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________________________________ Chanté M. Baker

_______________ Date

“Anchored in Time”:
The U.S. South as a “Place” of Gendered Racial Memory in Ernest J. Gaines’s Fiction

By

Chanté M. Baker
Doctor of Philosophy

Graduate Institute of the Liberal Arts

Rudolph P. Byrd, Ph.D.
Advisor

Leroy Davis, Ph.D.
Committee Member

Barbara Ladd, Ph.D.
Committee Member

Accepted:

Lisa A. Tedesco, Ph.D.
Dean of the James T. Laney School of Graduate Studies

Date

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Chanté M. Baker
B. A., Spelman College, 2004
M. A., Emory University, 2008

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Abstract

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Drawing upon discourses emerging from literary studies, gender studies, and American historiography, this dissertation examines the ways in which Ernest J. Gaines situates black men’s particular memories of and experiences in the U.S. South as important to their formation of a gendered racial consciousness. Focusing on his 1964 novel, *Catherine Carmier*, chapter one analyzes how Gaines uses the gendered racial memories of the Carmier family patriarch, Raoul, to dramatize how black Creoles’ claims to exclusivity were challenged by demands for group solidarity in 1960s America. Gaines also uses the memories and experiences of other Carmier family members to problematize the idea that issues of blood and southern history are exclusively limiting to one’s racial consciousness. Chapter two explores *In My Father’s House* (1978) as a critique of the ideological tensions that existed during the civil rights and black power eras, especially the effectiveness of interracial coalition building and non-violence, and the utility of black militancy as a defense strategy. Interactions between several male characters in the novel illustrate the impact of these debates on constructions of southern black manhood and on African American men’s interpersonal relationships. Recognizing Gaines’s continued exploration of the Civil Rights and Black Power Movements in *A Gathering of Old Men* (1983), chapter three contends that black men’s particular memories of their southern experiences inspire them to redefine the ideological tenets of both eras in redemptive, self-affirming ways. Chapter four consolidates the insights gleaned from the previous chapters, culminating in a discussion of specific sites of African American men’s memory, instruction, and transformation within the “place” of the U.S. South in *A Lesson Before Dying* (1993). Exploring gendered racial memory in Gaines’s work not only builds upon existing scholarship on his writings but also provides a useful framework for further discussions of the complexities of black identity presented in African American literature, in general, and in black men’s fiction specifically.

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Crossing the Mason-Dixon Line:

Gendered Racial Memory of the U.S. South in African American Literature

In his 1980 study of black family relations in an undisclosed southern town, Theodore Kennedy made these telling remarks. He writes:

> The feeling that gripped me when I first drove across the Mason-Dixon line became stronger as I continued deeper into the South. It made me think about my own experiences as a boy growing up in a southern town and I felt as though I were entering a strange country and could imagine an iron gate falling closed behind me. I felt trapped, as though everything before me was hostile. I could see myself as the black man being dragged behind a speeding car. I visualized myself as a young black male being burned alive while my mother, father, sisters and brothers watched, crying and screaming and begging for my life. […]. I could see myself being dragged out of my house by white men who were searching for a black man who allegedly raped a white woman. […] Yes, I could picture all these things as I crossed the Mason-Dixon line […]. (Kennedy 40)

Kennedy’s graphic descriptions of physical and psychological violence inflicted upon black men are drawn from stories passed to him since childhood. They are tales shared to warn. They are lessons offered for self-preservation. And they are stories whose origins are deeply rooted in southern soil. Collectively, narratives of black men and women’s lynching, torture, false imprisonment, and overall powerlessness in the face of white racism form a mental montage that illustrates their lived experiences with racial oppression. For African Americans, as so vividly articulated by Kennedy, grounding their experiences in a *specific* cultural and historical milieu—anchoring racialized encounters in a particular time and place—is to testify to their historical memory of the U.S. South. “Memories,” John Gillis cogently argues, “help us make sense of the world we live in; and ‘memory work’ is, like any other kind of physical or mental labor, embedded in complex class, gender, and power relations that determine what is remembered (or forgotten), by whom, and for what end” (3). One novelist whose works typify the breadth and depth of blacks’ historical memory of their lives across the Mason-Dixon Line, whose thematic concerns actively engage in important “memory work,” is Ernest J. Gaines.

Gaines creates for his readers a unique portrait of African American men’s particular experience in the South, as many critics rightly contend, by concentrating on themes such as the search for black manhood, the absence of the bond between fathers and sons, and the dynamics of race, memory, and identity.[1] *“Anchored in Time”: The U.S. South as a “Place” of Gendered Racial Memory in Ernest J. Gaines’s Fiction* concurs with these astute observations, but synthesizes the connection between racial history and identity, black masculinity, and “southerness” in ways that demonstrate the significance of region to Gaines’s particular re-presentation of black men. My study takes as its foundational premise the centrality of regional context and black historical memory to Gaines’s representations of African American men’s (and women’s) lived, witnessed, and remembered experiences. In order to illustrate these claims, this project draws upon literary studies, gender studies, and American historiography to examine how Gaines situates black men’s particular memories of and experiences in the U.S. South as important to their formation of a gendered racial consciousness. I explore this concept in the following novels: *Catherine Carmier* (1964), *In My Father's House* (1978), *A Gathering of Old Men* (1983), and *A Lesson Before Dying* (1993).[2]

In this project, I seek to explain how Gaines figures into the canon of twentieth-century African American literature, especially in its re-presentations of the South and the region's significance to African American experiences. I foreground the ways in which Gaines engages specific historical moments—namely the Civil Rights and Black Power Movements—in portraying how black men remember. Lastly, in my study I describe how African American men's remembrances—their memories and experiences in the U.S. South—affect their definitions of masculinity, especially when "southernness" is considered an integral part of their identities. Remembering, as Janice Haaken theorizes, "is the product of gendered social locations and of those collectively organized fantasies and beliefs about gender that dynamically shape what aspects of the past are likely to be preserved. [Gender] mediates the accessibility of memory and the anxieties and defenses mobilized in the process of recollecting" (12). Gendered *racial* memory, then, provides an effective entre into interrogating how Gaines imagines black men's negotiation of race and gender in a southern regional context: a negotiation explored in different ways throughout his corpus. In the novels included in this study, I identify the ways in which Gaines highlights the tensions that emerge within intersections of color-caste and "black" masculine identity (*Catherine Carmier*); the impact of civil rights and black power ideologies on constructions of black masculinity (*In My Father's House*); southern appropriations of "black power" and memory as vehicles for self-actualization (*A Gathering of Old Men*); and the U.S. South and certain sites therein as "places" of memory, instruction, and transformation for African American males (*A Lesson Before

Dying). Exploring gendered racial memory in Gaines's work not only builds upon existing scholarship on his writing, but also provides a useful framework for further discussions of the complexities of black identity presented in African American literature, in general, and in black men's fiction specifically.

"Anchored in Time" is conversant with contemporary scholarship on race, gender, and "regionality," most notably rendered in Riché Richardson's monograph, *Black Masculinity and the U. S. South: From Uncle Tom to Gangsta* (2007).[3] Confronting notions of the South as an "embarrassment in the African-American context," Richardson suggests that the region's "abject" status in the nation's history has resulted in black southern men being deemed "cowardly, counterrevolutionary, infantile, and emasculated" in a geographical hierarchy of black manhood (6). She attributes these "ideological models of black southern masculinity" to pejorative stereotypes of black men (specifically, the character of Uncle Tom and the black rapist) that, consequently, have "helped to maintain racial divisions and hierarchies" (5). Richardson's analysis is useful but problematic to the extent that it does not provide a reading of work by an African American southern male writer whose writings counter myths of southern black men, specifically, and black southern existence, in general, as dejected. Richardson's examination of black men's literature neglects to highlight the ways in which writers, including Gaines, narrate aspects of black regionality that affirm southern black manhood and elucidate African Americans' investments in the South—despite its contentious racial past—as a place to call "home." Gaines's authorial and thematic preoccupation in centering the region as integral to black identities is evidence of his participation in a long tradition of African American novelists and cultural critics engaging the ways in

which black racial subjectivities are complicated by southern regionality and by gendered experiences.

The act of grounding one's experience, especially one's memory of experience, in a particular place and social space aligns with formulations offered by various scholars, among them, Pierre Nora and Edward Casey.[4] Nora's seminal essay, "Between Memory and History: Les Lieux de Memoire" (1989), presents an analysis of what he sees as two distinct categories: Memory and History.[5] Nora contends that between these categories lie *lieux de memoire* or "sites of memory": symbolic spaces where one's lived experience collides with remnants of a past that is as much a product of historical events as it is an effect of individual or collective memories of the experience. "The transformation of memory," he argues, "implies a decisive shift from the historical to the psychological, from the social to the individual, from the objective message to its subjective reception, from repetition to rememoration" (Nora 15). Though scholars such as Genevieve Fabre and Robert O'Meally have used Nora's theory as the impetus for advancing an analysis of the functionality of memory and history in African American culture, Edward Casey's earlier analysis of memory and its specificity provides a similarly useful method for understanding blacks' re-imagining of the American South. [6]

In *Remembering: A Phenomenological Study* (1987), Casey argues for the importance of what he calls "place memory" (182), more specifically how this kind of memory functions in embodied experience. Reminiscent of Maurice Halbwachs's suggestion of the "localization of memory" and similar to Eudora Welty's apt meditation on "place" in fiction, Casey writes, "To be embodied is *ipso facto* to assume a particular perspective and position; it is to have not just a point of view but a *place* in which we are situated. It is to occupy a portion of space from out of which we both undergo given experiences and remember them. […]. As embodied experience opens onto place, indeed *takes place in place* and nowhere else, so our memory of what we experience in place is likewise place-specific: it is bound to place as to its own basis" (Casey 182, emphasis in the original).[7] Casey makes the important argument for distinguishing between a "site" of memory, so famously theorized by Nora, and a "place" of memory:

> A site is thus leveled down to the point of being definable solely in terms of distances between positions which are established on its surface and which exist strictly in relation to one another. As a result, a site is indifferent to what might occupy it—and to what we might remember about it. […]. Place…presents us with a plethora of […] cues. [A] place is at once internally diversified…and distinct externally from other places. Both kinds of differentiation, internal and external, augment memorability. […]. The primary action of place is containing. (185)

Casey suggests that memory and place occupy a dialectical relationship: places "will invite certain memories while discouraging others" (189). Similarly, places "furnish convenient points of attachment for memories… [they] are congealed scenes for remembered contents; and as such they serve to situate what we remember" (189). While this project benefits from the insights of several theorists of (historical) memory, Casey and Nora's theoretical positions provide an apt grounding not only for analyzing Gaines's novels but also of situating Gaines's work within a recurring theme of "place memory" of the American South in the African American literary tradition. As Toni Morrison cogently notes in her discussion of the creative liberties granted to the fiction writer in reconstructing African Americans' "memories within" their experience during slavery, blacks' memory of their lives in America's peculiar institution and contending with other forms of institutional discrimination has its roots in the U.S. South ("The Site of Memory" 110).

African American writers have long employed "place memory" by imagining blacks' history in the American South as grounding not only for historical memory but also for collective black identity in the U.S. With its history of sordid race relations predating and then intensifying in its legacy of Civil War defeat, the American South gave birth to a social reign of terror made legal through the laws of Jim Crow. The South, the hotbed of civil rights protest and the birthplace for "Black Power," as more recent historiographies insist, often set the tone for the entire nation: its responses to African Americans' demands for full American citizenship served as a gauge by which the country governed itself. [8] And yet, despite its history of racial intolerance, the South now stands as the proverbial black "Mecca"—it is the homeland to which African Americans have returned literally and figuratively over the last thirty years. In "Searching for Southernness: Community and Identity in the Contemporary South," historian James C. Cobb finds African Americans' affinity for the South to be "striking," given the ways in which their (southern) regional identities were denied historically by "antagonistic defenders of a southern way of life that rendered blacks not only identityless but invisible" and by their "would-be liberators who had undertaken the challenge of dismantling the barriers to fuller black participation in American life" (127). Historically speaking, the term "southerner" was mostly reserved for whites in the region, and it was commonly assumed that African Americans did not want to identify with the South (127).

