communal ties. Stepto identifies these two modes of African American identity as the principle identities informing narratives of ascent and narratives of immersion. Stepto, Robert B. *From behind the Veil: A Study of Afro-American Narrative*. Urbana: Ubiversity of Illinois, 1979. 167. Print.

"importance to human history"[118] Yet Gronniosaw could have avoided the attendant hazards with declaring such "fitness." Because announcing his "importance to human history" meant divesting himself of an African heritage, it necessarily meant rejecting African forms of renewal. As chapter one makes clear, because indigenous methods of transformation were not fraught with White hegemony, Gronniosaw could have achieved a mode of renewal wherein he recognized the merits of African identity, communal obligation, and sacred transformation. Rather than reinventing himself White, this type of renewal would have resisted defining blackness as unredeemable by acknowledging the inherent value of Africans and the belief systems that sustain them. Such a renewal would have also allowed Gronniosaw to help middle passage travelers and fellow American slaves speak from the dead, or the silent spaces of dispossession.[119] Engendering such radical dislocation would have allowed him to covenant with the enslaved, another language for performing the sacred imperative of establishing communities of restored peoples. The ties binding these communities to themselves, African religions, and the adaptation of Christianity, could have been Afro-Protestantism.[120] Yet

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[118] Finseth frames early Black writers' economic mobility and claim to the modern world as evidencing their "importance to human history." Yet his analysis applies to Gronniosaw's motivation for writing his narrative. Finseth writes, "working within systems enabled Black Atlantic narrators to demonstrate their fitness for a newly competitive social and economic order (and thus, implicitly, their importance to human history), this came at the cost of acquiescing, to some degree, in the universalizing, rationalizing, and financializing logic of the very modernity of which the African diaspora was both sign and symptom." Finseth's argument reiterates Paul Gilroy's claim that the Black Atlantic theorizes blackness as a "distinctive counter-culture of modernity." Finseth, Ian. "Irony and Modernity in the Early Slave Narrative: Bonds of Duty, Contracts of Meaning." *Early American Literature*, vol. 48, no. 1, Mar. 2013, 29. Gilroy, Paul. *The Black Atlantic: Modernity and Double Consciousness*. Harvard University Press, 1993. 36.

[119] Holland, Sharon P. *Raising the Dead: Readings of Death and (Black) Subjectivity*. Duke University Press, 2000. 40.

[120] In accordance with Cedrick May's contention, an orientation to African sacred values, Christianity, and communal regeneration could have allowed Gronniosaw to fundamentally transform himself and communities of those like him. May writes that establishing communal ties "helped to undermine the practice of slave keeping and allowed Africans in America to

Gronniosaw's inability to achieve such renewal and foster these communities reveal him as an incomplete trustee of defiance.[121]

The next chapter articulates how nineteenth-century African American authors employ the strategy of death and resurrection not to secure liberation by divorcing themselves from their Black identities, but by using those identities to do what Gronniosaw does not: assert inherent value in Black intellect and body and develop communities who proclaim transgressive values and audacious self-governance. Whereas Gronniosaw's frustrated quest to claim humanity requires similarity to White readers, Chapter three illustrates nineteenth-century authors' preoccupation with an envisioned Black reading audience as well as the more personal expressions of freedom that accompany human status. Chapter three argues that nineteenth-century African American authors articulate what it means to unite African resonances, political voice, and communal regeneration in the endeavor to show how blackness signifies in America.

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retain much of their cultural heritage by incorporating African religious traditions into Christianity." May, Cedrick. *Evangelism and Resistance in the Black Atlantic: 1760-1835*. University of Georgia Press, 2008. 4.

[121] Although the issues of Black subjectivity that arise from Gronniosaw's figuration of the death and resurrection motif suggests that he is an incomplete trustee of defiance, he is a trustee nonetheless. In his narrative, Gronniosaw offers one of the first formulas for conceiving and articulating Black equality and freedom. Although his claims to equality are largely implicit, it is not a mistake that Frederick Douglass, Henry "Box" Brown, Harriet Jacobs, and other slave narrative authors of the nineteenth-century, employ the conversion narrative format to express their secular claims to freedom.

Chapter Three:
Resuscitated Subjectivity: Presentations of Regeneration, Resurrection, and Womanhood in *The Life and Religious Experience of Jarena Lee*

In a departure from Gronniosaw's figuration of the death and resurrection motif, African American spiritual narratives of the nineteenth-century articulate a reclaimed Black self that employs Afro-Protestant orientations and African resonances as the foundation for renewal. The African American spiritual narrative tradition presents the written accounts of African American women who not only achieve fundamental transformation as a result of Christ acting on and in them, but who demonstrate that their race and sex, instead of preventing, make possible such metanoia. In their spiritual-autobiographies, nineteenth-century African American women writers chronicle the process of purification by which God created them anew, and they appropriate God's word to their individual purposes, constituting "an especially bold form of self-authorization."[1] The autobiographies of writers such as Jarena Lee, Zilpha Elaw, Nancy G. Prince, Julia A. J. Foote, Amanda Berry Smith, and Rebecca Cox Jackson attest, as William L. Andrews maintains, to the "souls journey not only from damnation to salvation but also to a realization of one's true place and destiny in the divine scheme of things."[2] Frances Smith Foster

[1] Andrews, William L., editor. *Sisters of the Spirit: Three Black Women's Autobiographies of the Nineteenth Century*. Indiana Univ. Pr., 2000. 1, Print.

[2] Ibid., 11. The titles of these spiritual autobiographies are Lee's *The Life and Religious Experience of Jarena Lee, Giving an Account of Her Call to Preach the Gospel* (1836); Elaw's *Memoirs of the Religious Experience, Ministerial Travels and Labors of Mrs. Zilpha Elaw, an American Female of Color* (1846); Prince's *A Narrative of the Life and Travels of Mrs. Nancy Prince* (1853); Foote's *A Brand Plucked From the Fire* (1879); Smith's *An Autobiography: The Story of the Lord's Dealings with Mrs. Amanda Smith, the Colored Evangelist* (1893); and Jackson's *Gifts of Power: The Writings of Rebecca Jackson, Black Visionary, Shaker Eldress* (1981). Although Jarena Lee published an expanded version of her narrative in 1849 titled *Religious Experience and Journal of Mrs. Jarena Lee*, this chapter focuses on her 1836 narrative because of its distinction as the first autobiography published by an African American woman and because its presentation of a reclaimed, Black self helped to position this trope central in nineteenth-century African American literature.

argues that because they authored narratives and traveled extensively as itinerant ministries "during a period when black individuality was being ignored and women's identities were being redefined, these women inserted themselves into the public discourses as individuals and as representatives."[3] Andrews, Smith Foster, and additional scholars observe that the impulse which most informs the spiritual narrative genre and African American spiritual narrative writers' transgressive psychology and spiritual identity is a two-stage "psychospiritual development."[4] Obtaining freedom from a sinful, spiritually dead self, first necessitated conversion to Christianity and belief in one's personal forgiveness, or justification, "from the guilt of sin by Christ's atonement."[5] Secondly, spiritual autobiographers experienced sanctification, or what John Wesley termed as the "second blessing," which freed them "from the power of sin by virtue of the indwelling Holy Spirit."[6]

By choosing the genre of spiritual autobiography to evidence their adherence to this two-stage sequence, African American women reiterated their capacity for spiritual perfection and their qualifications to speak on behalf of God as female and African American persons. The rebirth they proclaimed following sanctification not only marked full-fledged membership in the body of Christ, but it also allowed them to insert their stories of conversion and resuscitated

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[3] Foster, Frances Smith. *Written by Herself: Literary Production by African American Women, 1746-1892*. Indiana Univ. Press, 1993. 93, Print.
[4] These scholars, and their works, include Joycelyn Moody's *Sentimental Confessions: Spiritual Narratives of Nineteenth-Century African American Women*, Katherine Clay Bassard's Rituals of Desire: Spirit, Culture, and Sexuality in the Writings of Rebecca Cox Jackson," Kimberly Rae Connor's *Conversion and Visions in the Writings of African-American Women*, Jean Humez's "In Search of Harriet Tubman's Spiritual Autobiography," and Chanta Haywood's *Prophesying Daughters: Black Women Preachers and the Word, 1823-1913*. William L. Andrews uses the term "psychospiritual development" in *Sisters of the Spirit*., 11.
[5] Andrews, William L., editor. *Sisters of the Spirit: Three Black Women's Autobiographies of the Nineteenth Century*. Indiana Univ. Pr., 2000. 15, Print.
[6] Ibid., 15

subjectivity in a genre largely devoid of issues particularly pertinent to African American women. With its origins in the early American Puritan requirement to describe one's conversion and individual experience with the divine, the spiritual narrative genre served as an older, respected literary form in which African American women placed their accounts.[7] Because Puritans believed that "an austere and impenetrable God 'elected' certain persons to salvation," articulating a convincing conversion experience necessitated recounting "how God had informed the Christian that she or he was among the elect."[8] With identities defined by, using Thomas. K. Doty's definition, the "great crimes" of color and womanhood,[9] African American spiritual autobiographers rejected the notion of a stoic God of virtually impossible access, and accepted the Wesleyan interpretation of God's availability as well as his interest in human beings' personal afflictions. Joycelyn Moody suggests that this more benevolent view of God not only became the foundation for a more democratic means of redemption, whereby "salvation was achieved through Grace alone,"[10] but also the theological basis for African American women to revise the spiritual narrative genre to reflect their religious and existential concerns.

Moody notes that "one of the major features found in black spiritual narratives is the narrator's declaration of her or his racial identification."[11] That African American women often specified their gender in the very titles of their narratives announced that in a profoundly racist

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[7] It is important to note that the Puritan captivity narrative was also the manifestation of the American spiritual narrative tradition. Moody, Joycelyn. *Sentimental Confessions: Spiritual Narratives of Nineteenth-Century African American Women*. University of Georgia Press, 2003. 22, Print.
[8] Ibid., 22
[9] Editor of *Christian Harvester* and author of the introduction to *A Brand Plucked from the Fire*, Doty writes that Julia Foote, and by extension other spiritual narrative authors, is guilty of the crimes of color, womanhood, and evangelizing.
[10] Moody, Joycelyn. *Sentimental Confessions: Spiritual Narratives of Nineteenth-Century African American Women*. University of Georgia Press, 2003. 22, Print.
[11] Ibid., 22

and sexist environment there existed a valuable and divinely approved Black, female self to speak of.[12] Although most African American spiritual autobiographers were never enslaved, "the peculiar institution of slavery made Black women attentive to how racism circumscribed the more generally sexist environment in which they wrote."[13] Therefore, with titles that expressed their racial and gendered status, their narratives, from the outset, reflected a particular form of Christian rebirth that countered slavery's configuration of African American women. While White women writers such as Margaret Fuller addressed the "problems of women's relationship to a public language," spiritual autobiographers advanced this endeavor and defied the prevailing racial and gender paradigm that deemed them unrespectable.[14] Accomplishing both goals, especially the latter, was a difficult task, as the ministerial and itinerant lifestyle of which they detailed was, for some, demonstrative of an inability to attain cult of true womanhood standards.[15] Although women were assumed to be inherently religious,[16] spiritual autobiographers' insistence on removing themselves from the domestic sphere and inserting their voices and bodies into spaces traditionally conceived of as male domains necessarily meant that

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[12] Ibid., 23

[13] Patterson, Robert J. "A Triple-Twined Re-Appropriation: Womanist Theology and Gendered-Racial Protest in the Writings of Jarena Lee, Frances Ew. Harper, and Harriet Jacobs." *Religion & Literature*, vol. 45, no. 2, Summer2013., 57.

[14] In 1843, Margaret Fuller (1810-1850) published the book, *Woman in the Nineteenth Century*, a seminal text in feminist literature. Ibid., 57. Gustafson, Sandra M. "Choosing a Medium: Margaret Fuller and the Forms of Sentiment." *American Quarterly*, vol. 47, no. 1, Mar. 1995., 39.

[15] In "The Cult of True Womanhood: 1820-1860," Barbara Welter writes, "The attributes of True Womanhood, by which a woman judged herself and was judged by her husband, her neighbors, and society could be divided into four cardinal virtues—piety, purity, submissiveness and domesticity. Put them together and they spelled mother, daughter, sister, wife—woman. Without them, no matter whether there was fame, achievement or wealth, all was ashes. With them she was promised happiness and power." Welter, Barbara. "The Cult of True Womanhood." *American Quarterly*, vol. 18, No. 2, Part 1, Summer, 1966., 152.

[16] Andrews, William L., editor. *Sisters of the Spirit: Three Black Women's Autobiographies of the Nineteenth Century*. Indiana Univ. Pr., 2000. 13, Print.

they were on the margins of womanhood and that they reinterpreted how religion informed gender identity. Yet detailing their experiences of gender and racial marginality and describing the method for accessing a renewed, Black self, not only nuanced Gronniosaw's formula for resurrected being, but it signaled a distinct nineteenth-century African American women's literary tradition.

Although "the dominant trend in literary scholarship has been to privilege the slave narrative as *the* African-American literary form of the antebellum period, focusing in particular on Frederick Douglass's 1845 *Narrative* and Harriet Jacobs's 1861 *Incidents in the Life of a Slave Girl*,"[17] Jarena Lee's *The Life and Religious Experience of Jarena A. Lee, A Coloured Lady* (1836) indexes the plight and regeneration of Black subjectivity, and in doing so, furthers a literary tradition on which slave narratives build. Just as Lee, the first African American woman spiritual autobiographer, was the inheritor of an African American female tradition of activism begun by Phillis Wheatley, Sojourner Truth, Harriet Tubman and founded on a commitment to religious faith and human rights, so too were slave narrative authors such as Douglass and Jacobs inheritors of a literary form that explained the transition from spiritual death to renewed subjectivity. Indeed, because some proponents of slavery believed that God had not endowed Black bodies with souls, "before the fugitive slave narrator could hope for success in restoring political and economic freedom to American blacks, the black spiritual autobiographer had to lay the necessary intellectual groundwork by proving that black people were as much chosen by God for eternal salvation as whites."[18] In other words, Lee's narrative not only serves, as Gene Jarrett

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[17] Peterson, Carla L. *"Doers of the Word": African-American Women Speakers and Writers in the North (1830-1880)*. Rutgers University Press, 1998. 5, Print.

[18] Hollis Robbins and Henry Louis Gates, Jr. write that Black women writers "looked at the world around them…and resolved to speak out, to grapple with the political and social fact of their existence, and to begin to articulate the foundations of a Black feminist thought, wide

suggests, as an invaluable contribution to the ideology and practice of social change throughout the nineteenth-century,[19] but also as a text that begins to present and redefine Black interiority.

The critical reception of spiritual narratives, particularly Lee's *The Life*, make clear autobiographers' investment in early African American feminist concerns, preoccupations with regenerated personhood, and establishment of an enduring literary tradition. While accurate, such interpretations largely rest on accepting writers' psychospiritual development as a two-stage sequence that only evidenced Christian fidelity and the impulse for political recognition. Yet if we also accept, as chapter one and two argue, that African resonances and the strategy of death and resurrection also inform the African American literary and cultural imagination, then scholars have not fully accessed the nuances and intricacies of Lee's narrative. If Lee not only narrates her story of conversion, sanctification, and call to preach, but also uses her autobiography to "explore the daily survival tactics...employed to negotiate a world that was simultaneously racist and sexist,[20] then *The Life* warrants a more complete examination of those tactics. This chapter reveals that when read through the lens of the death and resurrection strategy, *The Life* translates the metaphor of a prior, spiritually dead self into a description of an individual death experience from which Lee must be resurrected. Lee's portrait of her death experience demonstrates the need to dislocate herself radically not only from a sinful world, but

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ranging and far seeing" (xxiv). Robbins, Hollis, and Henry Louis Gates. *The Portable Nineteenth-Century African American Women Writers*. Penguin Books, 2017. Xxiv, Print. Andrews, William L., editor. *Sisters of the Spirit: Three Black Women's Autobiographies of the Nineteenth Century*. Indiana Univ. Pr., 2000. 1, Print.

[19] Jarrett, Gene. *Representing the Race: A New Political History of African American Literature*. New York: New York University Press, 2011. 11, Print.

[20] Peterson, Carla L. *"Doers of the Word": African-American Women Speakers and Writers in the North (1830-1880)*. Rutgers University Press, 1998. 76, Print. Patterson, Robert J. "A Triple-Twined Re-Appropriation: Womanist Theology and Gendered-Racial Protest in the Writings of Jarena Lee, Frances Ew. Harper, and Harriet Jacobs." *Religion & Literature*, vol. 45, no. 2, Summer2013., 58.

also from a self that does not challenge the racist and sexist expectations imposed on African American women in such a world. I show that while Lee's conversion and sanctification seem only to evidence an empowered and resurrected Christian self that has adhered to Wesleyan precepts for salvation—and thus the two-stages of psychospiritual development—her conversion and sanctification also signify as two distinct modes of renewal.

For Lee, sanctification establishes her Christian rebirth, and thus becomes the moment of Christian renewal and membership. Yet this chapter argues that Lee's preceding conversion to Christianity actually masks another resurrection experience that is secular in nature. Rather than foregrounding her relationship with Christianity, Lee's conversion experience is articulated in language that suggests her attainment of a resurrected self with new voice and the ability to redefine gender conventions. Lee, then, reconfigures the meaning and significance of psychospiritual development, and she most powerfully expresses her two-layered resurrection when preaching and converting others, or enacting the sacred imperative of building communities of renewed peoples. Not only does this chapter draw attention to the ways in which Lee's religious and secular renewal communicate resurrected embodiment, but it also subverts the notion that only Christian transformation informs her narrative. By focusing on the character and description of Lee's death experience, two-layered resurrection, and sacred imperative, this chapter reveals the West-Central African resonances, Christian and secular character of the reconstituted self, and gender preoccupations in *The Life* and argues that such presentations appear necessary for Lee to claim a regenerated African American female self.