Countering attempts to exclude their experience from a (white) raced southern narrative, African American fiction writers including Alice Walker, Sherley Anne Williams, Randall Kenan, Toni Morrison, and John Oliver Killens have engaged blacks' history in the region and, by doing so, have attempted to insert African Americans into a broader American historiography that has sought to evade their mostly turbulent past while residing on U.S. soil. In fact, black fiction writers have sought to reclaim the South as "home," especially in the aftermath of the Civil Rights Movement, by citing the region's values of identity, family, and community as significant draws for its black sons and daughters. Melvin Dixon, in his essay, "The Black Writer's Use of Memory," suggests the American South and Africa as "important sites of memory in the construction of a viable African American culture," and as such, they help to "[establish] the value of cultural memory and the very kind of historiography that is not dependent on written analysis or criticism but rather achieves an alternative record of critical discussion through the exercise of memory" (18). Dixon further contends that African American novelists engage these sites "to evoke a sense of place" as well as "to enlarge the frame of cultural reference for the depiction of black experiences by anchoring that experience in memory" (20). Hence, African American writers use their work as a means of interrogating history, and their poetry and prose reflect an implicit consensus that creative engagement with the historical process is an act of remembering. In short, their memories of the South have had a sustaining presence throughout the African American literary tradition; the manner in which this presence has been manifested has varied in the works of black male and female writers.

Literature written by African American men has been examined broadly on the basis of the works' thematic engagement with articulations of black manhood and varied notions of black masculinity. While such emphases have inspired writers and critics alike to dissect what Evelyn Brooks Higginbotham famously termed the "metalanguage of race" in literary constructions of black masculinity, the significance of region to these explorations has received little attention.[9] For black men, as most scholarship suggests, the South functions as a mere backdrop to their historical struggles with institutionalized racism in the United States: a stage on which to articulate a critique of America's constitutional promises.[10] Perhaps it is because the South has been described as "the Nation's region"—a microcosm of the American Dilemma—that its significance to black men's racial consciousness has been subsumed into a broader discussion of black men's position as citizens of the United States.[11] Their stories of a distinctive gendered racial condition are deemed "American" tales whose southern plot and characters are merely incidental.

Black men's recurring engagement with the South throughout the African American literary tradition is far from inconsequential. These male writers' specific manner of situating the South as a place for gendered racial memory finds its roots in the slave narrative and has a literary trajectory that extends throughout our contemporary moment. The writings of Frederick Douglass, Booker T. Washington, W.E.B Du Bois, Jean Toomer, Sterling Brown, Arna Bontemps, David Bradley, Edward P. Jones, Randall Kenan, and even the literary scholarship of Houston Baker each reflect how the South has functioned as a powerful "place" of memory in the writings of African American men. Another such writer is Richard Wright.

Published in 1940, Wright's *Native Son*, illustrates the power of blacks' racial consciousness of the South in works featuring characters and plots situated in other regional locations. It is not until Wright's memorable protagonist, Bigger Thomas, interacts with his unintended victim, Mary Dalton, and her lover, Jan, that Bigger reveals that his family migrated from Mississippi to Chicago in the aftermath of his father's death in a race riot (Wright 64). Bigger's disclosure of the Thomases' southern roots provides a context for his mother's frequent charges that he did not have "any manhood in him" (as compared to Mr. Thomas who risked his life to protect the family), and explains Bigger's own feelings of inferiority in realizing traditional gender roles (i.e. the father as consummate protector and provider) (7). Though geographically miles away from the racial landscapes of Mississippi, Alabama, and other Deep South locales, Bigger finds himself in a preexisting narrative for his life as a black man in Jim Crow America, as a symbol for a "black world" whites "feared and were anxious to keep under control" (235). Furthermore, Bigger's indifference toward the Christian religiosity of his mother and the family's minister, Reverend Hammond, coupled with this distrust of his attorney, Max, is illustrative of a deeper, preexisting distrust of whites: individuals whose participation with Ku Klux Klan activities perverted the cross Mrs. Thomas and Reverend Hammond hold so dear (235), and whose violent actions misrepresented the Agape love he was once taught was so freely given. Bigger determines that his mother's Christ would not save him, just as divine intervention had not saved his father. The circumstances of his father's death and the memory of his action "anchors" Mr. Thomas in time just as Bigger's murdering Mary, and subsequent charge of rape, not only "anchors" him in time but also points to the significance of the region to gendered racial memory (90). Moreover, the idea of both Thomas men being “anchored” in time—connected to place by experience—specifically inspires my study’s title.

The year following the publication of Wright’s provocative novel, William Attaway wrote *Blood on the Forge* (1941) in which he detailed the lives of the Moss Brothers. Hoping that an escape to the North would result in a life markedly different from their existence as laborers in Georgia’s sharecropping system, brothers “Big Mat,” Chinatown and Melody Moss quickly learn that a change in location does not remedy discrimination. In fact, their new lives in the iron mills of the Northeast only exacerbated white hatred, even among ethnic whites who were also excluded from rights to full American citizenship. Chester Himes narrates a similar dilemma faced by his central protagonist, Robert Jones, in *If He Hollers Let Him Go* (1947). Having been reared in Ohio and then relocating to California, Jones never lived below the Mason-Dixon line; yet, when a white woman falsely accuses him of rape, Robert finds himself caught in a drama of black manhood forged in the cauldron of southern-bred racism. Instead of being sent to the gallows as punishment for his alleged crime, Robert is ordered to fight in World War II. The use of war service as an appropriate penalty for the assumed rapist becomes less of an example of the country’s progress at the time; rather, it reveals the author’s sensitivity to the ways in which military service functioned in the demise of African American men even as they fought for the U.S. on foreign soil. In short, Himes seems to suggest that southern retribution, particularly in its emasculation of black men, was given a new face.

Ralph Ellison also engages the U.S. South and its significance to black male identity in his magnum opus, *Invisible Man* (1952). In the novel, Ellison showcases a cast of southern black men whose characterizations typify the significance of the South to African American gendered racial consciousness: Dr. Bledsoe, a caricature of Washingtonian accommodation; Jim Trueblood, a character used to parody common stereotypes of black “folk” inhabiting the South’s Black Belt; the elderly husband who is humiliated when he and his wife, both southern migrants, are evicted from a New York tenement; and Brother Tarp, the oldest black member of the Brotherhood, whose limp is carried like an unsuspecting badge of honor: it serves as a remnant of his life in the South and a testament to all whom he encounters lest they forget. Each of these men leaves a lasting impression on Ellison’s unnamed narrator who struggles throughout the novel to understand the meaning of southern identity both for himself and for those whom he encounters.

As Kenneth Warren convincingly argues in *So Black and Blue: Ralph Ellison and the Occasion of Criticism* (2003), Ellison frequently meditated on the existence of a southern black identity, he insisted that scholars across racial lines consider the complex meanings of the existence of such, and Ellison often challenged notions of the American South as essentially antithetical to a positive African American self-image. Warren claims that a reading of Ellison’s critical essays reveals that he “was seeking a dynamic, even dialectical, account of the Negro that would acknowledge the history of racial repression but not merely characterize black people as…prisoners of a repressive [specifically, southern] environment” (63). While the significance of southern regionality would later be subordinated by black male writers whose artistic concerns continued in the protest-tradition of Richard Wright (meaning an insistence on locating black male characters in northern, urban enclaves), one may argue that *Invisible Man* and Ellison’s critical works sought to disrupt the persistence of narratives perpetuating the South as the black man's psychological burden exclusively.

Despite these depictions of the South as conjuring negative recollections in black male-authored fiction, writers such as James Alan McPherson find the region as significant to the black men's identity. McPherson's short stories, particularly a selection entitled, "Why I Like Country Music," reveal the black male narrator's appreciation for the region. The narrator admits his southern roots and discusses his embrace of southern white traditions that most clearly relate to his own black southern upbringing (namely, "banjo playing," "square dancing," and laughter) (McPherson 3-4). McPherson's narrative engagement with the continuities between black and white southern experience, through his narrator's acknowledgement of how practices and customs typically associated with white southerners, evokes endearing memories. In fact, McPherson counters depictions of the region as especially contrary to the formation of African American men's positive self-image. McPherson's suggestion resonates with earlier sentiments expressed by Ralph Ellison in his 1964 essay, "If the Twain Shall Meet," where he concludes:

> The Southern Negroes who have *revealed* themselves since 1954 are not products of some act of legal magic; they are the products of a culture, a culture of Southern states, and of a tradition that ironically they share with white Southerners. But with Negroes it developed out of slavery and through their experiences since the Civil War and the first Reconstruction…[The] Negro American is something more. He is the product of the synthesis of his blood mixture, his social experience, and

> what he has made of his predicament […]. His quality of wonder and his heroism alike spring no less from his brutalization than from that culture. (Ellison, "Twain Shall Meet" 574)

Ellison's attention to the distinctiveness of black southern culture, a culture conjoined to that of white southerners, coupled with what can be inferred as his implicitly gendered assessment of its impact on black (male) identity, inspires contemporary scholarship to situate the American South as significant to black racial politics, to further interrogate the South's interracial past, and to discover how specific moments (i.e. the Civil Rights Movement) aroused African Americans to embrace the region as a powerful grounding for identity.

My research on Gaines's work is motivated in the ways Ellison suggests. The U.S. South functions as a place of black men's gendered racial memory, and therefore has a definite impact on their self-definition as American citizens, their understanding of American history, and their interpersonal relationships within and across the color line. In my study, I consider the U.S. South's complex racial past, particularly as it involves African American males, and argue that black men, as depicted in Gaines's corpus, have used this history as evidence of their diversity and distinction as American men. Unlike those treatments which have been primarily literary or historical in their analyses of southern black masculinity and black men's experiences in the South, I use literary studies, gender studies, and American historiography in my analysis of Gaines's work**.** I foreground what Athena D. Mutua conceptualizes as "multidimensionality" as a theoretical paradigm that is critical to understanding the complexity of southern black masculinity. A concept derived from what Kimberlé Crenshaw theorized as "intersectionality," and further developed through the important contributions of black feminists and critical race theorists, "Multidimensionality,"

> recognizes that black men are not homogenous but rather are diverse by class, sexuality, religion, and other systems of subordination. It suggests that given the interconnectedness of patriarchy/sexism and racism, among other oppressive systems, black men, as a single multidimensional positionality, are in some contexts privileged by gender and sometimes oppressed by gendered racism. It also suggests that when the interconnectedness of multiple oppressive systems is ignored it undermines antiracist efforts. (Mutua 6)

While he portrays the "privileges" of gender demonstrated by his southern male characters (advantages most clearly expressed through the men's interactions with women and children), Gaines also draws attention to the ways in which "gendered racism" encountered by his male protagonists is exacerbated by the southern context in which they reside (Mutua 6). Moreover, my use of multidimensionality is supported by the important insights of feminist scholars, among them, Judith Butler. If, as Butler asserts, "[the] foundational moment in which the paternal law institutes the subject seems to function as a metahistory which we not only can but ought to tell" (91), then one can read African American men's literary production as a series of "tellings": their repeated articulations of "foundational moments" throughout history that have called black men into a greater understanding of their status as men in the United States.[12] Gaines's representations of African American men's gendered racial memories are examples of such telling.

Another major critical intervention of this project is its recognition of the importance of analyzing gendered dimensions of racial memory in fiction, especially in African American literature. As Zora Neale Hurston cogently acknowledged in the opening lines of *Their Eyes Were Watching God* (1937), men, despite their ability to "tur[n] [their] eyes away in resignation" at the disappointment of having wishes unrealized, are unable to fully relinquish shattered dreams because such aspirations are forever "mocked" by "Time" (9). These dreams, though resigned to Fate, are anchored in Time as memories, which men, Hurston contends, never forget. *Their Eyes* is mediated by the protagonist Janie's story, but Hurston powerfully displays the experiences of men—African American men—whose lives reflect the ebb and flow of dreams denied, deferred, and delivered. Like Hurston, I believe that the permanence of men's experiences is forever enshrined as memory: recollections undeniably influenced by race and, I submit, "place" as well.

A Gathering of Gaines: The Chapters of *"Anchored in Time"*

"Anchored in Time" foregrounds novels written by Gaines that highlight his engagement with the American South as a "place" of significance primarily in the memories of African American men. In the opening chapter, "'The House Was Haunted': Creole Identity and Gendered Racial Memory in *Catherine Carmier*," I analyze his treatment of Louisiana's Creoles of color. Gaines's representation of black Creoles in 1960s Louisiana discloses the charged issues of intraracial, intra-regional, and gendered ethnocultural distinctiveness. The disavowal of blackness and whiteness by Raoul Carmier is inspired by a legacy of racial indifference passed throughout his patriarchal line. Raoul's insistence on rejecting a racial category, due to his Creole heritage,

exemplifies the complexities of defining “black” masculinity in a historical context that emphasized black racial solidarity.

Chapter two, “‘A Black Man’s Conference’: Civil Rights, Black Power, and Black Masculinity in *In My Father’s House*,” examines Gaines’s critique of the Civil Rights and Black Power Movements, particularly their impact on constructions of black masculinity, in his 1978 novel. The gendered racial memories of five black male protagonists, and their interactions, engage some of the ideological tensions of the Civil Rights and Black Power eras. These conflicts pertain to the effectiveness of interracial coalition and non-violence, and the utility of black militancy as a defense strategy. As did examples set by Martin Luther King, Jr. and Malcolm X, the men’s experiences demonstrate how these tensions shaped black manhood and African American men’s interpersonal relationships with other black men, African American women, and white Americans during the period.

In chapter three, “‘A Day of Reckonding’: The ‘Power’ of Black Men’s Memories in *A Gathering of Old Men*,” I examine Gaines’s exploration of the cross-generational appeal of “black power” and its ability to promote African American men’s gendered racial healing. In his 1983 novel, Gaines depicts the transformative possibilities of a black liberation philosophy that has been deemed the property of a younger generation. In recalling memories of their gendered racial experience in the South, Gaines’s “old men” redefine “black power” on their own terms. The characters’ “power” comes in sharing their experiences within a community of their peers and in proving to themselves that they are not bound to their past; rather, gendered racial memory becomes a vehicle for self-actualization. Moreover, bearing witness within the (southern) place that has possessed more banes than blessings in their lives gives Gaines’s men the power to reclaim it as their own.

The final chapter on Gaines’s most recent novel examines the ways in which he envisions particular locations as central to the formation of gendered racial consciousness in African American men and boys. Specifically, “‘How a (Black) Man Should Live’: Southern ‘Places’ of Memory, Instruction, and Transformation in *A Lesson Before Dying*,” highlights the manner and method in which Gaines draws our attention to four key places, namely, the courthouse, the jail, the home, and the church. With their distinctive American and keenly southern histories, each site holds particular significance to the ways in which the region is imagined by African American males. For the black men and boys in *A Lesson Before Dying*, especially the novel’s young teacher Grant Wiggins and his “pupil” Jefferson, each location functions as a poignant place of memory, instruction, and transformation. Gaines’s fictive representation of the role of physical sites (and experiences occurring therein) in the development of black male consciousness is linked to broader discussions on how African Americans, especially, black men, understand the U.S. South.

“Anchored in Time”: The U.S. South as a “Place” of Gendered Racial Memory in Ernest J. Gaines’s Fiction advances an understanding of the U.S. South as significant to African American men’s formation of a gendered racial consciousness. Black men’s lived, witnessed, and remembered experiences in the American South demonstrate a distinct awareness of the region’s dual reputation as a place to call “home” and as a symbol of America’s sordid racial past. As Gaines’s writing reflects, African American men’s negotiation of these “twinned” concepts is often a hallmark of their discussions of

the region and what they see as its enduring legacy in American history. Their communication of a gendered, racial, and southern regional consciousness offers exciting possibilities for studying how marginalized populations use memory as a means of interpreting the past, understanding the present, and making projections about the future.

Chapter One

"The House Was Haunted":

Creole Identity and Gendered Racial Memory in *Catherine Carmier*

Ernest J. Gaines's fiction meditates on African American men's gendered racial experiences. Unlike his predecessors, namely Richard Wright and Ralph Ellison, Gaines's men are not lured to enclaves in northern states; instead, the lives of his black men are shaped by their experiences in the U.S. South. More than crafting tales featuring plots and themes that address black men's southern experiences writ large, Gaines recreates stories of men (and women) whose dynamic history and gendered racial memories are rooted in the rich soil of Louisiana.[13] With its distinctive Spanish and French heritage, strong African influence, complexly engineered racial-caste system, and diverse agricultural base, Louisiana stands as an anomaly among its Deep South neighbors.[14] Its liberal policies regarding race during slavery made it a regional pariah: a status quickly diminished when the trial of a Creole man of color, Homer Plessy, was used to prove that blacks' racial inferiority, in the broader (white) American imagination, was justified by "one drop" of "black blood."[15] Plessy's 1896 U.S. Supreme Court case not only placed Louisiana and the United States before an international audience, but it proved that ideologies surrounding the country's race relations could be institutionalized. The presumption that African Americans, especially, could be "separate" from their white counterparts and yet have access to "equal" social accommodations was a far cry from the realities of blacks' lives in America. The mandate of segregation cast a menacing shadow over the first half of the twentieth-century. It confirmed, for the entire country, that race would be forever established within what Gaines has termed, "the house that slavery built."[16]

In this chapter, I examine how Gaines uses gendered racial memory to identify the inadequacies of America's racial "house" in *Catherine Carmier*, his first novel. Published in 1964, the novel challenges essentialist notions of racial identity, in general, and illuminates the complexities of African American identity, more specifically. It examines the experiences of the Carmiers: a black Creole family living in 1960s rural Louisiana. As a fictive representation of Louisiana's unique "black" population of known Afro-European ancestry, the Carmiers struggle to maintain a reputation of exclusivity characteristic of their caste within a community of blacks, whites, and Cajuns that is increasingly aligning along a black-white binary. Gaines uses the Carmiers' story of caste exceptionality to show how the southern-mandated, nationally-adopted "house that slavery built" is "haunted" by the existence of Creoles of Color.

In *Catherine Carmier*, Gaines uses the gendered racial memories of the Carmiers, especially the family patriarch, Raoul, not only to dramatize how black Creoles' claims to exclusivity were challenged by demands for group solidarity in 1960s America, but also to problematize the idea that issues of blood and southern history are exclusively limiting to one's racial consciousness. "Memory," as Keith Byerman suggests, "affects the way [an] individual relates to [a] group, especially in an environment where both personal and group identity have been denigrated […]. Scenes of violence, humiliation, and dehumanization are blocked out by both individuals and communities, but they cannot be erased" (27). Examining gendered racial memory becomes a means of understanding the psychological dilemma of Carmier men—especially in their commitment to maintaining black Creole distinctiveness. These men reject black male identity completely: a gendered racial identity that, as bell hooks argues, "[is] defined in relationship to the stereotype [of the "untamed, uncivilized, unthinking, unfeeling" brute]" (*We Real Cool* xii).

As demonstrated by the choices made by Raoul's daughter Lillian, and his wife, Della, female members of the Carmier family acquiesce to social imperatives demanding that their clan adopt a fixed racial position, even though the women's individual decisions vastly differ. The literal haunting of the Carmiers' house by the ghosts of Raoul's father, Robert, and of Della's illegitimate son, Mark, impact Raoul's interactions with his family and with the community at large. Raoul's memories of Robert and Mark become "internal features" of his conscience: just how these individuals are "constituted" in Raoul's mind is "a consequence of the interiorization that [his] psyche performs"(Butler xvi). Robert and Mark's absent-presence helps to substantiate the gendered nature of Gaines's conception of black Creole identity formation. Raoul's experiences as a Creole man in the U.S. South, when they are measured against the experiences of his young rival, Jackson Bradley, also offer fictive illustrations of the complexities of "black" masculine identity during the 1960s. Ultimately, the men's conflict also highlights the tensions that ensue when racial ideologies of the past encounter realities of the present and possibilities for the future.

The "house" erected by America's system of human bondage has been a recurring theme in black- and white-authored southern fiction. Southern writers, as well as historians and cultural critics alike, have contemplated the efficacy of institutionalized discrimination when such rests on a fear of miscegenation, or, the "mixing of blood" across racial lines. "Many writers," Suzanne W. Jones insists, "who grew up in the segregated South or who have family there…have created fictional worlds in which they examine race relations, analyze interracial relationships, dismantle racial stereotypes, and imagine integrated communities" (3). We are reminded of how William Faulkner, for example, cites slavery as the "curse" of the region, situates poor whites as the prime originators of white supremacist rhetoric, and often uses his mixed-raced characters to illuminate the absurdity of the South's "miscegenation complex" and the "problem of race visibility" (Peavy 16, 34; Sundquist 4).[17] While the figure of the "tragic mulatto" has appeared in works by African American and white novelists in myriad ways, no such character exposes the irrationality of the (white) South's racial fears than Faulkner's Joe Christmas in *Light in August* (1932). [18] We are told that Joe is born to a white woman, but his father's racial identity is never revealed in the novel. Public anxiety about Joe's unknown parent, coupled with his "parchmentcolored" skin, suggestively European features, and suspicious behavior, not only heightens communal discomfort about his racial identity but also inspires those around him to presume that his father is black. Joe's assigned racial identity is further ingrained into the public consciousness when he is accused of committing the cardinal sin suspected of African American men in the South: raping and murdering a white woman. Joe Christmas dies never knowing the full "truth" of his ancestry; he is made yet another victim entrapped within the "house"—erected by the race record of southern history—that neither Joe, his judges, nor even his creator, Faulkner, has the ability to escape.[19]

Gaines's work purposefully situates gendered racial memory as essential to interrogating an individual's relationship to his or her past and one's responses to the possibilities for change held by the future.[20] In *Catherine Carmier*, he incorporates memory in ways that reflect what St. Augustine has identified as its "private character."

Gaines demonstrates the extent to which memory is individualized in its interpretation, how it orients one's consciousness of the past, and he uses his characters to show the ways in which memory situates an individual's positionality in the passage of time.[21] Gendered racial memory in this novel is enriched by Gaines's use of Creole culture. Creoleness destabilizes exclusively "racial" interpretations of slavery's "curse," and Gaines employs his Creoles of color to demonstrate some African Americans' involvement in perpetuating ideologies of racial hierarchy. Furthermore, as figured in Gaines's depiction of black Creoles, miscegenation creates an identity that has the potential to radically change the broader South's racial landscape; however, Gaines cogently recognizes that individuals who occupy such a position are in constant conflict with racially essentialist paradigms. The experiences of Gaines's mixed raced characters are complicated by their Creole-cultural subjectivities. He narrates the ways in which their lives cannot be interpreted as simply a matter of "black" versus "white."

Like the state from which their caste derived, historically, Creoles of color challenged the South's strict racial codes that reduced black identity to an issue of blood. They argued that their existence proved that such ideologies ignored intra-racial distinctions. Although book-length discussions of literary re-presentations of U.S. Creole identities, specifically, have been limited to the work of George Washington Cable and studies of his writing, critical analyses of racially mixed identities and their sociopolitical implications, more generally, have received attention in contemporary literary scholarship.[22] In *Neither White Nor Black: The Mulatto Character in American Fiction* (1978), Judith Berzon argues for the importance of studying the complexity of biracial figures in literature as opposed to subsuming their characterizations in generalized assessments of blackness and whiteness in fiction. She writes, “[The] mulatto’s position in American culture has appeared to many social scientists and novelists, to be more ambiguous than that of the full-blooded black. […]. The widespread preoccupation by black writers with questions of identity, both individual and collective, is given special significance in the case of the mixed blood individual” (4). “[The] ambiguous position of the biracial subject,” Suzanne Bost further argues, “confounds any sense of ‘truth’ in racial identity, recasting race as an uncertain and shifting field of differences […]. Americans have been asking for centuries what to call biracial individuals, fearful of the often ominous history inscribed in their mixture and the unsettling of racial differentiation that they represent” (19). While Berzon’s study of mixed raced characters is posited as an interrogation of black-authored fiction, in general, alongside white-authored texts, her attention to such characters in African American women’s novels foregrounds Bost’s inquiry into the persistence of such figures in black women’s writing. Suzanne Bost’s 2003 study, *Mulattas and Mestizas: Representing Mixed Identities in the Americas, 1850-2000*, situates the works of African American women writers as integral to an understanding of the psycho-sociopolitical significance of fictive representations of mixed-raced individuals. Bost insists that, in African American culture, racial meaning has often been produced in the bodies of women; women, especially, “become trapped between racial worlds and locked out of domestic harmony because of ‘one drop’ of ‘black blood’” (59). “Black women writers,” she contends, “reflect a unique investment in destabilizing [literary genres] from within, encoding the difference of African American women’s experience, responding to the unique sexual mythologies imposed on black women during slavery, and finding agency for the doubly oppressed black female character" (Bost 72-73). The "biracial heroines" found in works by Frances E.W. Harper, Pauline Hopkins, Nella Larsen, and Jessie Fauset "may seem to be tragic mulattas…[but] the empowerment they often possess, their political activism, and their physical mobility undermine the tragedy of their racial position […]. The liminal biracial character calls into question the separability of black and white at the same time that she moves between and beyond racial definitions" (Bost 73).