II

Lee makes clear that her autobiography not only proves and verifies her life, spirituality, and commitments in an effort to "inscribe herself into literary history,"[21] but *The Life* also illustrates her investment in the creation of a literary self. More than proving that she qualified as the "moral, spiritual, or intellectual peer of white Americans,"[22] Lee's narrative grounds the tradition of African American women's autobiography "in feminist ideals sanctioned by evangelical Christianity's radical spiritual individualism."[23] A part of the project of announcing such individualism included the creation of a literary self who represented multiple forms of renewal. As Smith Foster observes, we know that Jarena Lee "was familiar with at least one other contemporary African American religious narrative," and was thus attuned to the ways in which African Americans were constructing artistic portraits of their redemption.[24] Recognizing that Lee's narrative emphasizes the journey from a life of sin to one of salvation,[25] then, should not foreclose the possibility of interpreting particular narrative moments outside of a Judeo-Christian framing. Such recognition should also help to demonstrate the complexity of African

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[21] Haywood, Chanta M. *Prophesying Daughters: Black Women Preachers and the Word, 1823-1913*. University of Missouri Press, 2016. 36, Print.
[22] Andrews, William L. *To Tell a Free Story: The First Century of Afro-American Autobiography, 1760-1865*. University of Illinois Press, 1988. 2, Print.
[23] Andrews, William L., editor. *Sisters of the Spirit: Three Black Women's Autobiographies of the Nineteenth Century*. Indiana Univ. Pr., 2000. 3, Print.
[24] Smith Foster notes that in Lee's 1849 narrative "she mentions a work called "the Essence of John Steward, a coloured man" which she says told of "his miraculous call to the ministry" and his success in "Christianizing the Methodist Indians in Sandusky" (68). The value of expressing a self methodically crafted from individual and cultural influences led Lee, in defiance of African Methodist Episcopal Church regulations, to finance the printing of her second autobiography in 1849. Smith Foster maintains that in both autobiographies, Lee's carefully constructed literary self helps authorizes her to teach, to interpret, to lead, and to redefine her marginality (84). Foster, Frances Smith. *Written By Herself: Literary Production by African American Women, 1746-1892*. Indiana Univ. Press, 1995. 68, 84, Print.
[25] Peterson, Carla L. *"Doers of the Word": African-American Women Speakers and Writers in the North (1830-1880)*. Rutgers University Press, 1998. 1, Print.

American women's interiority, helping to reveal the ways in which *The Life* announces the attainment of Christian identity *and* multiple forms of renewal.

Before Lee expresses Christian identity and renewal, however, she depicts herself as ignorant of God and the value of African American personhood with language that suggests investment in a particular construction of the self. In the first two pages of *The Life*, Lee not only argues that ignorance of God renders her spiritually dead, but also that ignorance of a meaningful black self prevents her from obtaining new life. Faithful to using her narrative to present an artistic and complex self-portrait, Lee communicates her spiritually dead status through the desire to commit suicide. After revealing her date and place of birth, Lee writes that she was parted from her parents and "went to live as a servant maid with a Mr. Sharp."[26] She notes that her parents were "wholly ignorant of the knowledge of God,"[27] and that their lack of knowledge separated her from knowing God personally and produced in her the impulse to sin. Lee uses this description to foreground her soul's grave condition and to express the attendant desire to sin. Such desire culminates in Lee intentionally misleading her mistress when Lee reports that she has completed her daily tasks. Lee suggests that lying to her mistress inaugurates God's presence in her life, as "the spirit of God moved in power" through her conscious, producing feelings of guilt and convincing her that she was a "wretched sinner."[28]

Although God's intervention causes Lee to promise never to "tell another lie,"[29] the strength of her conviction falters and she reveals that her "heart grew harder." Yet she declares

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[26] Lee, Jarena. *The Life and Religious Experience of Jarena Lee*. Philadelphia: 1836. Reprinted. Andrews, William L., editor. *Sisters of the Spirit: Three Black Women's Autobiographies of the Nineteenth Century*. Indiana Univ. Pr., 2000. 27, Print.
[27] Ibid., 27
[28] Ibid., 27
[29] Ibid., 27

that God's spirit "never entirely forsook" her when the hardness of her heart indicated further distance from salvation. Failing to fully convince Lee of her spiritually dead status, Lee suggests that God's spirit attempts other means of persuasion. God's spirit acts on her again when she hears "a missionary of the Presbyterian order preach" on an afternoon in 1804.[30] Observing the minister and the room in which the minister preaches, Lee writes, "the place was a school room; but the preacher was solemn, and in his countenance the earnestness of his master's business appeared equally strong, as though he were about to speak to a multitude."[31] At the commencement of the sermon, the minister reads a stanza composed by famous hymn writer Isaac Watt which reinterprets Psalm 51. Lee hears the minister recite the lines, "Lord, I am vile, conceived in sin, / Born unholy and unclean. / Sprung from man, whose guilty fall / Corrupts the race, and taints us all."[32] Immediately following the minister's reading, and therefore legitimizing, of Watt's interpretation, "a ray of renewed conviction" darts into Lee's soul.[33] Referencing Watt's stanza, Lee reveals, "this description of my condition struck me to the heart, and made me to feel…the weight of my sins, and sinful nature."[34]

However, recognizing her "sinful nature" does not engender the desire for new life in Christ. Lee makes clear that the Presbyterian minister and Watt's stanza only function to communicate her soul's grave condition. Instead of offering the possibility of redemption, the minister ventriloquizes Watt's voice, producing the inability for Lee "to run immediately to the Lord for help."[35] In other words, because Watt dies in 1748, the minister's selection of Watt's

[30] Ibid., 27
[31] Ibid., 27
[32] Ibid., 27
[33] Ibid., 27
[34] Ibid., 27
[35] Ibid., 28

stanza works to resurrect Watt's voice while preventing Lee from achieving spiritual renewal. Trapped in a state of spiritual damnation, Lee claims that she was "driven of Satan" and "tempted to destroy herself."[36] After remembering "a brook…a quarter of a mile from the house, in which there was a deep hole," Satan directs her to drown herself. At "ten o'clock" on "a Sabbath morning," Lee looks into the water and hears Satan's direction to put her head under the water, as "drowning would be an easy death."[37] Miraculously, her "thoughts were taken entirely from this purpose" and she returns home assured that the "unseen arm of God…saved her from self murder."[38]

That Lee begins her autobiography with this account suggests its significance in her life and the narrative. Lee conveys that a presumably White Presbyterian minister does not rely on the Bible, but instead depends on another White male's interpretation of the Bible to instruct her. She, then, not only reveals that particular Christian faiths have a distinct view of spiritual depravity, but by invoking the minister and Watt, Lee shows that these two White men exclude her from Christian membership. Furthermore, her memory of the specific stanza the minister affirms does not simply ensure Lee's irredeemable status, it also suggests that these particular White men describe spiritual delinquency with language that seems to rehearse White supremacist rhetoric. Although the location in which the minister preaches, a school room, indicates that Lee seeks elevated knowledge of herself and God, she receives a static and "solemn" reminder from God's representative that she is "vile" and "unclean." Lee also hears the minister indict her spiritual condition as further corrupting and tainting "us all." While Watt may not have intentionally imbued his stanza with racist imagery, his words offer a striking similarity

[36] Ibid., 28
[37] Ibid., 28
[38] Ibid., 28

to nineteenth-century racist rhetoric that present black bodies as tainted, vile, unclean, and corrupting. As Sean P. Harvey notes, early American conceptions of race bled into perceptions of Christianity and the Christian.[39] That Lee remembers these words intends to convey the spiritual narrative convention of a prior life separated from God, but also a particular White male interpretation of the Bible that renders her unable to achieve spiritual resurrection in a Black, female body. By recounting this scene, then, Lee offers a voice that adheres to the spiritual narrative genre *and* indicts the minister for understanding black individuals as incapable of spiritual redemption.

Lee maintains this double-voice in her description of being driven to commit suicide. The details of Satan driving her to "self murder" certainly indicate a spiritually dead condition that engenders physical death. Yet just as Lee remembers Watt's stanza in order to communicate the multiple ways in which his words signify, she seems to offer the specific details of Satan's directive to highlight her multiple presentations of death. By drowning, Lee suggests an incomplete baptismal experience wherein she would enter a symbolic watery grave only to die in that grave, and therefore remain permanently removed from redemption. However, Lee's description of the time in which Satan announces the method of suicide, "ten o'clock," and the specific day, "a Sabbath morning," are rich with symbolic meaning. It is important to remember that in chapter one's investigation of West-Central African belief systems, the Kongo cosmogram presents the path of sacred renewal in which an individual begins life in the circle's right quadrant, then transitions below the watery Kalunga line at death, to become reborn with elevated knowledge and responsibility. The comogram's right quadrant symbolizes morning in

[39] Harvey, Sean P. "Native Tongues: Colonialism and Race from Encounter to the Reservation." *The American Historical Review,* Vol. 121, April, 2016., 563-64.

an individual's life and represents the beginning of a sacred journey through life and death. Not only does Lee identify "ten o'clock" as the symbolic beginning of her life by placing this specific time on the second page, or at the beginning, of her narrative, but by describing the morning as "a Sabbath morning," she imbues her experiences, which begin at ten o'clock, with sacred meaning. And while Satan could have directed Lee to commit suicide in the house in which she works, Lee claims that he directs her to drown in "a brook a quarter mile from the house in which there was a deep hole."[40]

While I am not suggesting that Lee knowingly represents her relationship with death and water as a cosmographic experience, I am arguing that the proposed location, time, and day of her death show strikingly similarities to a cosmographic experience. Charging Satan with motivating her nefarious intent allows Lee to underscore her grave condition and the necessity for God to intervene in her life physically and spiritually. Yet if Lee uses this scene to further illustrate a double-voice, then this scene suggests that Lee presents an African derived strategy of renewal as a way of radically dislocating herself not only from an interpretation of the Bible that does not offer redemption, but from one that understands her race as an impediment to such redemption. In other words, Lee seems to pursue spiritual regeneration in a manner that resists the minister's and Watt's perception of Blackness. Although Lee's claim that Satan directs her actions overlays, and thus masks, her desire to die to a spiritually and racially imposed identity, it also obscures her interpretation of the water as a site of renewal. While Lee makes clear that God prevents her from entering the water and killing herself, she also seems to suggest that she enters the water symbolically, thus transgressing the death boundary to be metaphorically reborn

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[40] Lee, Jarena. *The Life and Religious Experience of Jarena Lee*. Philadelphia: 1836. Reprinted. Andrews, William L., editor. *Sisters of the Spirit: Three Black Women's Autobiographies of the Nineteenth Century*. Indiana Univ. Pr., 2000. 28, Print.

into selfhood permanently distanced from an irredeemable spiritual and racial status. She seems to argue that the precondition for undergoing a secular and Christian conversion experience is spiritual renewal that fosters a reinterpretation of Black interiority.

Evidence of Lee's renewed subjectivity not only lies in her recovery from sin sickness,[41] but also in her immediate rejection of individuals and faiths that, as with the Presbyterian minister, restrict her access to salvation or view her race as problematic. When Lee resides with a Roman Catholic family following her sickness, she observes, "my anxiety still continued respecting my poor soul."[42] She seeks to remedy her condition by reading from the Bible. Lee writes that after a family member observes her effort, "this lady…took the Bible from me and hid it, giving me a novel in its stead."[43] Reminiscent of Gronniosaw's experience, the lady refuses to allow the book to speak to Lee. In place of a Bible, the lady offers Lee a novel, or a book of fiction produced from an author's subjective interpretation. Whereas hearing Watt's subjective interpretation of the Bible engendered inner turmoil, Lee does not experience such distress when the family member, and through her Catholicism, restricts access to salvation. That her interiority has been transformed allows her to respond by refusing to read the novel and relocating to Philadelphia. After reaching Philadelphia, Lee further exercises renewed personhood by suggesting that the "English Church" she attends does not edify her spiritually because it cannot recognize the value and hazards of Black, racial identity. She reveals that "while sitting under the ministration of this man," Joseph Pilmore,"[44] "it appeared that there was

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[41] Lee writes, "so great was the labour of my spirit and the fearful oppressions of a judgment to come, that I was reduced as one extremely…from which illness I recovered in about three months" (28).
[42] Ibid., 28
[43] Ibid., 28
[44] Joesph Pilmore (1739-1825) evangelized in the American colonies, and in 1769 he "became the first Methodist preacher in Philadelphia." Andrews, William L., editor. *Sisters of the Spirit:*

a wall between me and a communion with that people, which was higher than I could possibly see over."[45] In a rhetorical strategy that amplifies her narrative's literary significance, Lee writes that the metaphorical wall communicates, "*this is not the people for you*."[46]

Italicizing these words does more than indict Pilmore's congregation, it also highlights Joycelyn Moody's contention that there existed a meaningful Black, female self of which to speak. Lee's words also anticipate her membership in a congregation that does not erect a wall that impedes communion with God because of racial status. Yet it is important to remember that what inaugurates her quest to become a member of a congregation that appreciates her racial status and promotes new life in Christ is undergoing a death and renewal experience that seems to reflect West-Central African resonances. Lee's apparent preoccupation with West-Central African resonances is more convincing when we revisit the scant details of her parentage. Carla Peterson argues that Lee's reticence concerning her parents could function to effectively silence her parents' devotion to African belief systems. She writes that Lee "tells us nothing about her parents, refusing even to divulge their names," and she suggests, "it is quite possible that they, like [Sojourner] Truth's parents, were firmly rooted in African cultural traditions."[47] In other words, Peterson argues that Lee, as with Gronniosaw, sacrifices her parents' African identity to advance a Christian narrative. If Lee sacrifices her parents because of their fidelity to African cultural traditions, then the cosmographic character of her spiritual regeneration would work to

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Three Black Women's Autobiographies of the Nineteenth Century. Indiana Univ. Pr., 2000. 238, Print.

[45] Lee, Jarena. *The Life and Religious Experience of Jarena Lee*. Philadelphia: 1836. Reprinted. Andrews, William L., editor. *Sisters of the Spirit: Three Black Women's Autobiographies of the Nineteenth Century*. Indiana Univ. Pr., 2000. 28, Print.

[46] Ibid., 28

[47] Peterson, Carla L. *"Doers of the Word": African-American Women Speakers and Writers in the North (1830-1880)*. Rutgers University Press, 1998. 73, Print.

restore such African traditions. Intentionally representing West-Central African sacred values would also allow Lee to maintain her narrative's double-voice. By masking cosmographic symbols and speaking in a conventional spiritual narrative voice, Lee appeals to a White readership by rehearsing the spiritual narrative convention of Satan and God vying for her fallen soul. Yet in another voice, and to a Black audience, Lee appears to argue that as a precondition for conversion and sanctification, spiritually dead African Americans can achieve renewed subjectivity and spiritual rejuvenation by performing African cultural traditions.

If Lee restores her parents' African cultural traditions as a way of facilitating her own spiritual transformation, then *The Life* is an especially significant literary accomplishment, as it reconceptualizes fundamental separation from a sinful and corrupt world. Lee and other African American spiritual autobiographers across the nineteenth-century had to determine how radically to dislocate themselves from "The world."[48] Such a foundational change not only reoriented their minds away from prevailing notions of Blackness and Black female powerlessness, but, especially for Lee, it motivated them to unite with individuals who held similar views. It is not surprising, then, that following her rejection from the English Church Lee would attend an African Methodist Episcopal church service. Immediately after Richard Allen addresses the

[48] African American spiritual autobiographers demonstrate multiple ways in which they dislocate themselves from "the world" and traditional expectations of a Christian woman. "Nancy G. Prince resolved after her conversion to put her trust in God for the future, but her faith did not rule out marriage in her early twenties, devotion of her life to her husband, and, after his death, dedication of her energies to the uplift of Jamaican freedmen." However, in a different response to her conversion, Rebecca Jackson chose "a life of celibacy while still married," and later withdrew "into a Shaker community so as to practice 'holy living' in the manner she considered appropriate." Andrews, William L., editor. *Sisters of the Spirit: Three Black Women's Autobiographies of the Nineteenth Century*. Indiana Univ. Pr., 2000. 12, Print.

congregation, Lee declares, "this is the people to which my heart unites."[49] At the conclusion of his sermon, Allen invites Lee "to flee the wrath to come," and Lee writes, "three weeks from that day, my soul was gloriously converted to God."[50]

More than demonstrating her affinity for Methodism over Presbyterianism and Catholicism, Lee's conversion evidences the effect of communing with other spiritually renewed African Americans. Although Christianity does not seem to inform her spiritual transformation—which serves as a major difference between Allen's congregation and Lee—it does appear to characterize her conversion. Lee articulates her conversion in language that suggests a Christian, resurrectionary experience. She writes that when Allen reads, "I perceive thy heart is not right in the sight of God,"[51] she recognizes the she held "malice against one particular individual," and feels unburdened by this sin when she announces, "Lord, I forgive every creature."[52] The word "creature" reflects the Apostle Paul's description of new life in Christ,[53] and thus underscores Lee's Christian rebirth. She then links the concepts of rebirth and resurrection in the immediate description of her transformation. Lee remembers that after her rebirth, "it appeared…as if a garment, which had entirely enveloped my whole person, even to my fingers ends, split at the crown of my head, and was stripped away from me, passing like a

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[49] In 1794, Richard Allen (1760-1831) founded Bethel, the first African Methodist Episcopal church in the United States. In 1816, Allen was elected bishop of the African Methodist Episcopal church, the first independent African American denomination.