Bost's cogent analysis of the gendered implications of mixed race identity grounds her reading of black women's works; however, these women writers are not alone in their representations of biracial experiences. Black male writers including Charles Chestnutt, Jean Toomer, James Weldon Johnson, and Charles Johnson have discussed the gendered implications of mixed raced identity; however, literary analyses of gendered biracial consciousness in such works have not been offered to the same extent as black women's writing. James Weldon Johnson's compelling narrative, *The Autobiography of an Ex-Colored Man* (1912), for example, offers a fictive representation of the gendered experiences of a biracial male who, after having varied life experiences in the United States and abroad, makes the difficult choice to "pass" as white. Though he posits the narrative as providing readers with more insight into the racial experiences of African Americans, Johnson's famed protagonist details a narrative of biracial identity that crosses boundaries of race, region, and nation and that brings him to a greater understanding of his identity as a mixed-raced male in America. For African American men and women writers actively engaged in unsettling the boundaries of race and interrogating the utility of "race-ness" vis-à-vis biracial figures, their fictive explorations participate in what Betsy Erkkila has identified as a broader American "miscegenation complex."[23] She asserts, "[Phobias] and fantasies of blood mixture and contamination in the national imaginary may account for the fact that the despite the country's constitutional commitment to…justice, freedom, and rights, the American republic continues as a house divided in which some are more equal, more human, and more entitled than others to the founding ideas of life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness" (xi).

Often excluded from such assessments is the profound influence of culture—more specifically, black Creole cultural identity—in complicating how we imagine biracial identity in American race relations.[24] "Culture," Stuart Hall rightly argues, "constitutes the terrain for producing identity, for producing the constitution of social subjects. It is one of the social conditions of existence for setting subjects in place in historical relations, […]. They are unable to speak, or to act…until they have been positioned by the work that culture does […]. [As] subjects [,] they function by taking up the discourses of the present and the past" (Hall, "Subjects in History" 291). Hall's analysis of culture and its capacity to shape how an individual evaluates his or her subjectivity is similar to Edward Casey's assertions about the "place-specific[ity]" of memory (Casey 182). In both instances, discourses of the past and present significantly influence how an individual sees his or her relationship to the world in which one lives. To ignore the significance of culture and memory, then, is to deny their power in the formation of one's gendered racial consciousness.

Critical assessments of Gaines's corpus frequently reference how he uses Louisiana's unique racial history and its cultural distinctiveness to inform the gendered racial consciousness of his male and female protagonists. His novels and short stories offer fictive representations of the interactions between whites, African Americans, Creoles, and Cajuns in an imagined community situated in rural Louisiana. Discussions of *Catherine Carmier* suggest that Gaines's representation of black Creoles follows in the tradition of other African American novelists in contesting racially essentialist narratives depicting blacks as a monolithic group.[25] Beyond identifying distinctions of class and gender, Gaines posits caste as a distinctive category for consideration in creating black characters. Alvin Aubert, Michel Fabre, Thadious Davis, and Keith Byerman are among the few scholars who not only have identified Gaines's black Creoles as significant to the action of *Catherine Carmier* but also have recognized Raoul Carmier as a character most deserving of critical analysis.

In an important critique of the protagonist, Aubert describes Raoul as a "proud and tragic Creole," thereby linking the character's fate to that of his literary counterpart: the tragic mulatto (69). Beyond the "pity and fear" that the mulatto's "observable whiteness" inspires, Gaines's Creole, in Aubert's cogent estimation, functions as a metaphor for "the plight of Afro-Americans generally, including the undermining disunity that exists within the black community" (69). His recognition of the Creole's significance to whites and African Americans suggests that crises of "blood" impact communities on both sides of the great racial divide in complex ways.

Similarly, Fabre argues that Gaines's depiction of Raoul, and more broadly black Creoles, problematizes the South's black-white binary and Faulkner's re-presentation of the region's racial history by providing an "additional dimension" to the intimate connections between members of both racial groups (111). As a fictive representation of a group that "is defined historically by [its] refusal to join either race," Raoul's "contemporary tragedy arises from the choice to which the polarization of history and the disappearance of his caste restrict him" (Fabre 118). Just as Fabre rightly acknowledges the dilemma Raoul faces on account of his precarious social positioning, Davis also contends that Raoul's status as Creole impacts his interactions with and attitudes toward his family and the community in which he resides (12-13). Byerman's reading not only identifies Raoul's obsession with Creole status as impacting his familial interactions, but he briefly mentions that Gaines's use of Creole identity in the 1960s is important given the racial politics that marked the decade (194, 196).

These critical insights suggest the importance of situating black Creole identity and gendered racial consciousness as significant to Gaines's characterization of Raoul Carmier. The explicit link between Raoul's existence as a Creole man of color, Gaines's incorporation of Louisiana history and gendered racial memory, and black identity politics during the time in which the narrative is situated frequently has been underdeveloped in criticism of the novel.

Originally used to signify "a native or indigenous to an area," the term "Creole" "has gained a multiplicity of meanings, as different groups have ascribed the label to various distinct peoples" (Brasseaux 88). Scholars concur that the designation was appropriated by black slaves who wanted to distinguish between American born bondsmen and women and those born in Africa and the Caribbean (88). Their use of the term was much like that of white Creoles whose application made it akin to "aristocrat," and in so doing, they made a distinction between themselves and their Cajun counterparts. Free blacks embraced the term *gens de couleur libre* and the privileges associated with this distinction to the chagrin of whites (90). For French colonists who originally controlled the Louisiana territory (1699-1769), American born slaves were deemed more valuable than slaves imported from African and West Indian locales. Such slaves were considered "more docile," "seasoned to climate," "trained for fieldwork or domestic tasks," and spoke French (90). These distinguishing characteristics, coupled with the "public acceptance of interracial sex" and "the open system of concubinage" under French rule, resulted in the emergence of a population of free blacks that were documented as early as 1720 (Barthelemy 255; Brasseaux 105). "French colonists," Gwendolyn Mildo Hall insists, "tended to absorb free people of African descent, especially concubines and descendants of French men, into the white population. [By contrast], the Spanish corporatist concept of racial hierarchy sought to create separate social groupings based upon varying degrees of race mixture, promoting the emergence of separate groups among the free population of African descent […]" (240). Creoles of color under Spanish authority (1769-1803) were a recognized population because they "fill[ed] middle sector economic roles in society (i.e. artisans, petty traders, and farmers)," they "defend[ed] the colony from external and internal foes" as they had during the Natchez Wars of 1729-30, and the group "[gave] African slaves an officially approved safety valve" or pathway for obtaining freedom (Hanger 6).[26]

With the Louisiana Purchase of 1803, the United States assumed control of the territory, and as a consequence, the country imposed racial codes employed throughout the South onto a society that was, by virtue of its tripartite system, more "Caribbean [in its] character" (Brasseaux 105). "Although free people of color were forced to form a separate caste," Laura Foner insists, "[they] mirrored the values of white society and the planter class. [They] attacked racial barriers but not the class subordination of the three-caste system, and aspired to full participation in white society rather than its destruction or transformation" (430). In antebellum Louisiana, free black communities maintained their unique status, and continued to carve a space for themselves distinctive from, yet more inclined to, their upper-class white counterparts (Brasseaux 106). They owned property (often more valuable than that of farming whites) and slaves, were preoccupied with their elevated status in the state's three-tiered social system (signified by their fair skin and European features), and placed "great emphasis on family cohesiveness and stability" by marrying only within their caste (Brasseaux 106; Dominguez 596; Dormon 167). Creole women (both black and white) were described as "always beautiful, graceful, gracious, sophisticated, and high spirited," while men were characterized as being "handsome, proud to the point of arrogance, and brave to the point of recklessness" (Brasseaux 92). Not only did differences exist between Creole men and women, there were also distinctions between Creoles of color who resided in cities and those who lived in rural areas. In urban centers such as New Orleans and in towns like Opelusas, matriarchal households were common. Rural areas tended to be more patriarchal in organization, thus reflecting the group's tendency toward endogamy (108-109).

During and after the Civil War, Creoles of color found themselves in a precarious position, and as a result, developed various responses to the fighting that existed between Union and Confederate states. Some slave-owning Creoles wanted to "perpetuate slavery" and to "protect their antebellum privileges that set them apart from most slaves" (Lodgson and Bell 218). Others "added racial justification for their distinctiveness," "tried to perpetuate their light skin color among their descendants," and "wished to pass to a white identity" (218). Postbellum racial codes, however, virtually dismantled distinctions between the group and their "full blooded" black counterparts, and they "destroyed the traditional intermediate caste" (Brasseaux 111). As an alternative to the rejection of blackness offered by some Creoles of color, a "new generation" of Louisiana Creoles also emerged. This band of men and women condemned "castelike attitudes," "quickly came to guide and dominate the political views expressed by their community," and the group fostered "the most radical and consistent" positions on citizenship, suffrage, and education that affected their home state as well as the broader U.S. South (Lodgson and Bell 218). The record of black Creoles who chose to align themselves with their black counterparts in what historian Rayford Logan termed the "nadir" of the black experience reveals the variety of intragroup responses to racial discrimination and the complexity of their relationship to others of African descent. It was not until the mid-twentieth century, however, with the dawn of the Civil Rights and Black Power movements, that Creoles of color were asked to make a definite choice for intra-racial alliance. James Dormon contends:

> It was the crucible of the Black Revolution that Creoles of color encountered the central paradox of their ethnohistorical experience. Were they to join fully with their black peers in the struggle, seeking their identity within the larger black community as they fought for black equality? Or were they to enter the struggle for black rights while maintaining their sense of ethnic identity as Creoles? Surely there were those, more often than not the younger generation, who joined the movement and identified completely with the black community. […]. And yet others, largely the older, more traditional Creoles, were committed

> overtly to the movement while maintaining a clear identity as Creoles of Color—still a very special people. (“Ethnicity and Identity” 169)

It is in this context that Gaines renders Raoul Carmier. Raoul’s unyielding determination to maintain his ethnocultural identity amidst a heightened local and national political consciousness is as much caste-specific as it is gendered. Raoul’s responses to changes being made in the world around him is fueled by a legacy of persistence and pride bequeathed to him by his father, Robert, and by what Raoul sees as the imposition of “race” on his existence as a black Creole man in the South. Later, we will see how Raoul’s altercation with Jackson Bradley dramatizes the clashing of their individual responses to the limitations imposed by essentialist ideologies surrounding blackness. Their unique experiences as men within “the house that slavery built” inspire similar frustrations; however, gendered racial memories prevent Raoul from imagining the possibility of community between him and his young challenger, yet they move Jackson to empathize with him.

Early descriptions of Robert Carmier provide insightful background for which to evaluate the actions and attitudes assumed by Raoul. Upon his arrival to the unidentified Louisiana community, Robert finds himself on what was formerly the Grover plantation and immediately demonstrates the reputation of pride associated with men of his caste. Having relocated from Opelousas, Robert asks the property owner, Mack Grover, if he might occupy an abandoned house located on his land. The large house “had once belonged to the white overseer” who left the property once the land was reallocated for sharecropping (Gaines, *Catherine Carmier* 8). We learn that the house “remained vacant” due to whites’ disinterest in living so close to the “Quarters” (a term used to indicate the site occupied by African American inhabitants on the property, formerly slave quarters), and to Grover's refusal to rent the home to black sharecroppers (8). When the fair-skinned, European-featured Robert Carmier inquires about the empty dwelling, an apparently uncertain Grover asks, "'What color are you?'" Robert's reply that he is "a colored man" who "can farm as well as the next one," not only fulfills Grover's curiosity about his racial identity but also is intended to quell any potential apprehensions about Robert's ability to make his "keep" when compared to his black and Cajun competitors (8).[27] Mack Grover's repeated suggestion that Robert take a smaller dwelling "easier to keep up" is met by Robert's polite insistence that he will accept nothing less than the vacant house. Antoine Richard, a black witness to the men's encounter, recalls the exchange that soon followed:

> [The] colored man held his hat in his hand. Hat in hand, yes, but not fidgeting with it one bit—as any other Negro would have done, and many whites, too, who stood before Mack Grover—but holding it as steady as a professional beggar would hold his. Only Robert Carmier was not begging […]. He had come up there as a man would come up to a man, and he had asked for the house as a man should ask for a house. He had taken off the hat, not because he, Robert Carmier, thought he should take it off, but because someone in the past had told him that this was the proper thing to do when asking a favor. (9)

Richard's detailed memory of Robert's conduct with Mack Grover is significant. He witnesses actions made by a "colored" man that blatantly contradict social expectations for black men in the segregated South. Robert's resolve not to be swayed in his desires, and yet demonstrate a defiant gendered "politics of respectability," are subtle ways Gaines acknowledges a distinction between Robert and his black male counterparts.[28] As a consequence of Jim Crow, courtesies extended to whites by blacks, in general, were demanded as a means of showing their respect for the white supremacist order of the period. African American men were expected to express deference, especially, because failure to do so could result in public or private harassment, personal attack, reprisal against their loved ones, or even death.[29] Unlike most black men of his time, Robert's decision to remove his hat is not intended to demonstrate his adherence to the South's racial codes positioning African Americans as inferior. Robert Carmier's actions, in fact, reflect his indoctrination into another system of beliefs. Since his Creole identity segregates him from the black masses of which he is linked by blood, Robert, we can infer, has been instructed that men are inclined to perform deferential acts as a matter of mutual respect not subordination. Robert continues to subvert southern rules of public engagement when he speaks before a white man, Grover, has instructed him to do so, and he determines a date for occupying the house without Grover's full consent (Gaines, *Catherine Carmier* 10-11). Grover, we learn, does not contest Robert's bold behavior. Instead, he prophetically warns Antoine Richard that Robert's ability to "'car' his share'" on his property will not dissociate Robert from the black community of which he is a part; Grover concludes that Robert's work ethic will not elevate him in the eyes of whites "'no matter how [physically] white he is'" (11).

Robert Carmier is not alone when he finally relocates to Mack Grover's property. With him come his son, Raoul, his wife Lavonia, and his sister Rosanna. Together, the narrator explains, the Carmiers "made as much crop for Mack Grover as any family that size could make" (Gaines, *Catherine Carmier* 12). We also learn that the family consists of more members—Robert's four remaining daughters—who "had all gotten married and left" the family home in Opelousas; two daughters lived in the nearby town of Bayonne (12). As new occupants of Grover's property, Raoul and his family maintain an isolated existence, and they are known in the Quarters by their regimented schedules and "little use" for darker-complexioned blacks (12). And while the family did hire "people their color" to assist in farm labor, the Carmiers keep these relations to a business exchange, opting to socialize within their extended family exclusively (13).

The Carmiers' private way of life is disrupted when Robert Carmier gets into an altercation with a Cajun farmer after defeating his rival in a sugar cane "hauling" competition (Gaines, *Catherine Carmier* 13). Disgruntled by Robert's victory, the unnamed Cajun challenges Robert to a fight that leaves both men "bloody" (13). The Cajun's threats of avenging his loss are met with an equally determined Robert who insists he will meet the challenge. Three months after the men's violent exchange, Robert Carmier disappears; Robert's wife and sister move to another house "across the field" not long after his vanishing (14). "No one in the quarters knew exactly why the women had gone," the narrator explains, "but every other person had an opinion. One was that the house was haunted—Robert's ghost had been seen several times by several persons […]" (14).

Gaines's fictive representation of the conflict between Robert, a black Creole, and a Cajun farmer is not entirely removed from the record of African American and Cajun interactions in Louisiana history. Marked with an identity that "lies between stigma and stereotype," Louisiana's Cajuns are as unique to the state as its black Creoles (Tentchoff

230). Cajuns are descendents of the Arcadians of Nova Scotia who migrated to southern Louisiana in the early eighteenth century (Dormon, *The People* 7). Of French peasant ancestry, Cajuns were known for their "deep local attachments to their farms, villages, neighbors, and their kin" (11). Nineteenth-century descriptions of the group characterized its members as "ascriptively" "ignorant, uneducated, impoverished, and lack[ing] ambition"; however, much like their black Creole counterparts, Cajuns were known for their "tight-knit families," affinity for "group isolation and endogamy," and were "perfectly contented" with their social positioning (35). Dormon explains:

> What Cajuns generally thought of blacks is…hard to determine but postbellum attitudes manifested by the Cajun group argue that the Cajuns differed little from other white population elements in their fundamental anti-black racism. Doubtless the antipathy that came to prevail after the Civil War existed to some degree prior to that conflict; [yet], certainly the degree of Cajun Negrophophia was exacerbated by the experience of war, emancipation, and reconstruction. (*The People* 48)

As the twentieth-century emerged, however, "acutely abrasive race relations" between Cajuns and African Americans were subordinated to the former group's desires to maintain ethnic distinctiveness. Their "tolerant" attitude towards blacks was contingent upon African Americans' "'keep[ing] their place'" and blacks' deference "to the socially (and racially) superior white Cajun, even a Cajun of the least exalted social status among whites" (Dormon, *The People* 78). In the 1960s, when African Americans' demands for civil rights and calls for "black power" placed America's racial dilemma at the forefront of the national consciousness, blacks' achievements inspired other groups, including

Cajuns, to assert “ethnic awareness” (80). Though what became known as “ethnic power” required the “reestablishment of a sense of ethnic identity and unity,” Gaines’s fictive interpretation suggests that white racial solidarity remains a latent unifier between Cajuns and other whites (81). In *Catherine Carmier*, the acquisition of lands by Cajun farmers that was formerly owned by African Americans is made possible because of the former groups’ ability to leverage their whiteness against blacks despite their social positioning (Gaines 73). Additionally, as rendered in Gaines’s novel, civil rights demonstrations led by young African American members of the community agitate whites, and the Grover family’s decision to confiscate black-inhabited lands for Cajun use is their way of not only showing racial solidarity but also illuminating blacks’ dependence on white benevolence (73). Robert Carmier’s fight, and later Raoul’s conflict with their Cajun rivals, reflects the tensions between two groups that are distinguished by caste yet are tied to larger racial populations.

A previous interpretation of Robert’s disappearance has noted the significance of the Carmier house being “haunted” by his ghost; however, the impact of this haunting on Raoul has not been explained.[30] First, as the narrator explains, Lavonia and Rosanna Carmier vacate the home, leaving Raoul as its sole occupant. Secondly, speculations about the women’s sudden departure as resulting from a conflict between them and Raoul’s love interest (presumably his then future wife, Della Johnson) are disproven by Della’s “love [for] her in-laws” (Gaines, *Catherine Carmier* 14). In addition, given the example of Creole manhood set before him by his father, coupled with the violence preceding and mystery surrounding Robert’s disappearance, Raoul has a particular investment in upholding and protecting his father’s house. In choosing to remain in the dwelling, Raoul preserves his father’s legacy: one that inspires awe and envy from those around him, particularly Cajuns and other blacks. Raoul’s commitment to Robert’s example, in many ways, is an unconscious, “ego”-driven act of internalization that the younger Carmier commits on account Robert’s sudden disappearance (Butler 78).[31] Occupying the house is Raoul’s way of maintaining the family’s distance from both groups, of honoring the memory of his father’s heroism, and it sends a special message to Robert’s Cajun foes that his son is not intimidated by their threats of retribution. Lastly, Raoul chooses to marry and raise his own family in the house his father allegedly haunts. This haunting has significant implications for Raoul’s interactions with Della and their children: Catherine, Mark, and Lillian.

We learn that Della Johnson and Raoul Carmier are, as one character Madame Bayonne describes, the “antithesis” of one another (Gaines, *Catherine Carmier* 114). Madame Bayonne contends:

> ‘[Raoul and Della’s marriage] was wrong from the beginning. Della had no more business marrying Raoul than I would have marrying him. She’s nothing like Raoul, and she’s nothing like his people. Their color? Yes, their color. But color is only skin deep, and below that Della is as much Negro as you or I. Raoul is not. No, he’s not white either. He hates one as much as he does the other. But his idea—his idea of what things are about as opposed to her idea—is what I mean […]. Color will be forgotten—eventually. The idea, the idea—’ (Gaines 114)

The stark ideological differences between Della and Raoul that Madame Bayonne observes help to explain why such tension exists between the pair. Della does not subscribe to the separatist views characteristic of the Creole caste. She is known throughout the Quarters as a woman who could not “dislike anyone,” had a good relationship with her in-laws, and spoke kind words to all whom she meets (Gaines 14). When Della’s disposition suddenly changes and she stops socializing with others, members of the community attribute the change to Raoul’s imposing presence (14). They speculate that Raoul insisted upon Della’s subordination, to which she obliged, but was unable to uphold. Della commits the ultimate betrayal to her marriage and to the family’s caste exclusivity by having an extramarital affair with a dark-skinned black man, Bayou Water. Madame Bayonne insists that loneliness (on account of a lack of companionship with Raoul, and Della’s need for “someone”) drives Della into the arms of a man whom others considered “‘the most trifling thing that God ever put on earth’” (115). Consequently, Della’s indiscretion resulted in the birth of a son prophetically named Mark.

Mark’s existence and the circumstances surrounding his birth not only leaves an indelible “mark” on Della and Raoul’s already strained marriage, but the child also taints the patriarchal line of the Carmier family and the clan’s reputation in the Quarters. We learn that “everybody knew the second child was not Raoul’s,” “[he] was darker than anyone else in the family,” and Mark was constantly teased by his peers on account of his known parentage and skin color (Gaines, *Catherine Carmier* 16). In a mysterious account, while “sawing down a tree” with Raoul, a then ten-year-old Mark is crushed when “the tree suddenly made a false turn” (16). While inhabitants of the Quarters deem the “accident” a murder, the white sheriff and Mack Grover support Raoul’s claim that the death was unintentional. After losing Mark, Della retreats further into the family’s isolated existence by limiting her movements to Raoul’s field and home. The eldest child, Catherine, assumes responsibilities beyond the family’s boundaries, while the youngest sibling, Lillian, is quickly ushered to New Orleans where she is raised by Raoul’s sisters (16).

Ultimately, Mark represents an incredible affront to Raoul’s manhood. Not only is he the child sired by a black man, but Mark is also the male offspring that Raoul is unable to produce himself. Knowing that the first born, Catherine, is his child, we may interpret Lillian’s conception as Raoul’s failed attempt to father a son. Lillian’s residence in New Orleans, then, is not the sole cause for Raoul's estranged relationship with her. Rather, she serves as a constant reminder to Raoul of the irreconcilability of Della’s infidelity and of the son he always wanted but could neither have nor call his own. The insult Raoul experiences as a consequence of Della’s affair propels him even further into a life consumed by cultivating the land. “Raoul had been Della’s husband by law,” Madame Bayonne explains. “Other than that, it’s been the land. Not Della he loved when he married her—the land. […]. Della was for convenience sake. To look after the house, to bear his children, and other than that—nothing” (Gaines, *Catherine Camier* 117). Della’s failure to perform the tasks assigned to her—to venture beyond the boundaries Raoul sought to circumscribe around her life and their marriage—pushes him even further toward his one true love.

Critics have cogently asserted that Raoul’s commitment to the family’s land results in its function as a “surrogate humanity” for him amidst a dichotomous social demographic (Aubert 70). Beyond these accurate observations, we may also take Raoul’s persistence as evidence of his inability to reconcile the memory of his lost father. As previously mentioned, Robert Carmier mysteriously disappears not long after having a competition and subsequent altercation with a Cajun farmer. His desire not to be judged solely on the basis of caste but by his labor is a goal Robert achieves by virtue of his victory, but he is quickly eliminated. As a means of avoiding his father's presumed deadly fate and yet honoring a legacy passed through his patriarchal line, Raoul pours himself into the land. Madame Bayonne masterfully explains:

> 'Probably [Raoul's] great-grandfather was the first one to find out that though he was as white as any white man, he still had a drop of Negro blood in him, and because of that single drop of blood, it would be impossible to ever compete side by side with the white man. So he went to the land—away from the white man, away from the black man as well. The white man refused to let him compete with him, and he in turn refused to lower himself to the black man's level. So it was to the land where he would not have to compete—at least side by side—with either. He was taught to get everything from the land, which he did, and which he, through necessity, was taught to love and to depend upon. His love for his land, his hatred for the white man, the contempt with which he looks upon the black man has passed from one generation to another.' (Gaines, *Catherine Carmier* 116)

The acquisition of Louisiana territory by the United States imposed racial codes instituted throughout the South onto the state's existing tripartite system. Intraracial caste tensions, especially between black Creoles and non-Creoles, were exacerbated when black Creole claims to racial exclusivity were deeply challenged by the dismissal of such distinctiveness throughout the broader South. We can infer from the novel's setting that Raoul's great-grandfather lived in post-emancipation Louisiana: a period prior to but anticipating the phenomenon of the *Plessy* verdict. The "separate but equal" statute resulting from the 1896 Supreme Court ruling cemented the South's binary vision, and made Raoul's forefathers, and men of the caste they fictively represent, even more resolute in claiming an identity all their own. As Madame Bayonne posits, the resentment held by Carmier men toward African Americans and whites is inspired by externally imposed limitations on their civic participation and is prompted by the men's attempt to thwart the pervasiveness of race in their lives. The land's impartiality—its function as a neutral territory that is presumably void of race—provides a haven for Raoul and "his people" to exert their identities as men: individuals who will not be judged by color, but by merit. Such tenacity, though admirable, impacts the Carmier men's interpersonal relationships with others. It causes them to view the acquisition and cultivation of property as a means of manifesting an alternative reality that the men can both embrace and control.