[50] Lee, Jarena. *The Life and Religious Experience of Jarena Lee*. Philadelphia: 1836. Reprinted. Andrews, William L., editor. *Sisters of the Spirit: Three Black Women's Autobiographies of the Nineteenth Century*. Indiana Univ. Pr., 2000. 29, Print.

[51] Lee shows that whereas the Presbyterian minister preachers from Watt's interpretation of Psalm 51, Allen actually preaches from Acts 8: 21.

[52] Lee, Jarena. *The Life and Religious Experience of Jarena Lee*. Philadelphia: 1836. Reprinted. Andrews, William L., editor. *Sisters of the Spirit: Three Black Women's Autobiographies of the Nineteenth Century*. Indiana Univ. Pr., 2000. 29, Print.

[53] 2 Corinthians 5:17

shadow, from my sight—when the glory of God seemed to cover me in its stead."[54] The replacement of the split garment with the cover of "*his* salvation" makes metaphoric the transition from spiritual death to spiritual regeneration to new Christian spirituality.[55] Furthermore, Lee depicts "his salvation" as a cover to communicate her inner orientation to Christ as a resurrected self that manifests internally and externally. In other words, after having dislocated herself from spiritual death and achieved spiritual regeneration as a precondition of Christian conversion, Lee proclaims that she experiences Christian resurrection.

Lee's resurrection unto a new, Christian self certainly seems to evidence the first stage of psychospiritual development. Indeed she translates her experience of fundamental transformation through the language of Christian conversion. However, the notion of Lee's conversion as essentially Christian erodes on the next few pages of her narrative. Lee progresses through additional experiences after which she concludes, "I did not even know that Christ had died for the sins of the world, and to save sinners.[56] Following these experiences she also proclaims, "I felt within me a living principle, an immortal spirit, which cannot die, and must forever either enjoy the smiles of its Creator, or feel the pangs of ceaseless damnation."[57] If Lee had not previously considered the soul's immutability or Christ's ultimate sacrifice for humanity, two foundational tenets of Christianity, then her transformation in Bethel, Allen's church, does not intend to offer an account of Christian conversion. While a transformation does occur, readers can also safely conclude that her resurrection unto new life is a transformation absent of

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[54] Lee, Jarena. *The Life and Religious Experience of Jarena Lee*. Philadelphia: 1836. Reprinted. Andrews, William L., editor. *Sisters of the Spirit: Three Black Women's Autobiographies of the Nineteenth Century*. Indiana Univ. Pr., 2000. 29, Print.
[55] Ibid., 29
[56] Ibid., 32
[57] Ibid., 32

Christianity. Lee, then, seems to confound readers' expectations, and she resists Christian conversion as the only meaningful form of transformation in the nineteenth-century spiritual narrative genre. She also provokes readers to question the nature of the conversion she describes and the character of her resurrection.

Remembering Max Heirich's contention that conversion is the "process of changing a sense of root reality" to facilitate "a conscious shift in one's sense of grounding" dislodges Lee's conversion and resurrection from the obligation to describe a Christian mode of transformation.[58] Analysis of Lee's behavior immediately following her conversion and resurrection reveals that she experiences a secular conversion whereby she understands her race and sex as issuing a voice worth hearing. The outward performance of such a realization evidences a resurrected self animated by new, edifying, and sacred knowledge. In other words, Lee's performance of her resurrection demonstrates the link between the existential condition of her Black female self and the significance of a voice that can only be produced by that self. She announces this link, and therefore her resurrected self, after invoking the image of a cover that also functions to symbolically obscure a secular transformation and its outward manifestation. She writes, "though hundreds were present, I did leap to my feet, and declare that God, for Christ's sake, had pardoned the sins of my soul."[59] She continues, "That day was the first when my heart had believed, and my tongue had made confession unto salvation—the first words uttered, part of that song, which shall fill eternity with its sound, was glory to god."[60] While standing among the

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[58] Heinrich, Max. "Change of Heart: A Test of Some Widely Held Theories about Religious Conversion," *American Journal of Sociology* 83. 1977: 674.
[59] Lee, Jarena. *The Life and Religious Experience of Jarena Lee*. Philadelphia: 1836. Reprinted. Andrews, William L., editor. *Sisters of the Spirit: Three Black Women's Autobiographies of the Nineteenth Century*. Indiana Univ. Pr., 2000. 29, Print.
[60] Ibid., 29

hundreds still present, Lee has the "power to exhort sinners" and "tell of the wonders and goodness" of God.[61] She writes that while exhorting and testifying, "the minister was silent, until my soul felt its duty had been performed."[62]

Her description of feeling emotional ecstasy and the power of God intends to situate this moment within "the central core of the black Christian ethos," and serves to again contrast her experiences in the AME church with her dispassionate accounts of attending the church services of other Christian denominations.[63] Yet the emotional and Christian character of Lee's description masks her secular conversion and her performance of a secular resurrection, both of which she makes evident in this account. Lee's experience in Bethel suggests that she is converted to an awareness of the authority of her voice and presence. She represents such awareness, or belief, as having the same transformative power and sacred significance as Christian conversion by translating her realization in the language of Christian conversion. Therefore, not only does Lee's account again underscore the double-voiced quality of its narrator, but just as Christians are to be "doers of the word," Lee's account anticipates that she will express her beliefs outwardly, or become a doer of her new awareness.[64] When she writes, "I did leap to my feet," she does not simply depict herself standing, but also as having been activated by a profound transformation that registers on her body. Lee's conversion, then, facilitates a resurrected self that performs outwardly an inner reconstitution. Standing and speaking among Allen's congregation evidences her presence and voice as capable and worthy

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[61] Ibid., 29
[62] Ibid., 29
[63] Frey, Sylvia R, and Betty Wood. *Come Shouting to Zion: African American Protestantism in the American South and British Caribbean to 1830*. University of North Carolina Press, 1998. 143, Print.
[64] James 1: 22

of transgressing social and gender conventions, and it disrupts the church's hierarchy of authority by making the congregation witnesses to Lee's conversion and resurrection and not God's power through Allen.

Lee also represents her voice as endowed with the super natural ability to save and restore. Even before indicating that her song of celebration has the capacity to "fill eternity," she describes her voice as freeing her from malice and resentment. Although Lee is absolved of malice and resentment when she declares, "Lord I forgive every creature," it is not God's acceptance of her cry that engenders a renewed self. Lee does not offer God's response to her ostensibly Christian supplication, indicating that only her voice completes her transition from spiritual death attended by racism and sexism, to spiritual regeneration, to a secular conversion and resurrection. No surprise arises, then, that while addressing Allen's congregation Lee speaks directly to "sinners," or the spiritually dead. By speaking from a position of power to those whose spiritual and existential condition reflects her previous condition, Lee implies that she can guide congregants to secular conversion and resurrection as a precondition for greater renewal in Christ. In other words, Lee replaces Allen as a minister who better understands congregants' plight and who more effectively fosters their transition to Christian membership. More than simply suggesting a revolutionary interpretation of renewal and a strategy for accessing Christ, Lee deliberately depicts herself, and therefore her converted and resurrected self, as divinely approved and with authority surpassing Allen when she writes, "the minister was silent, until my soul felt its duty had been performed."

Lee's propensity for employing a double-voice and offering avenues for African Americans to achieve renewal outside and inside of a Christian model again converge as she endeavors to "save" the congregation. Although "saving" congregants would have the effect of

instilling a greater sense of personhood and individual value, it would also enable Lee to establish a community of renewed people. In other words, Lee's desire to "save" also indicates her adherence to a community forming sacred imperative. And by authoring her narrative, she symbolically increases the size of the congregation, allowing more than those assembled in the Bethel's sanctuary to benefit from her sacred imperative.[65]

Lee's secular conversion and resurrection not only fundamentally separate her from spiritual death and a self that does not resist racist and sexist treatment, but, like Allen's congregation, it also establishes a precondition for Christian conversion. As a way of not only articulating the process of her Christian conversion, but how that conversion produces a new, Christian self, she also details her religious transformation in language suggestive of death and resurrection. While it seems illogical for Lee to present two resurrected selves in one narrative, she does so to signal the possibility and necessity for African Americans to combine a transgressive voice and valuable presence with an eternal, Christian self that was affirmed by God and, as Haywood notes, was difficulty for white readers to reject. Although sanctification follows Christian conversion in the second stage of psychospiritual development, Lee again nuances this paradigm and uses the second stage to communicate her conversion to Christianity and her new Christian self.

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[65] I do not mean to suggest that Lee's double-voice no longer accounts for her White readership. In fact, one of the reasons Lee's secular conversion and resurrection reads as convincingly Christian is because she needs to convert her White audience to a belief in black humanity and subjectivity. Haywood notes that spiritual autobiographers' ability to convert White, Christian readers to a belief in African American women's personhood was the first step in conveying their spiritual equality with White readers, and therefore challenging racism as divinely sanctioned. Haywood, Chanta M. *Prophesying Daughters: Black Women Preachers and the Word, 1823-1913*. University of Missouri Press, 2016. 44, Print.

As a way of signaling the Christian transformation she will assume following her experiences in Bethel, Lee returns to the idea of committing suicide. However, whereas she symbolically drowns to facilitate a regenerated constitution before her secular conversion and resurrection, after such conversion and resurrection, the prospect of drowning functions only as a rhetorical device for establishing Christian transformation. Although Lee is fundamentally transformed as a result of accessing new personhood and performing an authoritative voice, she asks readers to believe that after these achievements she "again sunk back into sorrow," persuaded that she "could never be happy in this life."[66] Lee then combines this unconvincing declaration with the idea of suicide absent of the possibility of renewal. She writes, "I was again tempted to destroy my life while drowning; but suddenly this mode was changed, and while in the dusk of the evening…I was beset to hang myself, with a cord suspended from the wall enclosing the secluded spot."[67] In a departure from her previous experiences with suicide and water, Lee does not offer sacred significance to the day on which this thought occurs. Additionally, that she does not return to the brook suggests that her "temptation" does not act upon her in any meaningful way. Furthermore, Lee's transition to thoughts of hanging herself in the "dusk of the evening" not only offers another form of suicide, but it contrasts the time of day in which such thoughts occur, evening, with the time of her metaphorical downing, morning. Lee, then, disconnects the new promptings to commit suicide from her previous presentation of death as an avenue for renewal. Lee's radical shift from employing African resonances to articulate death as a threshold for regeneration to presenting death as an unregenerative state she

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[66] Lee, Jarena. *The Life and Religious Experience of Jarena Lee*. Philadelphia: 1836. Reprinted. Andrews, William L., editor. *Sisters of the Spirit: Three Black Women's Autobiographies of the Nineteenth Century*. Indiana Univ. Pr., 2000. 29-30, Print.
[67] Ibid., 30

desires to enter is unconvincing. That Lee achieves secular conversion and resurrection then works to build communities of renewed people before entertaining ideas of killing herself also lessons the believability of her suicidal thoughts.

Rather than revealing a desire to die an insignificant death, Lee evokes these thoughts to establish the need for Christian salvation and to anticipate what she describes as, "the hour of my conversion to God."[68] Because her thoughts of suicide function as a rhetorical device, Lee notes that only after these thoughts was she fully aware of her soul's perilous condition. She explains, "I had no view of the edge of which I was tottering, until it [her suicidal thoughts] was over, and my eyes were opened."[69] In a description that bears a striking resemblance to accounts that formerly enslaved persons gave of their Christian conversions almost one hundred years after Lee publishes *The Life,*[70] Lee writes, "then the awful gulf of hell seemed to be open beneath me, covered only…by a spider's web, on which I stood. I seemed to hear the howling of the damned, to see the smoke of the bottomless pit, and to hear the rattling of those chains, which hold the impenitent under clouds of darkness to the judgment of the great day."[71] Terrified by this vision, she instantly "formed a resolution to pray" before Satan appears in the corner of her room "in the form of a monstrous dog" with eyes that "looked like two balls of fire."[72]

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[68] Ibid., 31
[69] Ibid., 30
[70] Lee's Christian conversion experience resembles conversion experiences collected by Andrew Polk Watson between 1927 and 1929. Originally published in 1969, these stories were republished in 2010. Watson, A.P., Clifton H. Johnson, eds, Albert J. Raboteau. *God Struck Me Dead: Voices of Ex-Slaves*. Eugene: Wipf & Stock Pub, 2010. Print.
[71] Lee, Jarena. *The Life and Religious Experience of Jarena Lee*. Philadelphia: 1836. Reprinted. Andrews, William L., editor. *Sisters of the Spirit: Three Black Women's Autobiographies of the Nineteenth Century*. Indiana Univ. Pr., 2000. 30, Print.
[72] Ibid., 30-1

That Lee envisions hell and her deliverance with imagery characteristic of the Christian conversion experience of many enslaved persons again demonstrates a racially informed presentation of total transformation.[73] The details of Lee's vision and her attendant desire to pray, then, situate her Christian conversion experience within a particular African American conversion tradition. Yet remembering that Lee and other African American spiritual autobiographers also used their Christian conversion experiences to "convert skeptics they confronted into accepting the validity of their God-called subjectivity" means that Lee's account of her Christian conversion speaks to African American and White audiences.[74] While an African American readership may have seen in the details of her conversion experience a familiar illustration of conviction from sin and Christian transformation, that same audience as well as a White readership may have observed similarities between Lee's experience and the conversion of Saul of Tarsus. John Lofland and Norman Skonovd argue that the Apostle Paul's conversion to Christianity "has in a sense functioned as the ideal of what conversion should be in the Western world."[75] Recognizing the imperative of converting her White readership as well as announcing herself as having been resurrected into new Christian life, Lee models her conversion after Paul's.

For Lee, Paul's lived experiences and conversion speaks to her second-class status in America, as his conversion shows how the powers of divine intervention transformed the once-

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[73] Lee's characterization hell as a place of darkness wherein chains rattle and howls are heard suggests that she interprets the space and experience of hell as synonymous with the space and experience of slavery. Presenting hell in this way reinforces how issues concerning race inform her Christian conversion.

[74] Haywood, Chanta M. *Prophesying Daughters: Black Women Preachers and the Word, 1823-1913*. University of Missouri Press, 2016. 40, Print.

[75] Lofland, John and Norman Skonovd. "Conversion Motifs." *Journal for the Scientific Study of Religion,* vol. 20, no. 4, Dec. 1981: 373.

despised into an advocate for Christ.[76] Furthermore, Paul's conversion "was signaled by intense visions, lights, and voices."[77] Although Lee curiously depicts Satan's eyes as the light emitting objects in her conversion experience, her vision, nevertheless, functions as an intense expression of God working through her and manifesting her Christian conversion. Whereas Paul's temporary blindness registers conversion as having literal and metaphorical value, when Lee states, "my eyes were opened," the effect of her conversion seems absent from her body and limited to this metaphor of spiritual awakening. However, that her conversion experience culminates in a moment of physical weakness wherein she notes, "I had become feverish and sickly through the violence of my feelings," again places her Christian transformation in conversation with Paul's. In her weakened condition, Lee even provides her own Ananias in the form of a "coloured physician who was a member of the Methodist society."[78] As a result of the physician's aid in restoring her physically and spiritually, Lee develops an ability to comprehend the spiritual meaning of the Bible and becomes aware of how God uses the word to instruct her personally.[79] She exhibits such ability and awareness when she proclaims, "I was baptized according to the direction of our Lord, who said...'Go ye into all the world and preach my gospel

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[76] Haywood, Chanta M. *Prophesying Daughters: Black Women Preachers and the Word, 1823-1913*. University of Missouri Press, 2016. 40, Print. Lee further links herself with Paul when toward the conclusion of *The Life* she writes that God sends her to Cape May, New Jersey "as Saul of Tarsus was sent to Jerusalem." Lee, Jarena. *The Life and Religious Experience of Jarena Lee*. Philadelphia: 1836. Reprinted. Andrews, William L., editor. *Sisters of the Spirit: Three Black Women's Autobiographies of the Nineteenth Century*. Indiana Univ. Pr., 2000. 46, Print.

[77] Haywood, Chanta M. *Prophesying Daughters: Black Women Preachers and the Word, 1823-1913*. University of Missouri Press, 2016. 41, Print.

[78] Lee, Jarena. *The Life and Religious Experience of Jarena Lee*. Philadelphia: 1836. Reprinted. Andrews, William L., editor. *Sisters of the Spirit: Three Black Women's Autobiographies of the Nineteenth Century*. Indiana Univ. Pr., 2000. 32, Print. God sends Ananias to restore Saul's sight, or heal him. As with the presence of the "coloured physician in Lee's life," Ananias also helps transition Saul to new life in Christ.

[79] Ibid., 32

to every creature, he that believeth and is baptized shall be saved.'"[80] While the similarities between Lee's Christian conversion and Paul's function to communicate and legitimize her transformation, such fundamental change takes on additional meaning when Lee suggests that restored life and a directive to travel and speak occasion her conversion. That she achieves new life and is then charged to speak not only suggests that she has also achieved a Christian mode of resurrection, but it situates her as one of Christ's disciples who is charged to effect Christian conversion in others.