Raoul Carmier, then, is the product of gendered racial memory of and rebellion against the nebulous status of black Creoles in Gaines's Louisiana. Madame Bayonne continues: "'Raoul did not choose his position. He did not choose that house up there behind those oak and pecan trees. He is only carrying out something that was cut out for him in the beginning. He has no control over it. He was not put there by Robert, nor his grandfather. He was put there by the white and the black man alike'" (Gaines, *Catherine Carmier* 117). While the "'one drop of Negro blood'" that inspires Raoul's rejection from whites and his personal disdain for blacks is a fortune bequeathed to him by his forefathers, it was not a consequential identity that was rejected by his wife. Della, too, bears the stigma of blood responsible for Creoles' intermediary status between the races; yet, she was not indoctrinated into a mentality of exclusivity: "'[Della] had that single drop of blood in her just as he had, but she was taught from the beginning the direction that she would have to take. [She] had accepted that direction—fate" (117). Della's "acceptance" adds a gendered component to the impersonal operations of "fate" that underlies the story of the Carmier family: the "tragic" dimension of their lives is inspired by Gaines's admiration of the power of destiny in predetermining one's life outcome. Both Della and Raoul's individual determination to confront "fate" yields responses that vastly differ.

No information about Della's family line is presented in the novel; however, differences in perspective between she and Raoul are telling. Gaines's articulation of gendered Creole identity juxtaposes Raoul's refusal to align with neither blacks nor whites with Della's acceptance of the community's evolving racial politics. Through her words and deeds, Della rejects the strict adherence to Creole exceptionalism and hatred of blackness and whiteness imposed upon Raoul. She opposes ideologies surrounding one's "color" and "accepts" the idea that Creole identity is fated to converge with blackness for those who choose not to pass for white. Her decision to embrace the absence of choice opposes Raoul's rejection of such limitations; in not choosing to embrace black identity, Raoul challenges "rules" enforced by the "house that slavery built." His obsession with not subordinating himself to "house rules"—by cultivating the land and by policing his family—is intimately linked to questions of manhood: Catherine is his progeny—a manifestation of manhood that Raoul knows is his—and landownership is his way of realizing "honor" characteristic of men, in general, and of southern men more specifically.[32]

Della's acceptance of the changing nature of Creole identity not only is reflected in her behavior but also is a similar stance assumed by her daughter, Lillian. Lillian's indifference toward blackness and whiteness, and the family's insistence that she maintain their Creole identity, "signifies" upon the lessons passed down to Raoul and his forefathers; however, the gendered liberties and alternatives that are afforded to the family patriarchs are not available to her. Lillian, like Della, does not have the ability to embrace land cultivation as a practice of rebellion against the imperatives of race, due to the gendered nature of farming. Woods contends, "Regardless of how vocal or influential a wife may be, farming entails heavy work, and since this is a male prerogative, the husband has prestige stemming from his work" (157). With prestige comes certain freedoms and opportunities for self-fashioning; such individualized stances allow Carmier men to take ideological positions that Carmier women either adopt or resist. In Gaines's representation of the family's gender dynamics, male attitudes become the standard by which women's behaviors are gauged.

As mentioned earlier, Lillian Carmier is sent away from her family when she is one-month-old to be raised by Raoul's sisters in New Orleans (Gaines, *Catherine Carmier* 16). Her visits home are limited to brief stints in the summers, during which time, Lillian behaves as a stranger toward her parents; Catherine is the only family member with whom she feels a close connection. It is Catherine to whom Lillian confesses her intentions of leaving Louisiana in hopes of "passing" for a white woman in the North. Lillian's decision to self-identify as white is not a choice prompted by a disdain for blackness exclusively. More than disgust for the group to which she is tied by blood, Lillian's resolution is in many ways a response to the extent to which racial exclusivity can be claimed in one's pronouncement of Creole identity. Given the sociohistorical context of the 1960s, Lillian provides an honest critique of her father and his sisters' investment in an exclusionary family narrative and the utility of their aims: "'Daddy's world is over with,'" Lillian tells Catherine. "'That farming out there—one man trying to buck against that whole family of Cajuns—is outdated. […]. It's the same thing his sisters are trying to prove in the city'" (40).

Lillian's experiences in New Orleans exemplify the intraracial tensions that have characterized the city historically. In "The Crescent City," there existed "the curious coexistence of a three-tiered Caribbean racial structure alongside its two-tiered American counterpart" (Hirsh and Logsdon 189). The age of Jim Crow prompted white New Orleanians to align along racial lines, which resulted in the "rapid assimilation" of white immigrants and the "fierce determination of white Creoles to link their identity to a biological rather than a cultural heritage" (190). Black Creoles in the city, however, were not inspired to the same degree of urgency. Their embrace of the two-tiered system was "slower," "more contested," and a "somewhat more uneven process" (191). Arnold R. Hirsh contends:

> The tendency among New Orleans Creoles to wrap themselves in their downtown neighborhoods, sheltered within their unique history, language, and religion [in the early twentieth-century] perpetuated a sense of distinctiveness. Their concerns for respectability, family values, and even—for some—a pronounced color consciousness provided coherence,

> stability, and certain rewards. Feeling the same pressures as the white Creoles, who were simultaneously denying their past while self-consciously applying Americanized standards of racial identity, many black Creoles similarly turned to biology and genealogy in the search for status. (“Simply a Matter” 265)

Attitudes expressed by Raoul’s sisters reflect the tendency of some New Orleans Creoles to perpetuate intraracial difference even amidst a static racial order. The women’s determination to raise Lillian as Creole not only reflects social views persistent in their generation but also demonstrates the clash between their views and those emerging from Lillian’s age group.

In her ethnographic case study of a black Creole community in Louisiana, Sister Francis J. Woods documents findings from a 1967 study of young Creole self-perception. One high school girl reveals: “‘We don’t like the idea of…distinguishing Creoles and Negroes like some of our own people do, since we are all the same. We are all colored people even though some of us are lighter.’” Another young woman contends: “‘That was the way it [intraracial differences based on color-caste] used to be thought of and taught to children, but it ain’t that way no more. We is all equal’” (Woods 370). The participants of the study were said to provide insight into young Creole attitudes toward intraracial difference, in general; however, the gendered subjectivities of the informants are significant as well. The young women’s desire to challenge barriers for group solidarity reflects a stance similar to that of Della Carmier. They understand the possibilities for racial alliance presented by their blood ties to the larger African American community, and find these possibilities to be more productive than the maintenance of intraracial distinctiveness. These real and fictional depictions of women’s perceptions of group solidarity is similar to the positions taken by black feminists in forwarding an agenda that situates intragroup similarities, while acknowledging difference, as the basis for demanding social change. Lillian’s decision to pass as white is not a notable exception to such beliefs; like the famous case of Susie Guillory Phipps, her stance is reflective of the variety of Creole responses to racial cohesion.[33]

Lillian’s suggestion that her elders’ views are archaic and that their desire to lay claim to an identity that should prompt others to accept it as unique estranges Lillian from her loved ones. In a candid conversation with Catherine, Lillian shares how her immediate family’s choice to send her to Raoul’s sisters in New Orleans in order to get an “education” was actually an indoctrination into hating “blackness” and into establishing a distance between her and Della (Gaines, *Catherine Carmier* 47-48). Lillian, we are told, is not informed about circumstances surrounding Mark’s birth and death. Her rearing in New Orleans came as a result of her aunts’ awareness of Della’s indiscretions with Bayou Water and the women’s desires to raise Lillian themselves. When Lillian tells Catherine that her aunts “taught” her to despise blacks and to dislike Della “as an extra subject” (47), Catherine dismisses the assertion as a lie (47). Lillian insists, “‘[I]ndirectly they told me a million times to hate her [Della]. There’re so many little ways to make you hate, and they used every one of them’” (48). Though Lillian does not elaborate upon these “many little ways,” we can surmise from her assessment that these gestures were tactics used by her aunts to train Lillian to dismiss Della’s role in her life. Furthermore, the women’s ill-regard for Della mirrors Raoul’s dismissal of his wife and of their failed marriage after seeing the evidence of her infidelity specifically, and of Della's unbiased regard for darker-skinned blacks more generally. Race hatred taught to Lillian, coupled with the absence of a familial bond with her parents, distances Lillian from Raoul and Della, and it prevents Lillian from forming intimate connections with her aunts.

Notwithstanding her relationship with Catherine, Lillian's feelings of familial estrangement and of detachment from Creole identity are exacerbated by the growing fixedness of racial lines distinctive of the Civil Rights and Black Power eras. As the entire country witnessed a seismic contestation of America's institutionalized system of discrimination on the part of minorities of various groups, so did racial identity politics significantly coalesce around issues of group solidarity during the period.[34] Black Power and its cultural-literary complement, the Black Arts Movement, for example, called for unity among citizens throughout the African Diaspora, and it promoted an ethos of racial pride and "black self-determination" (Ogbar 2). This call to greater racial consciousness was not only a means of countering virulent anti-black hatred but also an appeal to champion black authenticity and to abandon Euro-centric standards for defining one's self.

With groups such as the Nation of Islam and the Black Panther Party espousing the importance of black self-respect, and outspoken revolutionaries like Malcolm X and Amiri Baraka praising the dignity of one's blackness, it is no surprise, then, that Creoles of color found themselves placed in an unsettling position. While many followed in the steps of their predecessors who had rejected the idea of caste exceptionality at the turn of the twentieth-century and sought to dismantle barriers between them and their non-Creole counterparts, some Creoles of color found it difficult to subscribe to "the new blackness" or Afrocentric self-definitions characteristic of Civil Rights and Black Power eras (Van de Burg 51).[35] “Some aspects of Black Power ran against the grain of Louisiana’s Creole heritage,” Adam Fairclough insists. “Stokley Carmicheal’s celebration of black skin, thick lips, and ‘nappy hair’—African rather than European physiognomy—praised precisely those features that were disdained by many Creoles.[…]Black Power…challenged light-skinned Creoles to abandon their alleged social exclusivism once and for all and to identify with the black struggle unambiguously” (*Race and Democracy* 383). Since historians and cultural critics have identified the goals of each era as being intertwined, we can view such calls for group cohesion associated with “black power” as part of a much longer, more complexly-generated civil rights struggle.[36] “The extent to which Black Power traumatized Creoles and transmuted the Creole self-image can be easily exaggerated,” Fairclough admits. “Resentment of Creoles persisted, but it had more to do with class than with color” (383). Amidst this changing sociopolitical consciousness (in regard to both race and Creole caste status) and with feelings of anxiety about the utility of her family’s ethnocultural identity, Lillian finds herself forced to choose a racial group with which to align. She explains her decision to “pass” to Catherine:

> ‘I’ve thought about it [passing] over and over. I’m not in love with it. I can’t ever be. But I have no other choice. I’m not black, Cathy. I hate black. I hate black worse than the whites hate it. I have black friends, but only at a distance. I feel for my mother, but only at a distance. I don’t let my black friends come close to me. I don’t let her come close to me. I don’t say get away. I’ve never said that. I just can’t open my heart out to

> them. […]. I haven't opened my heart out to that white world either. But I'm going there because I must go somewhere. […]. Daddy and his sisters can't understand this. They want us to be Creoles. Creoles. What a joke. Today you're one way or the other, you're white or you're black. There's no in-between.' (Gaines, *Catherine Carmier* 48)

Lillian's admission that her decision to "pass" is a forced identity one assumes complicates the narrative of "passing" as a survival strategy for fair-skinned African Americans. Her "survival" is prompted not as a means of escaping white racism; rather, Lillian's decision to identify as a white woman is her manner of resisting an alternative racial identity that she has been conditioned to abhor. Her claiming whiteness contradicts Della's embrace of blackness: in both instances, each woman accepts "fate"—regardless of their personal affinities—and adjusts her life accordingly.

Lillian's desire to share her frustrations with Catherine and, more importantly, to have Catherine "understand what happened" (their being taught to hate blackness) and "what is still happening" (the expectation for the family's Creole identity to be upheld) are telling (Gaines, *Catherine Carmier* 49). Not only are Lillian's observations cogent but they also illuminate the distinction between men and women's ability to employ memory as a means of articulating a gendered racial consciousness in the novel. As shown by my discussion of Robert and Raoul Carmier, the gendered racial memories of both men are articulated by Antoine Richard and Madame Bayonne, respectively. Richard's recollection of Robert Carmier's bold proposition to Mack Grover inspires his awe and admiration; the elder Carmier demonstrates a fearlessness that is characteristic of Creole manhood but is frequently policed in black men. Detailed explanations of Raoul

Carmier's actions, however, are provided by Madame Bayonne. Her articulation of Raoul's character as being a part of a longer narrative about the complexities of Creole men's gendered racial consciousness, and the imposition of black-white racial constructions on such thought, provides invaluable insights into Raoul's significance to Gaines's problematizing of race during the time out of which *Catherine Carmier* emerges.

Gaines's use of Madame Bayonne as a means of exposing Raoul's vulnerability is the author's manner of highlighting women's particular ability to speak critically about the interiority of individual lives, especially when these lives are "raced" as black. Notwithstanding Ralph Ellison's brilliant depiction of his "invisible" male protagonist, African American women writers such as Sherley Anne Williams, Toni Morrison, Alice Walker, and Gloria Naylor have used their novels to illuminate the consciousness of characters and to explain the motivations behind certain actions. Scholarly assessments of their work, in fact, have praised these women novelists' manner and method of interrogating gendered racial consciousness through their construction of male and female characters. Complementing these apt observations, Bertram Wyatt-Brown's important analysis of African American men's experiences during slavery suggests the ways in which black men's memories—a manner of interpretation explored in African American men and women's writing—shape their consciousness of uniquely racial manhood: "To escape the dictates of shame and humiliation, male slaves largely had to repress emotions and exhibit nerveless behavior. The unpredictability of masters, the difficulty of white surveillance, the powerlessness of any slave in jeopardy could result in self-despisement and doubt […]" (2). Wyatt-Brown contends that "inwardly directed" emotions of “rage, depression, and stony resentment” prevalent in African American literature becomes black writers’ means of interrogating “the threat of annihilation of mind as well as body that black males most especially feel” (2). Madame Bayonne’s particular assessment of Raoul echoes Wyatt Brown’s claims, she offers more insight into Lillian’s observation of her family’s need for exceptionalism, and her observations further explains Della’s later warning to Catherine not to break Raoul’s heart by getting involved with a black man, Jackson Bradley. Gaines allows women’s voices to narrate Raoul’s frustration for much of the novel; it is not until the novel’s end, however, that Raoul’s personal thoughts are revealed. The catalyst for his self-disclosure is Jackson.

Raoul’s disdain for Jackson Bradley is prompted by his memories of Della’s infidelity, Mark’s death, and Raoul’s fears of losing Catherine. We learn that Jackson returns to the quarters to visit his Aunt Charlotte after a ten-year absence. Having left when he was twelve years old to live with his mother and stepfather in San Francisco, Jackson arrives back to his childhood home to find Charlotte anticipating that his stay is permanent and that Jackson will become a teacher in the community. Jackson, however, is displeased with the community’s seeming lack of progress and is disenchanted with the idea of settling there. His doubts are challenged when Jackson sees his childhood darling, Catherine Carmier. We learn that he and Catherine were never sweethearts as teenagers; in fact, Jackson was involved with another girl, Mary Louise. Catherine and Jackson, however, do engage in innocent exchanges when they are very young. Once when the two were six-years-old, Catherine comes home and informs her mother that Jackson is her “boyfriend” with whom she wants to “‘come play with [her] sometime’” (Gaines, *Catherine Carmier* 15). Della agrees to the request, but Catherine’s description of

Jackson as “dark,” when asked about his “color,” inspires Della to caution Catherine about letting Raoul catch her playing with her friend (15). The children’s playtime together, Della tells Catherine, is a “secret” shared only between the two of them (16). Della’s choice to permit Catherine and Jackson’s friendship and to defy Raoul’s demands that the family not affiliate with darker-complexioned blacks is likened to her own willingness to associate with blacks in the quarters. And though she refuses to force Catherine into an isolated existence, Della remains well aware of Raoul’s influence over their home and is careful not to provoke his wrath.

When Della learns that Jackson has returned to the Quarters, she immediately draws an eerie parallel between him and Mark: “And for a moment [after considering what Jackson’s return means to his aunt, Charlotte], she [Della] thought how she would feel if her son could come back to her. But that moment passed away like a puff of smoke’” (Gaines, *Catherine Carmier* 58). What replaces this moment of wonder, is Della’s memory of Mark’s significance to Raoul: Mark was a living reminder of her infidelity with Bayou Water and the embodiment of Raoul’s hatred for blackness. Della’s charge to Catherine that she not “‘be the one now’” to “‘hurt him [Raoul] again’” (59), is her acknowledgement of how her own failure to embrace the Carmiers’ attitudes toward caste exclusivity and of the detrimental effect her actions had on Raoul. Moreover, Della’s admonition that Catherine not “hurt” her father “again” suggests not only the birth of Mark but also her grandson Nelson’s birth. Nelson, we learn, is fathered by Bernard, a Creole laborer who came to assist the Carmiers in tending to their sugar cane crops (119). He and Catherine fell in love, and she soon became pregnant. After learning of Catherine’s pregnancy, Bernard sought her hand in marriage, but was physically threatened by Raoul for making such a proposition. The altercation between Nelson's father and Raoul not only reveals the extent of the Carmiers' private existence (even to the point of distancing other Creoles) but also shows Raoul's obsessive protection of Catherine (119). When these actions are placed in the context of his undaunted commitment to maintaining his familial legacy and his memories of Della's infidelity, Raoul's fight with Bernard foreshadows the brawl that ensues between him and Jackson.

The childhood affection Catherine and Jackson experienced in their youth rekindles upon his return; yet, this time, Jackson's first "love" is also the mother of two-year-old Nelson. Despite Catherine's responsibilities to Nelson and the obligations she undoubtedly feels toward Raoul and Della, Catherine and Jackson engage in a forbidden romance, tempered by limitations imposed by Raoul. Stolen glances, secret rendezvous, and endearing confessions of mutual attraction characterize their relationship. Catherine tries to balance her growing love for Jackson with her particular commitment to Raoul. She feels indebted not only for her own betrayal of his trust but Catherine, like Madame Bayonne, seems to have an exceptional understanding of Raoul's desire for a son and of the gravity of Mark's existence on his life. Madame Bayonne insists:

> 'With people like Raoul…a son is the most important thing in his life. He's a loner from the beginning—but that son would be there to stand beside him. That son would be there to lessen this load of loneliness. He would be there to continue whatever he had started and was unable to finish. But [Mark] was not his son—this boy was black. And instead of lessening this load, the presence of the boy increased the burden. So he went to Catherine.' (Gaines, *Catherine Carmier* 118)

Catherine, in turn, spends her life trying to atone both for her sins as well as Della's by denying her own happiness. She does not leave with Nelson's father and accepts a fate of substituting for the son Raoul could never call his own. Catherine's self-sacrificing behavior is unsettled when she reunites with Jackson and makes the difficult choice to runaway with him. Unfortunately, her efforts are thwarted when she and Jackson's plan to leave the quarters and start a new life together is interrupted by her father.

Raoul is alerted of Catherine's plans to runaway with Jackson by two black sharecroppers who are paid by Cajuns to disclose the couple's whereabouts. We learn that Raoul takes Catherine and Lillian to Bayonne in order to attend a dance with his sisters who reside there. Presuming that Catherine and Lillian are under his sisters' supervision, he initially deems the sharecroppers' report a lie initiated by his Cajun rivals. Raoul's assumptions, however, are true; the Cajuns pay the black farmers to tell Catherine's whereabouts because they know the depth of Raoul's disdain for blacks and the high esteem in which he holds Catherine. As Raoul makes his way to the dance hall, Catherine and Jackson's alleged meeting place, Raoul wonders why the two black men reveal Catherine's indiscretion but did not inform him of Della's affair with Bayou Water years prior. Communicating Raoul's thoughts, the narrator explains:

> 'Why did they come tell him? Why didn't they just laugh at him behind his back? They did not tell him about the other one [implying Della's affair]. (He thought about the other one. It was like a haunting song that stays in one's mind. It had been in his mind twenty years. Even after the death of the boy [Mark] ten years ago, it would not leave. It seemed to grow stronger. Time seemed to feed it)' (Gaines, *Catherine Carmier* 226).

Raoul’s musings continue as he reflects on Catherine’s peculiar behavior in weeks prior (prompted by her encounters with Jackson), remembers her increasing loneliness, and he speculates that his Cajun adversaries had potentially masterminded Catherine’s exposure as a means of taking his land. His contemplation continues as Raoul accuses Jackson of provoking Catherine’s unfaithfulness (thereby dismissing her ability to exercise free will), and Raoul resolves to kill him (228).

In the midst of his rage, however, Raoul’s thoughts bring him to a compelling revelation:

> I will raise the gun. I will—he started thinking about the other boy. It was like a song that you could not get out of your mind. It was like your skin that you must live inside of forever. (Contrary to what the others believed, he loved the boy. Ten thousand times he had wanted to pull the boy to him, to hold him against his chest, to cry, to whisper, ‘I love you, I love you’; but something always kept him from doing so. How could he explain what it was? He did not know what it was. It was there with him all the time. ‘Hate him,’ the thing was saying to him. ‘Look what she’s done. Hate him. Hate him.’ And all the time he wanted to love the boy. He wanted to pass his hand over his skin, over his hair. He wanted to feel the small bones in his hands and arms.). (Gaines, *Catherine Carmier* 228)

Raoul’s conflation of his hate for Jackson and his apparent love for Mark exemplifies his internal conflict with embracing race in general, and blackness more specifically. While Mark is the product of an extramarital affair and symbolizes the literal tainting of his patriarchal bloodline, the child also means much more to Raoul than he previously acknowledged. His memories of wanting to embrace Mark, yet feeling compelled to hold him at a distance, demonstrates Raoul's desire to love Mark unconditionally even though he has been conditioned to maintain an alternative position. Preexisting gendered racial memory figuring blackness as an identity against which one must position himself is a legacy that also shapes Raoul's attitude toward Jackson Bradley. Raoul sees Jackson's pursuit of Catherine not only as the potential imposition of blackness into his familial ranks once more but also as another black man's attempt to sexually possess one of his women. Unable to bear either insult, Raoul cannot allow Jackson to pursue his daughter, and he resolves that he will prevent their union at any cost.

Beyond these revelations, Raoul's thoughts point to "something" that constantly reminds him to hate. We may interpret this great Unknown as the gendered racial memories Madame Bayonne narrativizes as having been passed throughout Raoul's generations. But the fact that this "thing" tells Raoul to "'look what she's done'" in justifying his hate for Mark suggests that "it" could be the ghost of Robert Carmier. The ghost's reference to "what she's done" is a direct allusion to Della's infidelity: Mark is both the embodiment and evidence of what Della's "done" to defame the family's legacy. The memory of Della's indiscretion reinforces the family's claims to exclusivity and prompts Robert's ghost to haunt Raoul with vengeance. Raoul, then, battles not only with the historical consciousness of his family but also with honoring his father and Robert's particular legacy of hate.

When Raoul sees that Catherine is not at that dance hall, and he reasons that she has returned to their home in order to prepare for departure, he quickly retreats only to find Catherine and Jackson together (Gaines, *Catherine Carmier* 236). With a loaded revolver in hand, he points to an unarmed Jackson and pleads: "'Boy, I don't want any more blood on my hand. I don't want any more gnawing at my heart. Don't make me use this—please'" (236). Raoul's plea marks a significant moment of truth in the novel. Not only does he confess to having killed Mark, but Raoul also reiterates the guilt he feels on account of the crime. As mentioned earlier, Raoul's violent action is prompted by an enduring memory of resentment, which he believes he cannot escape, and therefore, he cannot generate an alternative way of being. He reasons that Catherine's decision to follow Jackson is yet another disappointment in a succession of attempts at destroying his family and their particular ethnocultural advantage. More importantly, as demonstrated by the fight that occurs between he and Jackson, Raoul views Jackson as having challenged his identity as a Creole man. The brawl, then, is a test of Raoul's manhood—his Creole manhood—that is positioned in opposition to black manhood embodied by Jackson Bradley. Raoul's demonstration of excessive pride and reckless bravery does not prevent the inevitable exchange of blood between women of his caste and men of whom he believes himself to be superior. Even his presumed "advantage" as Creole and his focused attention on the land are not enough to defend him from the "blackness" that he and his forefathers reject. Like the male protagonists featured in the works of one of Gaines's literary influences, Ernest Hemingway, Raoul learns that he cannot rest on "self-assertion" alone.[37] The contest between Raoul and Jackson is, as Della concludes, a fight between him and Mark (248). But more than this, Raoul fights back against Mark, Jackson, Bayou Water, Cajuns, and anyone who attempted to impose blackness upon his life.