While Lee's Christian conversion works to convert a White readership to the value of African American spirituality and subjectivity, her resurrection positions the outward expression of her conversion, traveling and speaking, as affirmed by God for an African American woman. Such a radical presentation of her individual responsibilities to Christ amplifies the value of African American spirituality and subjectivity to include the value of African American women's interiority and voice in the service of God. Lee's Christian resurrection, then, also intends to convert her White readership to God's interpretation of African American women's significance. Yet because Lee's Christian resurrection is best illustrated by traveling and speaking in public, actions that transgress cult of true womanhood standards,[81] she is careful to suggest that instead of positioning her as a man, her resurrection redefines how femininity

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[80] Ibid., 32. Mark 16: 15-16

[81] Traveling and speaking in public were not only deemed improper for nineteenth-century women, but, as Joycelyn Moody argues, these actions were interpreted as ways in which women unsexed themselves (57). "Lee was often attacked as indecent and unnatural," and in the expanded version of her spiritual autobiography, she writes, some very ill-behaved persons, who talked roughly, and said among other things, 'I was not a woman, but a man dressed in female clothes'" (23). Moody, Joycelyn. *Sentimental Confessions: Spiritual Narratives of Nineteenth-Century African American Women*. University of Georgia Press, 2003. 76, Print. Lee, Jarena. *Religious Experience and Journal of Mrs. Jarena Lee, Giving an Account of Her Call to Preach the Gospel.* 1849, 23.

signifies. She presents this argument by making her physically weakened and sickly body integral to her resurrection. Sandra Gilbert and Susan Gubar contend that "nineteenth century culture seems to have actually admonished women to be ill."[82] When read through the lens of resisting and conforming to the expectations of proper feminine decorum, Lee's presentation of a body that requires rejuvenation "transforms her genuinely suffering self into the trope of the sick woman and exploits this trope in the representation of herself as an exemplary Christian."[83] In other words, while Lee configures her Christian conversion to resemble Paul's, she locates her Christian resurrection in a nineteenth-century representation of femininity, thus undermining the fiction that "the black woman was… biologically different from her white counterpart."[84] That Lee's race and sex register in her experience of Christian resurrection draws on "nineteenth-century notions of womanhood as a social and biological construction in order to garner sympathy from those who might otherwise have disdained her as unfeminine and thus unnatural."[85] Her Christian resurrection testifies to her divinely sanctioned responsibility to resist the limited social roles assigned to women—particularly African American women—and speak as one of God's representatives.

Lee writes that following her Christian conversion and resurrection she prays for sanctification.[86] However, because Lee's Christian conversion and resurrection has already

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[82] Gilbert, Sandra, and Susan Gubar. *The Madwoman in the Attic: The Woman Writer and the Nineteenth-Century Literary Imagination*. Yale University Press, 1979. 54, Print.
[83] Moody, Joycelyn. *Sentimental Confessions: Spiritual Narratives of Nineteenth-Century African American Women*. University of Georgia Press, 2003. 67, Print.
[84] Ibid., 67
[85] Ibid., 67
[86] Lee learns of sanctification from William Scott, "a certain coloured man" who teaches her that "the progress of the soul was from a state of darkness, or of nature was threefold; or consisted in three degrees, as follows:—First, conviction for sin. Second, justification from sin. Third, the entire sanctification of the soul to God." Lee writes, "I thought this description was beautiful, and immediately believed in it." Lee, Jarena. *The Life and Religious Experience of Jarena Lee*.

produced the same effect as receiving God's seal from sin—a new recognition and valuation of God's presence in her life that enlivens her through a surge of ecstatic behavior—Lee's prayer for sanctification reads less as a genuine petition and more as the situating of her conversion and resurrection experiences within the second stage of psychospiritual development. Although her description of attaining sanctification only serves to announce the sequence of psychospiritual development as part of her lived experiences, Lee underscores this sequence in her narrative to appeal to readers who believe in these tenets of salvation. However, it is because of Lee's faith in Christ and her Christian resurrection, achieved only after faith in herself and her secular resurrection, that she hears a voice instruct her to "'Go preach the Gospel!'"[87]

She not only reveals that this directive comes from God, but when she doubts that others will believe that God has commissioned her to preach, Lee notes that God lessons her anxiety when he declares, "I will put words in your mouth, and will turn your enemies to become your friends."[88] Receiving such assurance of future communion with God and preaching success links her with Old and New Testament prophets and missionaries who were also instructed to convert nonbelievers to faith in God and Christ. By suggesting that her commission and assurance echo Jeremiah 1:9, Exodus 4:1, 12, and Luke 21:15, Lee implies that doubting her call to preach is tantamount to doubting God's word. In other words, refusing to accept Lee as a minister, whose very travels and sermons evidence her Christian resurrection, is the same as rejecting Christianity. To reinforce the believability of her call to preach, Lee details another vision. She writes, "there appeared to my view the form and figure of a pulpit, with a Bible lying thereon,

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Philadelphia: 1836. Reprinted. Andrews, William L., editor. *Sisters of the Spirit: Three Black Women's Autobiographies of the Nineteenth Century*. Indiana Univ. Pr., 2000. 33, Print.

[87] Ibid., 35

[88] Ibid., 35

the back of which was presented to me as plainly as if it had been a literal fact.[89] More than attesting to her charge to travel and preach, Lee's instruction and her vision also seem to anticipate and provide a counter-argument to Allen's subsequent refusal to permit Lee to preach to Methodist congregations.[90] When Lee informs Allen that she "must preach the gospel," he responds that while she could perform exhortations, "as to women preaching…our Disciple knew nothing at all about it," concluding, "it did not call for women preachers."[91]

Rather than undermining her call to preach, Lee's inclusion of Allen's statements in *The Life* enables her to critique those who view it as "impossible, heterodox, or improper for a woman to preach."[92] Not only does she argue that Christ's death and resurrection for all of humanity necessarily means that men as well as woman can preach on his behalf, but she follows this egalitarian message by designating Mary Magdalene the first minister of Christ's resurrection.[93] Reinterpreting John 20:11-18 to frame Mary Magdalene in this way certainly bolsters her claim that her sex does not preclude her from ministering, but it also serves to

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[89] Ibid., 35

[90] Although the AME church adopted its own Doctrines and Disciplines in 1817 African American Methodists under Allen's leadership adopted "the Articles of Faith that John Wesley selected for the Methodist Episcopal Church. Wesleyan Methodists did not allow the formal ordination of women as preachers." Because Lee requests permission to begin preaching to an Episcopal domination in1807, Allen's refusal to allow Lee to preach is congruent with Wesleyan tenets. William L., editor. *Sisters of the Spirit: Three Black Women's Autobiographies of the Nineteenth Century*. Indiana Univ. Pr., 2000. 239, Print.

[91] William L. Andrews writes, "Among the Methodist, both white and black, exhortation was regularly distinguished from true preaching and usually followed it during a worship service. Exhorters were not licensed to speak from or interpret a biblical text. They were expected to limit themselves to pleas for close attention to the messaged preached, repentance, and acceptance of the present opportunity for salvation" (239). Lee, Jarena. *The Life and Religious Experience of Jarena Lee*. Philadelphia: 1836. Reprinted. Andrews, William L., editor. *Sisters of the Spirit: Three Black Women's Autobiographies of the Nineteenth Century*. Indiana Univ. Pr., 2000. 36, Print.

[92] Ibid., 36

[93] It is important to note that Lee's ability to interpret scripture represents the power to redefine this almost exclusively White and male privilege. Ibid., 36

underscore her own resurrections that make her call to preach possible. Lee, then, reminds readers of her secular and Christian resurrections, and in doing so, she suggests that just as furthering a community of renewed people attended her secular resurrection, her work as an itinerant minister who has been resurrected in Christ will also include building communities of Christians. Lee explicitly links and validates new life in Christ and her commission to preach with converting persons to Christ when she asks that if God did not persuade her to work in his vineyard, "how could he consistently bear testimony in favour of my poor labours, in awakening and converting sinners?"[94] For Lee, not simply does a future in which she uses geographical movement and a voice for God announce her Christian resurrection and itinerant ministry, but facilitating Christian conversions does also. Her anticipated future becomes reality when she remembers:

> In my wanderings up and down among men, preaching according to my ability, I have frequently found families who told me that they had not for several years been to a meeting, and yet, while listening to hear what God would say by his poor coloured female instrument, have believed with trembling—tears rolling down their cheeks, the signs of contrition and repentance towards God.[95]

While her self-deprecating description speaks to her humility, and thus further communicates the virtues and respectability of African American women, she suspends her narrative's trajectory of converting additional persons to Christ and converting Allen to a belief in her right to preach by detailing her marriage to Joseph Lee. Situated in the chapter, "My Marriage," which Lee places between the chapters, "My Call to Preach the Gospel" and "The

[94] Ibid., 37
[95] Ibid., 37

subject of My Call to Preach Renewed," Lee's description of her marriage reiterates the symbolism of her chapter arrangements. Her marriage functions to prevent her from exercising ministerial duties. Because marrying Joseph means that she must relocate six miles from Philadelphia to Snow Hill, disappointment occasions her marriage, as she notes, "I never found that agreement and closeness in communion and fellowship, that I had in Philadelphia, among my young companions, nor ought I to have expected it."[96] Lee then relates that a Christ-like figure appears to her in a dream and makes clear that Joseph must continue to pastor the "Cloured Society at Snow Hill," that she falls "into a state of general debility," and that Joseph dies six years into their marriage.[97] Marrying a Christian minister reiterates her respectability, but the three page length of this chapter and the few details she offers about their union, combined with the reality that her marriage interrupts the performance of her Christian resurrection, makes it a curious choice for her to include "My Marriage" in *The Life*. Because "My call to Preach the Gospel" presents Lee's bold declarations as to women's ability in Christ and precedes a chapter in which she suggests her husband's spiritual gifts are no more meaningful than her own, the value of "My Marriage" lies in Lee again invoking a sickly body in order to claim womanhood while resisting the conventional roles imposed on African American women.

Describing the "ill state of health" into which she falls, Lee notes, "I could not sit up" and writes, "from this sickness I did not expect to recover."[98] Yet she also reveals that her sickly body does not prevent her from exhorting sinners. When "the Lord would send sinners" into her house, she embraces the opportunity "to press home on their consciences the things of

[96] Ibid., 39
[97] Ibid., 39-40
[98] Ibid., 40

eternity."[99] Her endeavors produce Christian conversions, as she witnesses sinners "fall to the floor crying aloud for mercy."[100] Her unhealthy female body, then, becomes a sign of not only her gender status, but her obedience to God. Because Lee has already indicated that her body will not remain in its reclined position, but that it will be again restored to health in service to God, her sickly body also anticipates her restoration and transition from exhorter to minister. Therefore, Lee again conjures the trope of resurrection, and while afflicted, makes clear that her physically weakened state is only a prelude to future ministerial efforts. She explicitly connects a return to health with traveling and preaching when she desires "to go from one end of the earth to the other, crying, Behold, behold, behold the Lamb!" and by following this aspiration with a prayer for God to "raise me up, if consistent with his will."[101] No surprise arises that Lee frames her eventual restoration as consistent with God's will for her body and the dissemination of the gospel.

Lee's return to the trope of resurrection and the performance of Christian resurrection—traveling and preaching—aids in converting a skeptical readership to a belief in African American women's dignity and value to God. However, invoking these themes also foregrounds her subsequent experience in Bethel and anticipates Allen's acceptance of her commission to preach. Lee recounts that eight years after she informs Allen of her call to preach, she witnesses a minister, Richard Williams, appear "to have lost the spirit" while preaching to Allen's congregation.[102] In a reaction reminiscent of her secular resurrection and suggestive of her restoration to health after bouts of illness, Lee writes that "in that instant, *I sprang*, as by an

[99] Ibid., 40
[100] Ibid., 40
[101] Ibid., 40
[102] Ibid., 44

altogether supernatural impulse, to my feet, when I was aided from above to give an exhortation on the very text which my brother Williams had taken."[103] That Lee's presence and voice again replace a male minister's in Bethel's sanctuary suggests that in this moment she does more than simply exhort. Instead, Lee reveals that God not only provides the "supernatural impulse" for her to do what Williams cannot, preach the gospel, but also for her "to show the world" that she has been called to "labour in the vineyard" and "preach his gospel to the fallen sons and daughters of Adam's race."[104] Because addressing the congregation marks the first instance of Lee preaching and demonstrates to the congregation that she has in fact received divine instruction to preach, this moment is significant in Lee's life and narrative. But the fact that Allen witnesses Lee preach and affirms her as capable of spreading the gospel is just as important. Lee notes that instead of expelling her from the church, after she concludes her sermon Allen rises and legitimizes her as "called to that work as any of the preachers present."[105]

If springing to her feet to preach indicates God acting on Lee to make those assembled aware of her calling, then Allen rising and addressing Lee must signal more than the formal acceptance of her as Christian minister. As Lee indicates throughout *The Life*, rising and speaking evidences the recognition and performance of new, edifying knowledge. While her narrative voice performs a conversion for readers, then, her actual voice engenders Allen's conversion to believing in her God-called abilities, a belief Allen illustrates by standing and speaking. More than enlivening him, Allen's acceptance of Lee finally authorizes her to travel, preach, and perform the sacred imperative of building communities of renewed people by converting persons to Christianity. Yet this achievement seems frustrated as Lee reveals that she

[103] Ibid., 44
[104] Ibid., 44
[105] Ibid., 45

leaves her "very sickly" son as she is "called to preach about thirty miles distant."[106] Choosing to evidence her Christian resurrection instead of caring for her sick child seems to erode the carefully crafted presentation of her femininity, thus framing her as a woman with an affinity for usurping "male roles" in "male spaces" and lacking "natural," maternal instincts. Readers might especially form such an interpretation when reading that during the week she remained separated from her son she reveals, "not a thought of my little son came into my mind; it was hid from me, least I should have been diverted from the work I had to do, to look after my son."[107]

However, Lee counters this interpretation with additional proof of her gender. Describing her week-long efforts among Methodists, she writes:

> Here by the instrumentality of a poor coloured woman, the Lord poured forth his spirit among the people. Though, as I was told, there were lawyers, doctors, and magistrates present, to hear me speak, yet there was mourning and crying among sinners, for the Lord scattered fire among them of his own kindling. The Lord gave his handmaiden power to speak for his great name, for he arrested the hearts of the people, and caused a shaking amongst the multitude, for God was in the midst.[108]

In this revision of Joel 2:28-29, Lee suggests that facilitating the conversion of those assembled registers as a metaphorical birthing process. If God "poured his spirit" among the people, his spirit has necessarily been "poured into Lee" for Lee to then enlighten the group of professionals. Not only does Lee use the apt image of spreading fire to express her efforts to enlighten, but when we remember that she has previously used the term "labour" to describe the work of

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[106] Ibid., 45
[107] Ibid., 45
[108] Ibid., 46

converting sinners,[109] her endeavors amongst this group takes on additional significance. After insinuating that she has been inseminated with God's "spirit," Lee expresses the subsequent experiences of labor and childbirth as laboring to facilitate the rebirth of those assembled. In other words, not only does she preach to the group, but she frames this "labour" as making possible the group's spiritual rebirth. Anticipating Zilpha Elaw's term for those she converts while ministering in England as well as countering the notion of her as unnatural and lacking maternal instincts, Lee redefines the group as her "spiritual children" who mourn, cry, and shake after delivery.[110] Situating herself as a surrogate mother *and* God's handmaiden—his specifically female servant—reiterates Lee's womanhood and shows that God chooses her voice and Black, female body to reproduce another Christian community. Her overdetermined portrait of her femininity also functions to resist popular conceptions of the Black, female body as "a site of bondage by gendered objectification" and valuable only because of its ability to reproduce slave labor.[111]

III

In the remaining pages of *The Life*, Lee further evidences her Christian resurrection by traveling and speaking throughout New Jersey.[112] Not only does she "labor" to convert "a great

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[109] Lee describes her success in awakening and converting sinners as the effect of her "poor labours" (37). Additionally, after she addresses Bethel's congregation, she characterizes preaching as "labour in the vineyard" (37).

[110] Zilpha Elaw writes, "I have travelled in several parts of England, and I thank God He has given me some spiritual children in every place wherein I have laboured." Elaw, Zilpha. *Memoirs of the Religious Experience, Ministerial Travels and Labors of Mrs. Zilpha Elaw, an American Female of Color*. London: 1846. Reprinted. Andrews, William L., editor. *Sisters of the Spirit: Three Black Women's Autobiographies of the Nineteenth Century*. Indiana Univ. Pr., 2000. 141, Print.

[111] Moody, Joycelyn. *Sentimental Confessions: Spiritual Narratives of Nineteenth-Century African American Women*. University of Georgia Press, 2003. 158, Print.

[112] Lee ministers to congregations in Cape May and Dennis Creek, New Jersey.

slave holder" to Christianity, but in doing so, she simultaneously returns readers to her experiences with racial exclusion and suggests that the failure to accept Christianity and her as Christian minister links them with such "very cruel" persons.[113] Yet *The Life* announces that Lee's preoccupation with presenting a race and body that transgress how the term "black woman" signifies is made possible by her secular and Christian resurrections. In other words, because her lived experiences as an African American woman inform her self-conception and literary presentation, Lee revises the two-stage sequence of psychospiritual development to include the acquisition and performance of new personhood, agency, and voice for her Black, female self. More than offering an account of her life, Lee's autobiographical portrait of resisting imposed identities that were racist and sexist in nature, addressing multiple audiences in a double narrative voice, achieving resurrected embodiment, and converting skeptics to a belief in Black subjectivity and audacious value are themes present in African American literature and culture across the nineteenth-century. Robert Patterson argues that throughout the nineteenth-century, "black women writers, orators, and activists became increasingly preoccupied with foregrounding their subjectivity as a black woman, positing it as a credible epistemological framework through which to examine the social, political, ethical, and moral issues confronting American societies."[114]

As the first autobiography published by an African American woman, *The Life* shows the extent to which Lee's life and the experiences she details provide a foundation for nineteenth-

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[113] Lee, Jarena. *The Life and Religious Experience of Jarena Lee*. Philadelphia: 1836. Reprinted. Andrews, William L., editor. *Sisters of the Spirit: Three Black Women's Autobiographies of the Nineteenth Century*. Indiana Univ. Pr., 2000. 47, Print.

[114] Patterson, Robert J. "A Triple-Twined Re-Appropriation: Womanist Theology and Gendered-Racial Protest in the Writings of Jarena Lee, Frances Ew. Harper, and Harriet Jacobs." *Religion & Literature*, vol. 45, no. 2, Summer2013., 57.

century African American women committed to provoking American societies to recognize Black bodies as more than living caricatures. The "hidden facts" of *The Life* "allow us to understand why black women…behave in certain ways and how they acquired agency" to speak from what Joanne Braxton terms the "wild zone," a "space of difference" that "challenges hegemonic power."[115] Lee's autobiography certainly provides the foundation on which such women, particularly African American spiritual narrative authors, critiqued American society. Yet by attesting to the necessity of secular resurrection to radically dislocate African Americans from selves that do not seek freedom from racist and sexist treatment, *The Life* also informs slave narrative authors who described their non-Christian transformation from enslaved to free person in the North as "a glorious resurrection from the tomb of slavery to the heaven of freedom."[116] While the trope of secular resurrection in slave narratives certainly evidences the literary tradition on which authors such as Frederick Douglass, Henry "Box" Brown, and Harriet Jacobs build, so too does the often repeated declaration, "I was born." A statement with which most

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[115] Hobbs, Catherine, editor. *Nineteenth-Century Women Learn to Write*. Charlottesville: U of Virginia P, 1995. 47, Print. Braxton, Joanne M. Black Women Writing Autobiography: A Tradition Within a Tradition. Philadelphia: Temple UP, 1989. 73, Print. Moody, Joycelyn. *Sentimental Confessions: Spiritual Narratives of Nineteenth-Century African American Women*. University of Georgia Press, 2003. 155, Print.

[116] Upon emerging from his wooden box, the symbolic coffin he uses to mail himself to freedom in Philadelphia, Henry "Box" Brown proclaims, "I had risen as it were from the dead" (53). Furthermore, in *Incidents in the Life of a Slave Girl*, after hiding for seven years in a cramped, rodent infested garret in which she struggles to breath, Harriet Jacobs emerges from this metaphorical gave, escapes to Philadelphia, and achieves freedom. In the introduction to *Harriet Jacobs and Incidents in the Life of a Slave Girl: New Critical Essays*, Rafia Zafar refers to Jacobs' emergence from the garret as a "curious resurrection" (1). Douglass, Frederick. *Narrative of the Life of Frederick Douglass, An American Slave, Written by Himself*. 1845. Reprinted. Baker, Houston A., editor. *Narrative of the Life of Frederick Douglass: An American Slave*. Penguin Books, 1986. 113, Print. Brown, Henry Box. *The Narrative of the Life of Henry Box Brown*. Oxford University Press, 1851. 2002, 53, Print. Jacobs, Harriet. Incidents in the Life of a Slave Girl. 1861. Reprinted. Garfield, Deborah M., and Rafia Zafar, editors. *Harriet Jacobs and "Incidents in the Life of a Slave Girl": New Critical Essays*. Cambridge Univ. Press, 2008. 1, Print.

authors begin their slave narratives, "I was born" is not only "a claim that the events which have been written occurred, but also an existential claim, a declaration that 'I exist.'"[117] Yet *The Life* allows us to interpret this existential claim as a statement that anticipates writers existing anew, or becoming "born again."

Lee, then, writes an autobiography that attends to different modes of resurrection, and in doing so, legitimizes fundamental transformation outside of Christianity. Just as slave narrative authors present the trope of secular resurrection as a language used to articulate suffering and the reclaimed self, twentieth-century African American authors further nuance the death and resurrection motif to include other ways in which secular resurrection manifests. Chapter four analyzes a short story from one of these authors and argues that James Baldwin's, "Going to Meet the Man," reconfigures the motif of death and resurrection as an interpretive lens to critique and undermine White supremacist ideology.

[117] Olney, James. "'I Was Born': Slave Narratives, Their Status as Autobiography and as Literature." *Callaloo*, No. 20, Winter, 1984., 149.

Chapter Four:
"To Be Thinking About a Thing Like That:" Black Bodies as Sites of Terror and Resurrection in James Baldwin's "Going to Meet the Man"

> Our dehumanization of the Negro then is indivisible from our dehumanization of ourselves: the loss of our own identity is the price we pay for the annulment of his.
>
> -James Baldwin, *Notes of a Native Son*, 1972

> Lynching is not simple murder.
>
> -James Weldon Johnson, "The Practice of Lynching: A Picture, the Problem and What Shall Be Done About It," 1927

By arguing that James Baldwin nuances the death and resurrection motif to reveal the fallacies undergirding White supremacist ideology, I do not mean to suggest that African American authors across the twentieth-century revise the motif in the same manner. As with Baldwin, twentieth-century African American authors maintain a largely secular interpretive lens to present a reclaimed self that has been produced from a metaphorical death experience. Furthermore, twentieth-century authors' portraits of radical dislocation and fundamental renewal explores the concerns and preoccupations that occasion African American life removed from slavery, but that is still heavily informed by notions of Black degradation and White superiority. However, whereas Baldwin analyzes the ways in which racists and practitioners of racial violence rely on their own mode of death and resurrection, African American authors such as Nella Larsen and Toni Morrison articulate the potentialities of reconstituted Black personhood and its implication in future African American communities. While not attesting to the value of African American interiority, intellect, and spirituality in the same way as eighteenth and nineteenth-century African America authors, Larsen's novel, *Passing* (1929), and Morrison's novel, *Beloved* (1987), are informed by political impulses of particular significance to twentieth-

century African American authors.[1] Although Larsen and Morrison examine the ways in which the symbolic value of whiteness produces a hegemonic structure of American society, in "Going to Meet the Man," Baldwin focuses acute attention on how the individual and communal performance of "superior whiteness" also damages White racists. This chapter investigates the ways in which White supremacists attack Black bodies in an attempt to stabilize White, masculine authority.

II

"Going to Meet the Man" (1965), explores the racial and psychological complexities at the intersection of violence, memory, and the White, masculine imagination. As a way of attesting to the barbarity of White, Southern racists who used sexual violence and heinous murder to reify White supremacist ideology during the 1960s, Baldwin authors a narrative that

[1] In *Passing*, Larsen suggests that Irene Redfield's inability to fully access the satisfaction afforded by Clare Kendry's racial and sexual fluidity dislocates her radically from a stable psyche. Larsen also shows that Irene's psyche cannot be restored from such dislocation. Therefore, Larsen replaces the automatic assumption of attaining resurrection through a process of dying to an old self with the aspiration, but inability, to access a new self. Morrison further explores presentations of death, renewal, and resurrection in *Beloved*, and she does so by centralizing African resonances in her novel. *Beloved* questions the assumption that the resurrected self is always a bettered self, and it offers multiple presentations of death and resurrection to contrast a destructive form of resurrection with its healthy opposite. The character of Beloved, Sethe's resurrected daughter who has transgressed the space of death and returned to Sethe, represents a destructive, parasitic form of resurrected embodiment. Sethe's second daughter, Denver, achieves psychological restoration that engenders renewed existence. The character of her regenerated self situates her as the reincarnation of her grandmother, Baby Suggs. Thus, Beloved and Denver engage in a battle, not only for Sethe's life, but for what Sethe's life represents, the legacy of slavery for enslaved persons and their descendants. By framing the battle for the interpretation of the slave experience as a battle between two resurrected young African American women, Morrison creates a counter-narrative to inherited beliefs that understand slavery's effect on African Americans, generally, and African American women, specifically, in often monolithic and restrictive ways. Larsen, Nella. *Passing*. New York: Knopf, 1929. Print. Morrison, Toni. *Beloved: A Novel*. New York: Knopf, 1987. Print.

documents the ways in which law enforcement and social convention conspire to preclude African Americans from citizenship and personhood. Yet more than emphasizing the reality of racial terrorism, Baldwin uses "Going" to map the means by which the ideologies that give rise to such terrorism become rooted deeply in psychology and yoked to identity formation. In other words, "Going" "dramatizes racism as symptomatic of an inner disorder," while "questioning "White supremacists' self-constituting ideals founded on criminal abuse of others."[2] In Jesse, his protagonist, Baldwin locates the White racist's inner disorder and his desperate need to criminally abuse "Black others." The embodiment of a legal system determined to enforce disenfranchisement as Southern custom and natural order, Jesse serves his community as Deputy to Sheriff Big Jim C.[3]

The narrative opens with Jesse lying in bed next to his wife, Grace, unable to achieve the erection his desire promises. When Grace says gently, '"go to sleep… '"you got a hard day tomorrow,'"[4] Jesse remembers that the "niggers" "would be at the court-house tomorrow" before asking himself, "what had the good Lord Almighty had in mind when he made the niggers?"[5] Endeavoring to answer this question and activate an "auto-therapeutic cure" for his failed

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[2] Griffith, Paul. "James Baldwin's Confrontation with Racist Terror in the American South: Sexual Mythology and Psychoneurosis in "Going to Meet the Man." *Journal of Black Studies*, vol. 32, no. 5, May 2002. 506, 508.

[3] Steven Weisenbuger suggests that Baldwin models Sheriff Big Jim C. after Alabama's Dallas County sheriff, Jim Clark. Weisenbuger writes that on October 9, 1963, Sheriff Clark "herded 325 prospective registrants behind a rope line outside the courthouse; then he protested as deputies poured out racial insults and blocked supporters' attempts to pass refreshments over the rope for applicants forced to stand all day in a blazing heat." Weisenburger, Steven. "The Shudder and the Silence: James Baldwin on White Terror." *ANQ*, vol. 15, no. 3, Summer 2002. 3-4.

[4] Baldwin, James. *Going to Meet the Man*. Vintage International, 1995. 229.

[5] Ibid., 230

phallus,[6] Jesse, through a series of flashbacks, returns to moments wherein practitioners of White, racist authority reified their power and cherished ideology through the torture, mutilation, and lynching of Black bodies. Jesse's attempt to remedy his impotence by remembering instances of White men symbolically and literally castrating African American men also reveal the corrosive center of his unstable psyche. To further convey such instability and "depict racism as a disabling neurosis," Paul Griffith observes that "Baldwin orchestrated perspective and plot through flashbacks."[7] Jesse first returns to the beating and sexual violence he inflicts earlier that day on an African American male who refuses to silence the singing of African Americans registering to vote. He then transitions to his childhood memory of viewing an African American man repeatedly lowered into a fire as White families discover "in this barbaric anti-human rite a genuine primeval satisfaction."[8] The memory reaches the apex of its symbolical value as Jesse remembers that the man is castrated, doused in kerosene, and torn apart by the knife and rock wielding crowd. After recalling the fear he experiences when he hears his parents have sex the night of the lynching, Jesse's mind returns to his wife lying beside him, and with revived potency, he announces, '"Come on, sugar, I'm going to do you like a nigger, just like a nigger, come on, sugar, and love me just like you'd love a nigger.'"[9]

Critics have correctly observed that African Americans asserting the right to a political voice undermines the project of White Supremacy, and thus, instigates Jesse's retreat into spaces of White, racial terror. More than restoring the belief system that most informs his White,

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[6] Weisenburger, Steven. "The Shudder and the Silence: James Baldwin on White Terror." *ANQ*, vol. 15, no. 3, Summer 2002. 6.
[7] Griffith, Paul. "James Baldwin's Confrontation with Racist Terror in the American South: Sexual Mythology and Psychoneurosis in "Going to Meet the Man." *Journal of Black Studies*, vol. 32, no. 5, May 2002. 508.
[8] Littlejohn, David. "Exemplary and other Baldwins." *Nation, 201*. 1965. 478.
[9] Baldwin, James. *Going to Meet the Man*. Vintage International, 1995. 249.

masculine identity, then, Jesse's memories demonstrate his unacknowledged fear that his "superior" status as White, law enforcer and racial regulator has lost its authority, its very "potency." In other words, Jesse "fears that the struggle to maintain the ways of the past is already lost."[10] Jesse couples this fear with his observation that his role models, "men much older than he, who had been responsible for law and order much longer than he, were now much quieter than they had been."[11] The fragility of his status, underscored by Black political agency, suggests that Jesse's sexual impotency is symptomatic of his racial impotency, a condition that would render him "unable to take his place within the racist tradition passed on by generations of White fathers."[12] That Jesse returns to spaces that situate vile black bodies and black sexuality as the antithesis of untarnished whiteness suggests his need to not only restore his masculinity, but the racially based rites, legacy, and authority such masculinity must continue to convey.

Jesse's orientation to his penis and his whiteness exhibit his devotion to what Baldwin terms the "hidden laws" that structure Jesse's social world. Baldwin writes, "every society is really governed by hidden laws, by unspoken but profound assumptions on the part of the people."[13] The evolving socio-political climate "cracks apart" the organizing racial principles which govern his world.[14] As a result of his state of profound chaos, Jesse's changing reality forces him to confront weakened, hidden laws and unspoken assumptions. He then endeavors to concretize those laws and assumptions in mental portraitures of monstrous barbarity. Critics

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[10] Brim, Matt. "Papas' Baby: Impossible Paternity in "Going to Meet the Man.." *Journal of Modern Literature*, vol. 30, no. 1, Fall 2006. 190.
[11] Baldwin, James. *Going to Meet the Man*. Vintage International, 1995. 236.
[12] Brim, Matt. "Papas' Baby: Impossible Paternity in "Going to Meet the Man.." *Journal of Modern Literature*, vol. 30, no. 1, Fall2006. 190.
[13]Baldwin argues that it is the job of the American writer to uncover hidden laws. Baldwin, James. *The Price of the Ticket: Collected Nonficition 1948-1985*. St. Martin-Marek, 1985. 175-6.
[14] Patell, Shireen R. K. "We the People," Who? James Baldwin and the Traumatic Constitution of These United States." Comparative Literature Studies, vol. 48, no. 3, Sept. 2011. 376.

such as Trudier Harris and Steven Weisenburger recognize that the violence Jesse remembers in the name of White supremacist revival rehearses the White racists' need to frame racial terrorism as "a recuperative fantasmatic for an American white manhood" believed to be "diminished and besieged."[15] Harris argues that racial violence and lynching function as "sacrificial rites" that preform a similar recuperative effect by interpreting the Black body as a scapegoat used to achieve White solidarity. Yet Weisenburger maintains that lynching spectacles articulate an "exterminationist agenda."[16] The prevailing critical models, then, view the White racists' sacred effort to redeem White manhood and White identity by sacrificing select Black bodies or eliminating all of them in sadistic rituals of community affirming terrorism.

However, I maintain that in "Going," Baldwin reveals another critical mode by which racial violence signifies. Because Jesse's supremacist ideology defines blackness as the negative of whiteness, his desperate quest to rejuvenate hidden laws of White masculinity, supremacy, and rage by returning to memories of brutality does not seek to eliminate Black bodies, nor is it fully expressed in recuperative or sacrificial motives. This article argues that Jesse's memory facilitates a resurrectionary desire. In other words, Jesse's travels into a celebrated racial past allow him to resurrect Black masculinity and Black bodies in order to destroy them, to again participate in the sacred imperative of their murder. His ability to call forth Black masculinity and Black bodies from their metaphorical and literal graves and then return them to those graves demonstrate Jesse's capacity to reify the White, masculine authority that now eludes him. His resurrectionary project, then, also intends to situate himself as an extension of previous

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[15] Weisenburger, Steven. "The Shudder and the Silence: James Baldwin on White Terror." *ANQ*, vol. 15, no. 3, Summer 2002. 3. Harris, Trudier. Exorcising Blackness: Historical and Literary Lynching and Burning Rituals. Indiana University Press, 1985.

[16] Weisenburger, Steven. "The Shudder and the Silence: James Baldwin on White Terror." *ANQ*, vol. 15, no. 3, Summer 2002. 3.

generations, and thus, resurrect his fallen, White identity. Yet Baldwin problematizes Jesse's restoration by endowing his memories with moments that undo the fallacies of White supremacist ideology. Because accepting White supremacy as aggrandizing fiction would permanently disrupt the constitution of Jesse's being, Baldwin shows that in Jesse's most potent memories of racial terror lie unacknowledged thoughts that undermine the belief system he cherishes. Baldwin suggests that such cognitive dissonance not only engenders psychological instability, but also creates the conditions under which Jesse terrorizes himself.

Jesse's endeavor to resurrect a racist identity necessarily means that he views his white identity, and therefore himself, as beginning to enter a state of nonexistence. To dramatize the critical distance between Jesse's ideal self and his racial impotency, and to depict how the threat of nonexistence signifies, Baldwin situates Jesse in a metaphorical death space at the narrative's opening. If Jesse's imagined White self represents unimpeachable authority, dominion, dignity and symbolizes the fullness of life, then his capacity to personify these ideals collapses as his race and penis lie flaccid in his darkened bedroom, a metaphorical tomb for his whiteness. That Jesse figures blackness as the opposite of blinding whiteness suggests that his metaphorical tomb, wherein darkness renders imperceptible his white skin and thus cloaks the symbolic value of such skin, functions as a space of unwhitening. Not only does Baldwin entomb Jesse in a space of unwhitening, but by positioning Jesse in his bed—another allusion to his death status—he further dislocates Jesse from the ways in which White men reify White supremacy. Baldwin figures the bed similar to Jesse's memories of racial terrorism, as a site intended to exhibit White, masculine performance, but that instead renders such an illustration fundamentally flawed. Therefore, Baldwin situates Jesse in the bed to underscore his death status and further unbind him from how he believes White identity should manifest.

Baldwin emphasizes Jesse's muted excitement, interaction with Grace, and experience in the tomb to convey Jesse's failure to represent his gender and racial ideal. When Jesse and Grace realize that Jesse's desire will not produce an erection, she asks, '"what's the matter?'" to which Jesse responds, '"I don't know…I guess I'm tired."'[17] Not only does experiencing fatigue undermine the notion of superior, white ability and sexual potency, but when Grace responds, '"you've been working too hard,'" she connects his position as law enforcer and racial regulator with his sexual dysfunction. In other words, Grace combines Jesse's inability to perform sexually with his inability to control Black political agency. The lethargy that attends Jesse's failure to maintain racial order, when understood by his wife, not only signals that White femininity cannot affirm his White, masculine identity, but that it also voices his emasculation and racial impotency. As Jesse lies in a state of frustration, he suggests that his wife's race prevents him from asking her "to do just a little thing for him, just to help him out…the way he could ask a nigger girl to do it."[18] Baldwin writes that for Jesse, "the image of a black girl caused a distant excitement in him, like a far-away light; but, again, the excitement was more like pain; instead of forcing him to act, it made action impossible."[19] Because light represents power and authority that now evades him, it makes sense that Jesse conceives of this "light" as far-away, or disconnected, from him. As with Grace's voice, his inability to conjure the image of a "black girl" performing oral sex again indicates his inept racial and sexual potency, a condition Baldwin links with his death status by revealing that the distant excitement and "light" made "action impossible."

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[17] Baldwin, James. *Going to Meet the Man*. Vintage International, 1995. 229.
[18] Ibid., 229
[19] Ibid., 229

When Grace says to Jesse, '"go to sleep,'" because he has a '"hard day tomorrow,'"[20] her characterization of tomorrow as "hard," reinforces the significance of his failed phallus. Yet she articulates her disappointment with his racial and sexual inadequacies by foreclosing the possibility for him to restore his White masculinity and by solidifying the connection between his need to sleep and his failures as White, male deputy. Removing his hand from her breast, Grace cautions, '"they going to be out there tomorrow…get some sleep."'[21] As she endeavors to sleep, Jesse "lay there, one hand between his legs, staring at the frail sanctuary of his wife."[22] As a descriptor of Grace's body, "sanctuary" suggests that Jesse desires to enter Grace's body to perform the sacred, quasi-religious, ritual of uniting with White femininity in sexual intercourse. That they do not engage in intercourse, and that she eventually refuses his further advances, announces that for Jesse the physical pleasure from the sexual penetration of his wife *and* its ritual function cannot evidence his White masculinity, nor revive his identity. If the two signifiers with which Jesse uses to display White supremacist devotion, his profession and his wife, engender his emasculation, then they also facilitate a symbolic castration that feminizes him. If Jesse's tomb and its darkness unwhiten him, and thus declare him an unfit heir to previous generations' supremacist glory, then Jesse can no longer claim membership in the White, racial category. Feminized and unwhitened, in his tomb, Jesse becomes his opposite, a Black woman. For Jesse, then, the anxiety attached to nonexistent whiteness is the fear of embodying death, or Black femininity.[23]

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[20] Ibid., 229
[21] Ibid., 229
[22] Ibid., 229
[23] Baldwin may have anticipated this reading by naming his protagonist "Jesse," an androgynous designation.

While Jesse's position beside Grace suggests an interracial, lesbian interaction that further erodes his White, masculine restoration, the car he hears nearing his house ensures that his racial revival remains unrealized. Baldwin writes, "he heard a car coming north on the road and he half sat up, his hand reaching for his holster, which was on a chair near the bed, on top of his pants. The lights hit the shutters and seemed to travel across the room and then went out."[24] Jesse assumes that in the car are "some liver-lipped students" who "would be at the court-house tomorrow."[25] He concludes, "the niggers were getting ready."[26] Because Baldwin uses light to symbolize power and authority, the car lights serve as an extension of the power and authority these Black students appropriate from Jesse. When the lights filter into the bedroom through shutters, creating multiple, phallic illuminations that "travel across," or push into, the room, representations of the forces which once animated his being now penetrate him. In other words, Baldwin suggests the power and authority of Black political agency and voice penetrates, and thus further feminizes, Jesse as a Black woman. In Baldwin's configuration of Jesse, Jesse not only becomes the sex and race of those he molests, but he feels molested as a result of his ruined whiteness and confrontation with how Black citizenship means. That Baldwin presents Jesse as racially and sexually violated because of Black political empowerment underscores Jesse's psychological instability and gestures toward the self-inflicted terror at the root of his violent memories.

Although Jesse prevents himself from the conscious recognition of his unsexed, unwhitened, and violated condition, when he reaches for his holster—as when he reaches for Grace—he seeks to remedy the encroaching feeling of impotent whiteness by brandishing his

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[24] Baldwin, James. *Going to Meet the Man*. Vintage International, 1995. 229.
[25] Ibid., 230
[26] Ibid., 230

"weapon." Yet Baldwin makes clear that Jesse does not reach for his gun. Instead, his hand grasps for his holster, a vacant space wherein his symbolic phallus should fill. The absence of Jesse's "gun" forces him to realize, on some level, that he is incapable of marshalling symbolic racial or masculine power to protect himself and Grace from emboldened African Americans. Because the vacant space of his holster reiterates Grace's "vacant space" that is also absent of his phallus, Baldwin uses the holster to emphasize Jesse's distance from his ideal, White self. That Baldwin positions the vacant space of the holster atop Jesse's pants, themselves a traditional signifier of manhood, privileges this emblem of his emasculation. For Baldwin, the bedroom, Grace, the holster, the passing car, and the light it produces instill in Jesse, what Saidiya Hartman refers to as, "the terror of the mundane."[27] To counter such terror, Jesse recalls a time when if he "wanted more spice than Grace could give him," he would "pick up a black piece or arrest her."[28] He conjures this image of rape in an attempt to resurrect a White self. Yet when he launches a racist tirade against those he maintains are "no better than animals," his revivalist project crumbles as his chief insult characterizes his current condition. After asserting that African Americans "lived like animals," Jesse recalls, "their houses were dark, with oil cloth or cardboard in the windows."[29] These curious details intend to highlight African Americans' dislocation from whiteness, and thus for Jesse, humanity. Yet because darkness fills his own house, his description of the life blackness lacks serves as his subconscious realization of his death status.

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[27] Hartman, Saidiya. *Scenes of Subjection: Terror, Slavery, and Self-Making in Nineteenth Century America*. New York: Oxford University Press, 1997. 4.
[28] Baldwin, James. *Going to Meet the Man*. Vintage International, 1995. 230.
[29]Ibid., 231

Suffering from the absence of any avenue for identity reintegration and from thoughts that affirm his grave condition, Jesse retreats deeper into his memory, further into his index of White barbarity and monstrous masculinity. The anxiety that defines his death status is "an expression and outcome of hidden as well as socially manifested obsessive neuroses."[30] Therefore Jesse's mind journeys to sites that not only soothe his vexed psychology, but present racial terrorism as social convention as well as individual and communal obligation. Before Jesse arrives at his first destination, he awakens Grace, attempting to include her in his travels. Although she awakens long enough to repeat her request for him to sleep, Baldwin notes that for Jesse, "it was all right. He knew that he was not alone."[31] When Jesse arrives at his memory of African Americans' registering to vote earlier that day, he speaks to his unconscious wife, laughing as he reveals, '"they wouldn't stay where Big Jim C. wanted them, no, they had to start blocking traffic around the court house…and Big Jim C. told them to disperse and they wouldn't move, they just kept up that singing."[32] Refusing to move at the sheriff's command, Jesse suggests that his fellow deputies "had to beat him ["the ringleader"] and a couple of others" before incarcerating them."[33] Jesse situates this scene as the foundation upon which to evidence African Americans' disruption of the racial order and to assert his duty to prevent further social erosion by continuing the "ringleader's" punishment. However, Baldwin uses this scene not only to illustrate Jesse's recognition that African Americans' voices and bodies exist removed

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[30] Griffith, Paul. "James Baldwin's Confrontation with Racist Terror in the American South: Sexual Mythology and Psychoneurosis in "Going to Meet the Man." *Journal of Black Studies*, vol. 32, no. 5, May 2002. 511.
[31] Baldwin, James. *Going to Meet the Man*. Vintage International, 1995. 231.
[32] Ibid., 232
[33] Ibid., 232

from their relationship to White supremacy, but to announce Jesse's absence from this scene of racial regulation.

Believing that he is charged to maintain a White nationalist agenda, it makes sense that Jesse would find himself among other perpetrators of violence. Yet Baldwin does not locate Jesse in this scene, as Jesse informs Grace, "*I* didn't see this nigger till I got to the jail."[34] Baldwin italicizes Jesse's "I" as a way of marking him as unsuitable for upholding White communal values. While other "law enforcement" agents work to suppress African Americans' voices and rights at the site wherein racial attitudes and restrictions are codified into law, Baldwin prevents Jesse from participating in this endeavor. Although Jesse uses his memory of this scene to signal the transition from the "ringleader's" beating in front of the courthouse to the beating he receives from Jesse, this memory, like Jesse's recollection of African American homes, subconsciously remind him that he is not an adequate representation or enforcer of White supremacist ideology. Indeed, because he does not participate in other deputies' acts of suppression and intimidation, Baldwin distances Jesse from this fraternity of White rage. Jesse's subsequent memory, then, must not only convey his White identity, but also proclaim his White masculinity.

When his memory shifts to the "ringleader" in the jail cell, Jesse, again speaking to an unconscious Grace, states that he "was lying on the ground jerking and moaning…and blood was coming out of his ears from where Big Jim C. and his boys had whipped him."[35] After Jesse "put the prod to him," causing the man to again jerk and scream, Jesse shouts, '"You make them

[34] Ibid., 232
[35] Ibid., 232

stop that singing…you hear me.'"[36] That the man "didn't have much voice left" after his second beating produces profound pleasure and satisfaction in Jesse. Yet this joy is superseded by the "peculiar excitement which refused to be released" when he prods the man under his arms, witnesses blood "coming from his mouth," and notices that the man had "pissed his pants already."[37] Observing the man's urinary incontinence causes Jesse's mouth to feel dry and makes "his throat…as rough as sandpaper."[38] Baldwin shows that the pronounced effect of Jesse's "peculiar excitement" relates to the effect he has on the man's penis. While the beating Jesse inflicts does not murder the man, Jesse's reaction signals that he has symbolically murdered the man's masculinity. Trudier Harris notes that in Baldwin's works, "the prevailing metaphor for understanding the white man's need to suppress the black man "is that his sexual prowess depends on the subjugation of African American masculinity."[39] In other words, Jesse delights not only in symbolically murdering the Black man's masculinity, but in recognizing that through this murder he can resurrect his own masculinity and identity. Because Jesse now feels the excitement that was "far-away" from him earlier, he begins to resurrect his White, masculine authority.

The particular language and imagery Jesse uses as he feels himself restored further indicates the character of his resurrection. After repeating, "you all are going to stop your singing,"[40] Jesse describes the voting line as repugnant to his White sensibilities and a social disruption. Continuing to prod the man, Jesse shouts, "you are going to stop coming down to the

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[36] Ibid., 232
[37] Ibid., 232
[38] Ibid., 232
[39] Harris, Trudier. Exorcising Blackness: Historical and Literary Lynching and Burning Rituals. Indiana University Press, 1985. 320.
[40] Baldwin, James. *Going to Meet the Man*. Vintage International, 1995. 232.

courthouse and disrupting traffic and molesting the people and keeping us from our duties and keeping doctors from getting to sick white women and getting all them Northerners in this town to give our town a bad name."[41] Whereas Baldwin distances Jesse from "controlling" the line of African Americans, and thus shows that the sheriff does not trust Jesse to enforce racial order, through the image he invokes, Jesse situates himself in front of the courthouse as witness to the offensive formation. Suggesting that he too is a member of the fraternity of White rage, Jesse beats the man with his "cattle prod" as he suggests that the line renders impossible the preservation of a society steeped in whiteness as social convention. Although Grace has metaphorically castrated him, he uses his reclaimed masculinity, of which the phallic weapon is sign, to speak as protector of White femininity and maintaining its symbolic value. Yet Jesse invokes the image of a doctor not simply to suggest that only White communal members—and especially those who can produce White communal members—are worthy of restoration, but also as a veiled insult that declares the absurdity of restoring the beaten man's body and masculinity. A racial order that must be perpetually strengthened and fiercely protected may give the town a bad name, but it ensures that Jesse lives up to the birthright of which his name, gender, and race attests.

As restored defender of a White supremacist social design and defender of its most important feature, Jesse prods the man's testicles, alerting the man to his metaphoric castration, thus making him witness to his murdered masculinity and Jesse's resurrected authority. When Jesse recognizes that after prodding the man's testicles, "the scream did not come out, only a kind of rattle and a moan,"[42] the symbol of his white masculinity becomes erect as the terrorism

[41] Ibid., 232-3
[42] Ibid., 233

and violence he inflicts finally produces silence. After kicking the man and thinking, "*this ain't no nigger, this is a goddamn bull*," Jesse begins to shake, feels "very close to a very peculiar, particular joy, and grabs "his privates."[43] His erection, formed from the combination of destroying Black masculinity and safeguarding racist values, is the manifestation of his self-reclamation. Baldwin illustrates that Jesse's symbolic phallus gives rise to his actual phallus to demonstrate that Jesse bases his "entire position and being on not being black,"[44] on hating all that White supremacist ideology needs black skin to represent. Baldwin suggests that occupying such a "negative space of violent disavowal" animates Jesse and transforms him into the most potent signifier of White, masculine authority offered in the narrative thus far.[45]

It is at this zenith of racial power that Baldwin dislocates Jesse from his restored self. Before Jesse leaves the cell, the man calls out to him, stating, '"White man,"' then asking, '"you remember Old Julia?'"[46] With "his mouth full of blood and one eye barely open," he reveals, '"my grandmother's name was Mrs. Julia Blossom. *Mrs.* Julia Blossom. You going to call our women by their right names yet.—And those kids ain't going to stop singing. We going to keep on singing until every one of you miserable white mothers go stark raving out of your minds."[47] That he designates Jesse "White and man," suggests that the man understands Jesse, that he realizes that these two descriptors inform the totality of his interiority and psychology. With a voice Jesse was assured his revived authority silenced, the man transforms "White man" from characterization to an indictment of what Jesse is not. Designating him "White man" forces

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[43] Jesse's behaviors also reveal the homoerotic implications of this moment. Ibid., 233
[44] Patell, Shireen R. K. "We the People," Who? James Baldwin and the Traumatic Constitution of These United States." Comparative Literature Studies, vol. 48, no. 3, Sept. 2011. 372.
[45] Ibid., 372
[46] Baldwin, James. *Going to Meet the Man*. Vintage International, 1995. 233.
[47] Ibid., 233

Jesse to reconcile his reclaimed self with his recognition of an African American who exists outside of a White supremacist framing with a voice his authority could not suppress. In other words, Baldwin indicates that the man's voice simultaneously invokes Jesse's ideal self and undermines it. That the man identifies Jesse's governing belief systems, whiteness and masculinity, also discloses that he has effectively penetrated Jesse's psychology, and thus, feminized him. Having stripped Jesse of his most precious attributes, the man extends the scene of humiliation not only by demanding dignity for Black women and celebrating Black voices, but also by renaming Jesse and other law enforcement agents, '"White mothers."' Because Jesse makes clear that White femininity requires protection, renaming Jesse a "White mother" reverses the imagery Jesse creates of sheltered White womanhood and refigures him as a White woman without a defender who will remain vexed by Black presences.

While the man delegitimizes Jesse as racial authority, he also feminizes Big Jim C. and his deputies, thus invalidating the entire structure of Southern, racial order and reinterpreting the generations of enforcers connected to it. Yet while the man's words undermine Jesse and his community's White, masculine ideal, Baldwin also uses them to show the interrelation between Jesse's own memory and his racial and sexual impotency. When Jesse looks again at the man's bleeding and swollen face, he "suddenly remembered him" as the grandson of one of his former mail-order customers.[48] He then slips into another, older memory in which he and the bleeding man conversed. Jesse recalls that after walking into Julia Blossom's yard, he observes a boy—who is the man at a younger age—"sitting in a swing," refusing to return the smile Jesse offers.[49] After he asks, "'Old Julia home?"' "the boy looked at him for a long time before he answered.

[48] Ibid., 234
[49] Ibid., 234

'Don't know Old Julia live here.'" Offended by how the boy addresses him, Jesse shouts, '"Hey! Old Julia.'" A long silence answers him, and he feels that "he had been caught up in a nightmare, a nightmare dreamed by a child."[50] To connect the man's use of the words, "White man," with the effect these words generate when Jesse hears them from the boy, Baldwin italicizes "White man" in Jesse memory. When the boy refuses to answer if his grandmother had "gone out," Jesse turns to leave, then stops suddenly to offer the boy "some chewing gum." The boy responds, '"I don't want nothing you got, white man,'" then walks into the house and closes the door.[51]

This memory demonstrates that Jesse's own lived experiences evidence his unauthoritative, unwhitened self. Although the man dismantles Jesse's resurrectionary project, his words summon a memory that causes Jesse to destroy its remaining vestiges. In other words, when the man mentions his grandmother's name, it is Jesse who remembers a "scene of challenge and humiliation by a young black boy from whom he expects no resistance."[52] Baldwin, then, conveys that Jesse's memory, the safe space of his identity restoration, turns on him as he participates in his own destruction. Jesse situates himself in a moment absent of White dominion, and Baldwin reveals that such an absence terrorizes Jesse, or entraps him in a nightmare of enfeebled whiteness. When the boy refuses to divulge his grandmother's location, he makes clear what he reiterates as an adult: his voice is an instrument of Black protection and agency that Jesse's demands cannot manipulate. Furthermore, feigned kindness also cannot influence the boy as he refuses the chewing gum and removes himself from Jesse.

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[50] Ibid., 234
[51] Ibid., 234
[52] Patell, Shireen R. K. "We the People," Who? James Baldwin and the Traumatic Constitution of These United States." Comparative Literature Studies, vol. 48, no. 3, Sept. 2011. 378.

Enraged by the feeling of terror he creates, Jesse returns to his memory of the jail cell, and while sweating and trembling, he desires to "pistol whip him [the man] until the boy's head burst open like a melon."[53] That the man and Jesse's memory render another phallic weapon without "bullets" explains why Jesse can only wish to whip the man. An ineffective "gun" not only undermines Jesse's attempt to envision himself as White, masculine authority, but Baldwin reinforces this idea with Jesse's peculiar thoughts. Jesse notices that singing filled him as though it were a weird, uncontrollable, monstrous howling rumbling up from the depths of his own belly."[54] If Jesse has been symbolically castrated and feminized by the man and himself, then the notion of African Americans' songs filing his "belly" suggests that he interprets these sounds as a force that impregnates. Just as the man penetrates Jesse's mind to discover his two animating yearnings, Black voices "fill" Jesse, allowing to gestate within him the very sounds of political unrest that he was charged to subdue. Baldwin frames Jesse as a woman whose terror at the inability to silence Black agency manifest in him as monstrous fetus. Subconsciously realizing his existential and symbolic condition, Jesse erupts, "you lucky we *pump* some white blood into you every once in a while—your women!"[55] With this declaration, Jesse, "to his bewilderment, his horror, beneath his own fingers, he felt himself violently stiffen—with no warning at all."[56] As a result, he "dropped his hands and he stared at the boy and he left the cell."[57]

Jesse is bewildered and horrified not because his erection occurs in the presence of the man, but simply because it occurs, that beneath his fingers exist an erection, and a penis, that has

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[53] Baldwin, James. *Going to Meet the Man*. Vintage International, 1995. 235.
[54] Ibid., 234
[55] Ibid., 234
[56] Ibid., 235
[57] Ibid., 235

been repeatedly removed from him. Although Jesse's sudden erection seems to problematize Baldwin's configuration of a laboring and suffering Jesse pregnant with what he can never acknowledge, Baldwin uses this temporary moment of rejuvenation to establish the narrative's most powerful critique of White supremacist ideology. Baldwin presents his argument when Jesse's memory transitions from the cell to the Black man's lynching. Because Jesse's plan to use the man he beats as the site of his resurrected White, masculine identity fails, Jesse locates an older, more sadistic memory that he believes protects him from further emasculation and unwhitening. If his memory of the man in the cell delegitimizes his position as law enforcer, racial regulator, and the embodiment of White supremacy and masculinity, then it makes sense that he would return to a space that reinforces White communal values at an age that would make actual or symbolic pregnancy unlikely. It also makes sense that this space would offer a Black man who functions as an unproblematic site of White identity resurrection.

Before Jesse remembers the man's death, he recalls his parents' disposition and the community's celebration of the ritualistic torture and murdering of the man. As his parents' car ascends the hill on which the lynching occurs, Jesse observes his mother and father "looking at something he could not see."[58] Watching his father view the man suspended over the fire, Jesse notices that "his father's lips had a strange, cruel curve" and that he "wet his lips from time to time, and swallowed."[59] Witnessing his father's transformation, Jesse was "terribly aware of his father's tongue, it was as though he had never seen it before. And his father's body seemed immense, bigger than a mountain. His eyes, which were grey-green, looked yellow in sunlight; or at least there was a light in them which he [Jesse] had never seen before."[60] Baldwin notes

[58] Ibid., 244
[59] Ibid., 244
[60] Ibid., 244

that Jesse's mother, who was "younger and prettier than most of the other women" attending the lynching and wearing "the dress she wore to church," patted her hair and adjusted its ribbon as her gaze moves from the dying man to her reflection in the rearview mirror.[61] Jesse's father remarks, '"You look all right…When that nigger looks at you, he's going to swear he throwed his life away for nothing. Wouldn't be surprised if he don't come back to haunt you." That Jesse's father frightens his wife after complementing her reiterates William Pinar's contention that "in America, terror and enjoyment converged on the site of the black body."[62] The sight of the black body facilitates the black body as site wherein White sexuality and gender performance are maintained. Baldwin supports this idea through his description of the father's face. That he wets his curved lips and sees from eyes illuminated by a peculiar light illustrates the father's sexual arousal at the sight and site of the black body.

When Jesse views his father's body as immense and bigger, Baldwin shows that even before Jesse observes the lynching spectacle, he understands the aggrandizing effect that viewing the burning body should produce. He also understands that the particular dress his mother chooses and her attention to her hair does not simply convey the relationship between White femininity and Black degradation, but also situates her as preparing for a communal rite that has all the elements of a religious rite.[63] When the family reaches the clearing, Jesse notices the well-dressed crowd and individuals carrying food as though "it was a Fourth of July picnic."[64] From atop his father's shoulders he also views a "gleaming chain" that "bound two black hands

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[61] Ibid., 242, 244
[62] Pinar, William. *The Gender of Racial Politics and Violence in America: Lynching, Prison Rape, and the Crisis of Masculinity*. Peter Lang Inc., 2001. 42.
[63] Harris, Trudier. Exorcising Blackness: Historical and Literary Lynching and Burning Rituals. Indiana University Press, 1985. 86.
[64] Baldwin, James. *Going to Meet the Man*. Vintage International, 1995. 242.

together at the wrist."[65] As friends of Jesse's father raise and lower the man into the fire, Jesse realizes that the man's hairline, like his father's and his own, formed a widow's peak and that the man was naked and bigger than his father. Baldwin suggests that each instance the man is lowered into the fire intends to dehumanize him, thus preventing Jesse from identifying with him and forcing the man to signify as the apex of White rage. The distance created between Jesse's humanity and the man's communicates "Southern terrorist violence as a continual process of cultural reinforcement" and Jesse's initiation into a belief system that "normalized hatred and validated sadistic rituals of terrorist violence against Blacks."[66] Yet for Baldwin, the community's sight and site of the man also registers as religious observance. The community, and now Jesse, interprets racism and racial violence as "an entrenched mode of cultural expression as unquestioned and as impassioned as an expression of faith."[67] Paul Griffith argues that White communities' understanding of race in this way rehearses what Baldwin meant in declaring, "the nigger actually exists; for we believe that he exists. Whenever we encounter him amongst us in the flesh, our flesh is made perfect and his necessary and bloody end is executed with a mystical ferocity of joy."[68]

Jesse anticipates such joy as the community delights in the men holding death on a leash, "which they lengthened little by little."[69] The man's burning flesh perfumed the crowd with the smell of white supremacy, and Jesse watched his mother's face. Jesse observes, "her eyes were

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[65] Ibid., 246
[66] Griffith, Paul. "James Baldwin's Confrontation with Racist Terror in the American South: Sexual Mythology and Psychoneurosis in "Going to Meet the Man." *Journal of Black Studies,* vol. 32, no. 5, May 2002. 512, 509.
[67] Ibid., 514
[68] Baldwin, James. *The Price of the Ticket: Collected Nonficition 1948-1985*. St. Martin-Marek, 1985. 74.
[69] Baldwin, James. *Going to Meet the Man*. Vintage International, 1995. 247.

very bright, her mouth was open" and concludes, she was more beautiful than he had ever seen her, and more strange."[70] The new and peculiar joy Jesse feels as he watches the burning body and notices his mother's beauty, connects this emotion with the excitement and erection he experiences when he recognizes the effect he has on the beaten man's penis. In other words, this moment connects the murder of Black masculinity and restoration of White masculinity with female arousal and ideal, White femininity. This moment, then, further attests to Jesse's corrupt psychology and foreshadows the emergence of another phallic object used to symbolically murder Black masculinity. Baldwin provides this object as Jesse remembers, "one of his father's friends reached up and in his hands he held a knife."[71] Jesse "wished that he had been that man" who held "a long, bright knife" that was "brighter than the fire."[72] Jesse watches as the man "walked up to the hanging body," weighted "the nigger's privates in his hand, and cut the "dreadful thing away."[73] That the crowd responds by screaming evidences their release of what Roger Whitlow identifies as a "communal orgasm."[74] This collective release exhibits the community not only destroying the mythical, monstrous black phallus, but also partaking in that monster. Calvin Hernton argues that castration functions as a "disguised form of worship, a primitive pornographic divination rite" wherein "white men hope to acquire the grotesque powers they have assigned to the Negro phallus…by destroying it."[75]

Having been initiated into the community, Baldwin demonstrates that "the idea of the black man's dangerous and enviable potency is unforgettably implanted" in Jesse's mind, and

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[70] Ibid., 247
[71] Ibid., 247
[72] Ibid., 247
[73] Ibid., 247-8
[74] Whitlow, Roger. "Baldwin's 'Going to Meet the Man": Racial Brutality and Sexual Gratification." *Critical Essays on James Baldwin*. Boston: G.K. Hall, 1988. 197.
[75] Hernton, Calvin. *Sex and Racism in America*. New York: Double Day & Company, 1965. 117.

that Jesse participates in acquiring the powers of the black phallus as he achieves his first erection."[76] Baldwin describes Jesse's erection when, immediately preceding the castration, "Jesse felt his scrotum tighten."[77] Accompanying this sensation, he describes the man's penis as huge, huge, much bigger than his father's, flaccid, hairless, the largest thing he had seen till then and the blackest."[78] Suggesting that Jesse's father also suffers from impotency, yet positioning him as participant in the transference of Black masculinity, shows Baldwin arguing that the racial authority Jesse's father, and now Jesse, wields is informed only by destroying Black masculinity. In other words, because Jesse and his father subconsciously believe that they are bankrupt of inherent authority, they must claim White authority by murdering the black phallus. They, then, must repeatedly destroy the Black phallus, therefore restoring White authority, whenever Black masculinity appears to threaten White masculinity. Jesse understands the cycle of murder and resurrection as "a great secret which would be the key to his life forever."

Although Jesse seems to have successfully resurrected his masculinity and racial identity, Baldwin again uses the castration scene to undermine Jesse's restoration. Before the castrated man burns to death, he "looked straight into Jess's eyes" for what seems "longer than a year."[79] The intensity of their eye contact suggests that this moment transfers another secret to Jesse, a realization he can never accept. If Jesse recognizes the symbolic representation of the black phallus and understands that his father is dislocated from such "natural" and "essential" power which Jesse must embody, then Baldwin implies that the Black man serves as a surrogate father

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[76] Freese, Peter. "James Baldwin: Going to Meet the Man." The Black American Short Story in the 20th Century: A collection of Critical Essays. Ed. Peter Bruck. Amsterdam: B.R. Gruner Publishing Co., 1977. 178-9.
[77] Baldwin, James. *Going to Meet the Man*. Vintage International, 1995. 248.
[78] Ibid., 248
[79] Ibid., 248

whose sustained eye contact transmits Jesse's sexual potency. Whereas Baldwin reveals that Jesse retreats deeper in his memory when Black presences frustrate his resurrectionary project, at the lynching, Jesse does not realize that his own memory has again undermined a White, supremacist revival. Although he hears his mother and biological father have sex when the family returns to their home following the lynching, Jesse does not identify with this example of his biological father's sexual potency. Instead, he remains unified with his surrogate father, and his phallus remains a reproduction of the Black man's sexuality.

III

Not recognizing that his restored White, masculine identity is not white, but that it is only a reproduction of how he has configured Black masculine, authority, Jesse's mind returns to the tomb of a bedroom as his penis now responds to desire. Because Jesse subconsciously realizes the source of his revived potency, he declares to Grace, "come on, sugar, I'm going to do you like a nigger, just like a nigger." Yet when Jesse demands, "come on, sugar, and love me just like you'd love a nigger," he must imaginatively enter Grace's body "in order to fantasize how she will enjoy the event as if a black man" were pleasing her sexually.[80] In his sexual encounter with Grace, then, Jesse again feminizes himself, revealing that his "sensory experience is not heightened only as a man, but as well like a woman, as a woman he imagines himself to be."[81] It makes sense that Grace is the woman Jesse imagines himself to be. However, because Jesse emphasizes his mother's beauty and sexuality during the lynching and when the family returns home, Grace functions as a representation of what his previous racial and sexual impotency

[80] Pinar, William. *The Gender of Racial Politics and Violence in America: Lynching, Prison Rape, and the Crisis of Masculinity*. Peter Lang Inc., 2001. 61.
[81] Ibid., 62

prevented: the attraction and acceptance of the most ideal form of White femininity. In other words, as Jesse labors "harder than he ever had before,"[82] he unwittingly terrorizes himself by using the sexual potency derived from his surrogate father to please Grace, a replacement for his mother.

More than a "hideous parable of the 60s,"[83] "Going" frames racial violence as acts of racial terror that further distort and subconsciously terrorize identities rooted in Black subjugation. In his critique of "the plasticity of race as an instrument of power," Baldwin argues that while the "ritual of lynching…served as a dramatization of hierarchical power relationships based on gender and on race," other, less conspicuous forms of racial coercion, also solidified White communal values.[84] Not only do Jesse's memories of raping Black women and beating the incarcerated man connect these private events to the public lynching, but by writing that the lynching resembles a fourth of July picnic, Baldwin argues that there exists a national epidemic of public and private efforts to resurrect White identities by manipulating Black bodies. In "Going," Baldwin suggests that while racial terror maims Black bodies and minds, it also permanently disfigures the minds of its practitioners. Shireen Patell describes the effect of racial terror on the perpetrator as having been "absolutely estranged by the violent racism that gives

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[82] Baldwin, James. *Going to Meet the Man*. Vintage International, 1995. 249.
[83] Peden, William. "The Black Explosion." *Studies in Short Fiction*, vol. 12, no. 3, Summer75. 235.
[84] Hartman, Saidiya. *Scenes of Subjection: Terror, Slavery, and Self-Making in Nineteenth Century America*. New York: Oxford University Press, 1997. 119. Hall, Jacqueline Dowd. Revolt Against Chivalry: Jessie Daniel Ames and the Women's Campaign Against Lynching. New York: Columbia, 1979. 156.

rise to its own identity."[85] For Baldwin, this estrangement engenders a "traumatic forgetting" whereby the racist self suppresses human empathy, along with Black subjectivity.[86]

[85] Patell, Shireen R. K. "We the People," Who? James Baldwin and the Traumatic Constitution of These United States." Comparative Literature Studies, vol. 48, no. 3, Sept. 2011. 372.
[86] Ibid., 372.

Conclusion

Through its investigation of the motif of death and resurrection in African American literature and culture, *Trustees of Defiance* explores the ways in which African American culture bearers articulate renewed personhood through literature from 1772 to 1987. Beginning with an examination of the Kongo cosmogram, Afro-Protestantism, and how these orientations and philosophies informed and sustained enslaved Africans, I have argued that the combination of African derived beliefs and Christianity allowed enslaved Africans to interpret death as a pathway to fundamental transformation. By understanding death as the precondition for a reclaimed self, enslaved Africans reinterpreted their living death status. *Trustees of Defiance* argues that by maintaining a cultural and religious interpretation of death as a temporary state which facilitated total transformation, enslaved persons accepted the possibility of conceiving of themselves beyond their slave status. I have argued that conceiving of themselves outside of the racist ways in which black skin signified enabled enslaved persons to dislocate themselves from the, in Nell Painter's term, "soul murder" that defined their living death status.[1] In other words, *Trustees of Defiance* presents enslaved Africans' bondage not simply as a "substitute for death, usually violent death," but as a condition to which they could die in order to achieve psychological and spiritual restoration.[2] *Trustees of Defiance* argues that such restoration conveys the achievement of resurrection, whereby enslaved persons attained renewed subjectivity and personhood. This work also characterizes enslaved persons' performance of their renewed subjectivity and personhood as resurrected embodiment. I have revealed that the

[1] Painter, Nell Irvin. *Soul Murder and Slavery*. Baylor University Press, 1995. 8, Print.
[2] See note 4 in the Introduction.

demonstration of resurrected embodiment activated the enslaved and self-freed to perform the sacred imperative of establishing or furthering communities of renewed peoples.

Although the motif of death and resurrection entered African American culture through Afro-Protestantism, this work argues that the religious origin of the motif did not preclude articulations of radical dislocation and fundamental renewal in other African American cultural pronouncements. This work examines how one of those pronouncements, literary expression, transmitted the motif of death and resurrection. The Western world's reverence for the written word as a signifier of intellectual and spiritual capacity motivated African descended people to write themselves into Eurocentric conceptions of humanity. By authoring their narratives, African descended people also resisted their imposed identity as inferior nonbeings. Therefore, authoring their narratives enabled them to attain new life as persons resurrected into humanity. *Trustees of Defiance* demonstrates that to reinforce their narratives' resurrectionary project, authors such as James Albert Ukawsaw Gronniosaw presented themselves as having proceeded through multiple death and resurrection experiences. Gronniosaw chooses to divest himself of his African cultural heritage in order to announce himself metaphorically resurrected as a White Calvinist. By first asserting a natural predisposition to Christianity, Gronniosaw situates himself as divinely favored and predestined for heaven. He then combines his predestinarian orientation with a providentialist argument that frames the African slave trade as part of the grand historical design that God employed to achieve "the redemption of the regenerate."[3] My analysis of *A Narrative of the Most Remarkable Particulars in the Life of James Albert Ukawsaw Gronniosaw* reveals that by distancing himself from his African family and appealing to conservative and progressive religious persuasions, Gronniosaw widens his readership, thus presenting his

[3] See note 60 in Chapter Two.

resurrected self to a wider audience. Yet *Trustees of Defiance* shows that because Gronniosaw chooses to eschew African prescriptions for total renewal, he unwittingly reifies the same White supremacist ideologies from which he seeks radical dislocation.

Gronniosaw's narrative makes clear the hazards of negotiating resurrected embodiment for early Black authors. His frustrated quest to assert himself renewed and separate from unredeemable blackness highlights the insidious nature of White supremacy and the problems that arise from rejecting heritage in the quest for restoration. However, whereas Gronniosaw rejects his African heritage, Jarena Lee not only uses African resonances to attain spiritual regeneration that dislocates her from a self that does not resist racist and sexist treatment, but her regenerated spirituality becomes the foundation for her secular conversion and resurrection. By examining *The Life and Religious Experience of Jarena Lee*, *Trustees of Defiance* registers the similarities between the details of Lee's metaphorical suicide and the Kongo cosmogram as an illustration of a). the African retentions that inform Lee's spiritual narrative and b). achieving a regenerated constitution rooted in West-Central African sacred beliefs as the precondition for a secular conversion and resurrection. Lee's belief in the value of her presence and voice and the demonstrations of such belief constitute her secular conversion and resurrection experiences. Yet these experiences also function as the foundation for Lee's Christian conversion and resurrection. Lee presents her conversion as a spectacular event that links her with nineteenth-century enslaved Africans and the Apostle Paul, then she suggests that traveling and speaking on behalf of God communicates her resurrection into new life in Christ and Christian ministry. After both resurrections, Lee performs the sacred imperative of furthering communities of renewed peoples. *Trustees of Defiance* maintains that Lee's formula for renewed personhood nuances the motif of death and resurrection to include African resonances, a reevaluation of

African American womanhood, and the achievement of resurrection outside of a Judeo-Christian framing. I have argued that the possibility of accessing a reclaimed, secular self informed slave narrative authors' presentations of death and resurrection.

Yet *Trustees of Defiance* also illustrates how James Baldwin further nuances the motif, extending Lee's interpretation of the character of secular resurrection and its significance in the lives of African Americans. Although Lee's nuance of the motif includes African resonances and focuses acute attention on the interiority of her African American female self, in "Going to Meet the Man," Baldwin investigates how death and resurrection manifests in the mind of his White, racist protagonist. Baldwin also reveals how racial terrorism not only maims Black bodies, but also corrupts the minds of its White practitioners. While Baldwin suggests that racial violence serves to solidify the bonds that connect White supremacy with individual, communal, and national identity, *Trustees of Defiance* argues that Baldwin most poignantly critiques Jesse's relationship with masculinity. This work contends that by exercising political agency, African Americans produce Jesse's racial impotency which engenders his sexual impotency. Because Jesse perceives his racial identity, and therefore his sexual identity, as "diminished and besieged,"[4] his mental retreats into moments of monstrous brutality seek to transform black bodies into instruments and sites of White rage. That Jesse returns to such moments suggests that the experience of participating in sexual violence and heinous murder transfers black male agency to him, thus serving to resurrect his failed racial and masculine identity. Yet *Trustees of Defiance* reveals that with every memory of White supremacist revival, Jesse undermines his resurrectionary project and positions himself feminized and removed from the racist forefathers he valorizes. I have argued that in "Going," Baldwin revises nineteenth and twentieth-century

[4] See note 15 in Chapter Four.

African American authors' figuration of the motif to chart the development of White supremacist and hyper-masculine preoccupations in order to expose the dangerous fallacies at their center.

II

I have designated enslaved Africans, the self-freed, Gronniosaw, Lee, and Baldwin "trustees of defiance" because these persons resist the notion of inferior, unprogressive black identity, and they maintain the motif of death and resurrection in African American culture. By resisting the ways in which the Western world understood the signs of black and white skin, these persons communicate the value of African descended peoples' interiority while subverting the racist structures that sanctioned oppression. As I have illustrated, trustees' cultural and literary contributions present counter-narratives to these structures which serve to undermine the notion of innate Black spiritual and intellectual depravity. Trustees not only demonstrate that God affirms African American subjectivity and works through black bodies to vivify others, but they assert that the perception of superior whiteness is rooted in the refusal to see the fragile and fictitious foundation upon which it rests. That they accurately observe this fraudulent foundation and present themselves fundamentally renewed and radically dislocated from racist ideologies evidences their revision of what James Coleman terms, "faithful vision." Coleman contends that faithful vision represents African Americans' implementation of a Judeo-Christian ethic and African worldviews to "emerge from the destructive past as complex human beings."[5] He argues that as a cultural practice, African Americans accrue agency and personhood by marshalling their beliefs in the "sacred, spiritual, and supernatural."[6] Coleman maintains that "faithful vision

[5] Coleman, James W. *Faithful Vision: Treatments of the Sacred, Spiritual, and Supernatural in Twentieth-Century African American Fiction*. Louisiana State University Press, 2009. 2, Print.
[6] Ibid., 2

emphasizes a daily individual struggle related to the group experience…and encompasses the personal need to do what is necessary…to survive and accomplish goals."[7]

While Coleman observes twentieth-century African American novelists' investment in faithful vision, my work shows that trustees incorporated African resonances and Afro-Protestantism to faithfully see themselves beyond existential and racial limitations. Furthermore, my work evidences the ways in which twentieth-century African American authors sharpen their faithful vision to better describe the pernicious ideologies that African Americans confronted throughout American history. In other words, trustees make clear that the individual needs of African Americans evolved throughout American history as did their political preoccupations. The nineteenth-century witnessed enslaved Africans, the self-freed, and Jarena Lee combining West-Central African beliefs with Christianity to present themselves resurrected before performing their sacred imperatives. However, James Albert Ukawsaw Gronniosaw's eighteenth-century portrait of total renewal finds the exhibition of African cultural and communal values antithetical to the achievement of personhood and respectability. James Baldwin's twentieth-century need is not expressed in a desire to reject his African heritage, to present resurrected African Americans, or to adhere to a sacred imperative, but rather by undermining racism's core tenets, thereby enlightening African Americans to the deceitful character and complex structure of the racism they confront. In their presentations and revisions of the death and resurrection motif, then, trustees represent the expression of fundamental transformation and communal edification as deeply embedded in the African American cultural and literary imagination. I have argued that trustees' communicate the value of African descended people's interiority and resistance to oppression by reconsidering the nature of death

[7] Ibid., 2-3

and resurrection, and I have demonstrated that this endeavor serves a ritual function in African American culture and literature.

Such ritual function not only evidences faithful vision, but it also reshapes the conventions of African American protest. Because the motif occasions an illustration of overwhelming injustice, yet the possibility for American society to transcend entrenched prejudice, trustees implicitly rehearse the African American jeremiad tradition. David Howard-Pitney argues that the African American jeremiad derives from American puritans' adaptation of Jeremiah's lamentation and prophecy of revitalization to create "a unique version of this rhetorical tradition."[8] American Puritans' unique version established an American jeremiad that conveyed "a rhetoric of indignation," expressing deep dissatisfaction and urgently challenging the nation to reform."[9] However, whereas Puritans used the American jeremiad to reorient early America to Christian salvation, Willie J. Harrell maintains that the African American jeremiad sought to transform a racially oppressive American society by warning White Americans of God's divine retribution for their mistreatment of his people.[10] In other words, African

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[8] Howard-Pitney, David. *The African American Jeremiad: Appeals for Justice in America*. Temple Univ. Press, 2005. 5, Print.

[9] Ibid., 5

[10] Perhaps the most famous example of the African American jeremiad comes from David Walker who in 1829 published his *Appeal, in Four Articles*. Walker's *Appeal* warned that if America continued to betray its foundational creed that "All men are created equal" and if the nation continued to permit the enslavement of Black persons, then God would exact vengeance on behalf of his children. Addressing African Americans, Walker writes, "the day of our redemption from abject wretchedness draweth near, when we shall be enabled…to stretch forth our hands to the Lord our God, but there must be a willingness on our part, for GOD to do these things for us, for we may be assured that he will not take us by the hairs of our head against our will and desire, and drag us from our very, mean, low and abject condition." Walker, David. *Walker's Appeal to the Coloured Citizens of the World*. Boston: 1829. Reprinted. Hinks, Peter P., editor. Pennsylvania State University Press, 2000. 2, Print. Harrell, Willie J. *Origins of the African American Jeremiad: The Rhetorical Strategies of Social Protest and Activism, 1760-1861*. McFarland & Co, 2011. 7-8, Print.

Americans employed religious and secular rhetoric to convert White Americans to a belief in African American humanity and civil rights. This work shows that trustees' use of the motif to indict American society, achieve fundamental renewal, and persuade White Americans to abandon racist beliefs for their own identity restoration provides a new language and demonstration of the African American jeremiad. In their particular nuance of the motif, trustees reveal their reinterpretation of the African American jeremiad tradition, as they embody their protest and revive a nation dead to African American injustice.

Yet while this work underscores death and resurrection as a strategy for individual, communal, and national transformation, it also magnifies the psychological orientation and existential condition of African Americans who seek a reclaimed self. In their cultural pronouncements and literature, trustees recognize that living in America often means enduring a process of dehumanization wherein black skin becomes the motivation for invalidating African descended peoples' subjectivity, citizenship, and political agency. Culture bearers and authors affirm that such efforts of delegitimation not only foster African Americans' second-class citizenship, but also function to distance them from personhood. For trustees, then, recognizing ones status as an African descended person living in America also means recognizing the perpetual threat to Black personhood. Yet perhaps more intriguing, the texts this work analyzes suggest that the attempt to invalidate Black personhood is an act of identity erasure, whereby African Americans are figured as black bodies devoid of interiority. In other words, culture bearers and authors indicate that for Black persons, living in America risks being situated into a metaphorical death. Whereas chapter one underscores Orlando Patterson's argument relative to the social death imposed on enslaved persons, trustees declare that the threat of nonbeing status in America extends from the eighteenth to the twentieth century.

If trustees recognize that metaphorical death occasions the African American experience, then their cultural pronouncements and literature do not only reinterpret the function of death, they also serve as preventative measures to Black disposability. Therefore, this work argues that the African American endeavor to achieve fundamental transformation begins with two realizations: first, that possessing an American identity facilitates the perpetual threat of metaphorical death, or the absence of subjectivity and citizenship, and second, that death can be understood transgressively, as a strategy of resistance and radical dislocation that engenders resurrection. Culture bearers and authors, then, convey that the African American lived experience is often a choice between entering two metaphorical deaths—one dehumanizing, one liberating. Trustees' realization of these two realities does not simply present two psychological orientations, but it offers a new way of conceptualizing W.E.B. Du Bois' theory of double consciousness. Du Bois writes:

> After the Egyptian and Indian, the Greek and Roman, the Teuton and Mongolian, the Negro is a sort of seventh son, born with a veil, and gifted with second-sight in the American world,—a world which yields him no true self-consciousness, but only lets him see himself through the relation of the other world. It is a peculiar sensation, this double-consciousness, this sense of always looking at one's self through the eyes of others, of measuring one's soul by the tape of a world that looks on in amused contempt and pity. One ever feels his two-ness,—an American, a Negro: two souls, two thoughts, two

> unreconciled strivings; two warring ideals in one dark body, whose dogged strength alone keeps it from being torn asunder.[11]

Trustees suggest that at its center, the "two-ness" African Americans feel is the experience of negotiating two distinct death orientations. Knowing the black self as an American means confronting the life canceling "power of white stereotypes in black life and thought and…the practical racism that excluded every black American from the mainstream of society."[12] Yet, as Dickson D. Bruce maintains, perceiving the black self as a negro means being connected with the essence of Black life which is an African "spirituality based in Africa but revealed among African Americans in their folklore, their history of patient suffering, and their faith."[13] As chapter one shows, the idea of death as an avenue to total restoration is a central tenet in African spiritual retentions throughout the United States. And while they choose not to employ African retentions, Gronniosaw and Baldwin also refigure death to resist the same forces of white stereotypes and practical racism, thus framing their presentations of death as distinctly African American. Therefore, trustees demonstrate that the strategy of death and resurrection serves as a governing structure of African American life and psychology always in opposition to the metaphorical death that an American identity threatens. They tell us that African American life is not defined by striving to integrate both selves, but by the choice between which death consciousness to pursue. Perhaps by asserting that African Americans most desire to merge their

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[11] Du Bois, William Edward Burghardt. *The Souls of Black Folk*. Chicago: A. C. McClurg & Co. 1903. Reprinted. Blight, David and Gooding-Williams, Robert., editors. Bedford Books, 1997. 38, Print.
[12] Bruce Jr., Dickson D. "W.E.B. Du Bois and the Idea of Double Consciousness." *American Literature*, vol. 64, no. 2, June 1992, 301.
[13] Ibid., 301

double selves into better, truer selves,[14] Du Bois means to rehearse and anticipate culture bearers' and authors' presentation of the psychologically and spiritually whole African American as one whose reclaimed self also evidences the social privileges and legal rights afforded to a White American citizenry.

Indeed, grappling with the centrality and implications of death in African American lives certainly informs *The Souls of Black Folk*. Anissa Janine Wardi reminds us that *Souls* engages in a discourse of death.[15] From the outset, *Souls* begins such a discourse in "The Forethought," as Du Bois writes, "Herein lie buried many things which if read with patience may show the strange meaning of being black here at the dawning of the Twentieth Century."[16] Du Bois' "Afterthought" maintains his preoccupation, as he declares, "Hear my cry, O God the Reader; vouchsafe that this my book fall not stillborn into the world wilderness."[17] Furthermore, eleven of fourteen chapter epigraphs image graves, ashes, corpses, and mourners.[18] That Du Bois articulates insights into African American souls through language evoking death suggests that the "color line" "becomes conflated with the subject of death."[19] Such conflation means that his theory of double consciousness also engages the subject of death, and trustees clarify and show how better to interpret and contextualize this "two-ness." Additionally, they argue that

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[14] Du Bois, William Edward Burghardt. *The Souls of Black Folk*. Chicago: A. C. McClurg & Co. 1903. Reprinted. Blight, David and Gooding-Williams, Robert., editors. Bedford Books, 1997. 39, Print.
[15] Wardi, Anissa Janine. *Death and the Arc of Mourning in African American Literature*. University Press of Florida, 2003. 23, Print.
[16] Du Bois, William Edward Burghardt. *The Souls of Black Folk*. Chicago: A. C. McClurg & Co. 1903. Reprinted. Blight, David and Gooding-Williams, Robert., editors. Bedford Books, 1997. 34, Print.
[17] Ibid., 195
[18] Wardi, Anissa Janine. *Death and the Arc of Mourning in African American Literature*. University Press of Florida, 2003. 23, Print.
[19] Ibid., 23

progression through a liberating death consciousness which manifests in resurrected embodiment signals the future development of renewed African American communities.

III

As this work illustrates, by including the reformulation of death and resurrection with the quest for freedom and literacy, trustees revise Robert Stepto's theory of African Americans' most prominent "pregeneric myth."[20] They also reinterpret how the African American jeremiad signifies, and they illuminate Du Bois' theory of "double consciousness." In other words, trustees enable us to better perceive, understand, and engage the concerns and investments of African descended people across the eighteenth, nineteenth, and twentieth-centuries. So to describe the enduring and engendering presence of the motif of death and resurrection in African American culture and literature, I return to David Scott's definition of tradition as an active process and relationship in which the present calls upon the past to reproduce essential virtues. Trustees demonstrate that the concept and performance of death and resurrection are woven into what it means to be African American, as this inclination and practice reshapes virtues from the past to better address present realities. I hope that in this work's reappraisal of the value of determined resistance, African faith retentions, African American spirituality, African American community, and culture bearers' and authors' particular nuance of the death and resurrection motif, readers are compelled to reevaluate the meaning of radical dislocation and fundamental transformation.

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[20] Stepto, Robert B. *From Behind the Veil: A Study of Afro-American Narrative*. University of Illinois Press, 1979. Xvi. For a more detailed description of Robert Stepto's theory of African American pregeneric myths and their function in African American literature and culture, see page 98 in Chapter Two.

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