What Raoul fails to realize is that he is not alone in bearing the burden of racial essentialism. Jackson, too, voices similar concerns with the manner in which blackness circumscribes one's identity and sets boundaries for an individual's life when he recalls his experiences in California. Jackson's reflections on his time in America's western "North" not only reveals what he sees as continuities in African Americans' southern experiences in other regional locales but also shows his growing awareness of the multifaceted nature of institutionalized discrimination. Initially, "hearing his mother complain about the shabby neighborhood they had to live in only because they were Negroes" or "hearing his stepfather complain about his job" do not prompt Jackson to link their living conditions and life circumstances to a longer narrative of blacks' inequality (Gaines, *Catherine Carmier* 92). In fact, his own experiences as a student in integrated California schools "surrounded by white students," and his unrestricted access to public accommodations make Jackson question whether his home life was more an anomaly than the norm (92). Jackson's call to consciousness of the "North's" broken promises "had only come less directly than it had in the South" (92). The narrator explains:

> [Jackson] was not told that he could not come into the restaurant to eat. But when he did come inside, he was not served as promptly and with the same courtesy as were others. When he went into a store to buy a pair of pants or a pair of socks, he was treated in the same manner as he had been in the restaurant. And when he and his parents were looking in the paper for another place to rent, he remembered how his mother's finger made an imprint under each place that said 'colored,' when all the time there were

> other places which she would have preferred living in and which were much cheaper. The imprint under that one word, because it was made in San Francisco, would be imprinted on his mind the rest of his life. (92-93)

Recalling his mother's disdain for their living conditions, yet feeling helpless in selecting a more suitable dwelling coalesce with memories of his stepfather's dissatisfaction with securing a job better suited to help him support their family. These memories force Jackson to reconsider his original thoughts of California's difference from the South, in general, and rural Louisiana more specifically. Like the permanent "mark" made in Raoul's consciousness by the birth of Della's illegitimate son, the "imprint" of blackness is branded into Jackson's psyche and is made more powerful because he experiences its limitations in the imagined antithesis of the South. Jackson, however, quickly learns that both places have their "faults," despite the fact that the "North" historically has been cast as the proverbial Land of Promise. "The North," the narrator explains, "with all of her faults made it clear to you whether you were a Negro from the South, an Indian from New Mexico, or a Chinese from Hong Kong, that in spite of her shortcomings, conditions here were better than the ones you had left, or you would not have left in the beginning" (93).

The allure of metaphorically "northern" locations—including California—to populations both within U.S. borders and to those abroad speaks to the North's prominence as the symbolic manifestation of the country's Constitutional promises of life, liberty, and the opportunity to pursue individual happiness; the South had been positioned as the nation's unsightly blemish in America's narrative of Opportunity. Jackson's revelation that such disillusion is not solely the property of African Americans, but is a vision shared by other ethnic groups, is evidence of his broadening consciousness of race. Jackson is also made aware that race is not the only subject position from which an individual can experience discrimination: social class is a subjectivity that crosses boundaries imposed by racial difference. Jackson recalls a conversation between him and “a white boy, born and raised in Dayton, Ohio” during which he is exposed to the danger of seeing injustice as exclusively a matter of black and white (Gaines, *Catherine Carmier* 94). When Jackson assumes that the young man has “everything,” and that he can afford to contest class inequality because of racial privilege, the white “boy” tells Jackson that his understanding is shortsighted: “Your struggle is no worse than mine,” he tells Jackson. “I’m sure your cross is even lighter to carry” (94). The young man’s reply that Jackson’s “cross” of discrimination may be “lighter to carry” than his own is an interesting explanation of the “burdens” associated with whiteness. The “metalanguage of race” that subsumes intraracial differences within African American communities frequently obscures differences within white populations as well. But whereas blackness is understood as a disadvantage to one’s life experiences, whiteness connotes a level of privilege that ignores the subjectivities of white Americans who encounter discrimination on account of their socioeconomic status and other categories of social difference: “The denial of white as a racial identity, the denial that whiteness has a history, allows the quiet, the blankness, to stand as the norm. This erasure enables many to fuse their absence of racial being with the nation, making whiteness their unspoken but deepest sense of what it means to be an American” (Hale 1).

Jackson’s encounter with “the white boy from Dayton” and the invaluable life lessons he learns while in California not only feeds his disillusion with the United States but also encourages his sympathy and admiration for Raoul. Just like the Carmiers had been taught to hate African Americans, Jackson was also raised to despise them on account of the family's elitist proclivities (Gaines, *Catherine Carmier* 176). Jackson, however, admits that he cannot hate Raoul because he "was still trying to stand when all the odds were against him" (177). Raoul's determination to uphold his convictions, his dogged resistance against succumbing to societal demands for his assimilation, and his resolve not to adopt a mentality of inferiority inspires Jackson to evaluate his actions as not solely the exploits of a resentful man. Rather, Jackson considers Raoul's behavior as demonstrative of his unwavering resilience: a quality in Raoul that has been shaped by a lifetime of uncertainty, loss, and disappointment. Jackson's experiences in Louisiana and in California, coupled with the academic insight with which he can evaluate these occurrences, affords him an opportunity for critical self-reflection. Such insight provides Jackson with a language to express that which Raoul cannot. It also unites these men in their mutual commitment to contesting racial essentialism while showing the divergences in their aims. Davis writes:

> [Jackson] has a hard-earned knowledge of the walls that separate aspects of himself. His reunion with his aunt, Charlotte Moses, has precipitated a struggle to overcome their different notions of the common ground connecting them; his meeting with Catherine has inspired his determination to break through the barriers isolating individuals; his encounter with racist practices of the plantation…has made him admit that racism is a reality. Jackson believes that a wall surrounds his life, but he persists in fighting it […]. (6).

For both Jackson and Raoul, racial “walls” surrounding their lives—erected by their gendered racial memories and experiences with discrimination—compel them to act. Haunted by the idea that inclusion in any racial category undermines his ethnocultural heritage, Raoul commits to maintaining a stance of separation, even if it means alienating those around him. Jackson, too, is haunted by the implications of one’s inclusion in a particular racial group. As a man who identifies as African American, he understands that his blackness stigmatizes him in ways that even his education cannot undo. Jackson’s pursuit of Catherine is not driven by a single-focused attempt to dismantle obstacles of intraracial difference; his love for her seeks to show that the connection experienced between human beings has the potential to subvert even the most enduring barriers. The fact that Catherine chooses to remain under Raoul’s authority and does not leave with Jackson demonstrates Gaines’s awareness that transcending the “house that slavery built” is a difficult task, even for individuals within a given racial community.

In her essay, “Home,” Toni Morrison writes, “We need to think about what it means and what it takes to live in a redesigned racial house […]. We need to think about what new dangers present themselves when escape or self-exile from the house of racial construction is announced or achieved” (8). Gaines’s *Catherine Carmier* situates the importance of interrogating the nuances of racial identity, but, as Morrison posits, he suggests that even the recognition of intraracial distinctions does not eliminate the conflicts that persist within racial communities. Gaines’s novel asks important questions about the history and nature of racial cohesion at a time when demands for group solidarity frequently ignored the tensions that arose when espousing discourses of black racial pride. His fictive representation of Louisiana’s Creoles of color and their gendered racial memories in 1960s America illustrates the complexity of black responses to the period. In the next chapter, I will continue to discuss the significant distinctions in African American men’s particular responses to demands for black racial solidarity, and show how Gaines’s *In My Father’s House* continues to engage black men’s varied approaches to destabilizing America’s “house that slavery built.”

Chapter Two

“A Black Man’s Conference”:

Civil Rights, Black Power, and Black Masculinity in *In My Father’s House*

The Civil Rights and Black Power Movements in the United States are considered two of the most pivotal moments in American history. Though their periodizations continue to inspire debate among leading historians, the collective aims and achievements of “civil rights” (a demand for equality in American institutions and the realization of one’s rights and privileges as citizens) and “black power” (a demand for civil rights while “advocating racial autonomy and self-determination”) changed the sociopolitical landscape of the United States.[38]

The origins of what is considered the Civil Rights Movement—marked by the tragic death of Emmett Till, the Montgomery Bus Boycott, and the 1954 *Brown v. Board of Education* Supreme Court decision—catalyzed tactical non-violent direct action initiatives led by noted organizations such as the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP), the Congress for Racial Equality (CORE), the Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee (SNCC), and the Southern Christian Leadership Council (SCLC). Their fight to contest injustice advanced grassroots activism, supported cross-generational and interracial coalition, and promoted diplomacy. Southern cities including Montgomery and Selma, Alabama set the stage and scene for anti-discrimination protests that achieved federal intervention in the form of the Civil Rights (1964) and Voting Rights (1965) Acts. The use of court systems and subsequent legislative victories that identified civil rights activism, however, neither quelled white racism nor quieted African Americans’ determination to dismantle “the house that slavery built.” Their chants for “Freedom Now” were replaced by a louder, more resolved cry for “Black Power.” This clarion call, which evolved into a full-fledged Black Power Movement, inspired forms of activism that emphasized armed self-defense, called attention to the plight of blacks in urban centers, connected the experiences of African Americans to a transnational black freedom struggle, developed racial pride as a component of blacks’ empowerment, and advocated “community control of schools, welfare rights, prison reform, jobs, and racial justice for the poor” (Joseph 3). The Black Panther Party, the cultural organization US, and the Republic of New Africa are among the many alliances that made black power more than a mantra: it became a necessary prerequisite for equality. Together, ideologies of civil rights and black power not only prompted intergenerational contestation of injustice—inspiring young and old to ask hard ethical questions about the equity of America’s constitutional promises in a society plagued by various forms of imperialism—but also produced a phenomenal cadre of men and women leaders whose lives continue to evoke memories of pride.

Historians, cultural critics, and students of the lives and work of two such leaders—Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. and Malcolm X (also known as El-Hajj Malik El-Shabazz)—rightly acknowledge the men’s enshrined status as champions of resistance during these eras.[39] But more than representing two interconnected resistance traditions within the African American freedom struggle (i.e. integration and black nationalism, respectively), Dr. King and Malcolm X function as archetypes of black masculinity that African American men admired and strove to emulate. Their single chance encounter in 1964 is etched in time by a photograph of the presumed rivals engaged in a jovial handshake.[40] This cordial grasp symbolically represents that which contemporary scholars have come to rightly acknowledge: moments of ideological convergence indeed exist within the leaders' aims and attitudes toward black racial progress.[41] Similarly, the image of the men's interlocked hands also symbolizes the meeting of the representations of black masculinity each leader embodies in the "consensus memory" of the civil rights and black power eras.[42] Their meeting reminds us of the enduring connection between that which has been deemed "civil rights," what has been designated as "black power," and the impact of both ideologies on black manhood.[43]

This chapter examines Ernest J. Gaines's critique of the Civil Rights and Black Power Movements, particularly their impact on constructions of black masculinity. Set in 1970, *In My Father's House* (1978) presents several male characters in the small Louisiana parish of St. Adrienne. Their interactions fictively engage some of the ideological tensions that existed during the civil rights and black power eras, especially the effectiveness of interracial coalition and non-violence, and the utility of black militancy as a defense strategy. As did examples set by Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr., Malcolm X, and other leaders of the time, the men's experiences demonstrate how these tensions shaped black manhood during these movements. Furthermore, Gaines uses the novel to illustrate the ways in which the civil rights and black power eras—for all their successes—neglected to address African American men's interpersonal relationships. By imagining "a black man's conference," Gaines suggests that exploring the complexities of African American men's relationships, and the ideologies that shape black men's thinking, broadens our understanding of these interconnected periods in the African American freedom struggle. Black men's gendered racial memory—the men's specific memories of their experiences as black and male subjects in the United States—is one pathway to such understanding.

My discussion of *In My Father's House* centers on five black male protagonists: Reverend Phillip J. Martin, Robert X (born Etienne Rey), Howard Mills, Jonathan Robillard, and Billy. Martin, a prominent minister and civil rights leader in St. Adrienne, is forced to revisit the sins of his youth when his illegitimate son, Robert, returns to the parish to confront Martin for abandoning his familial responsibilities. Robert's quest to challenge Martin is triggered by the brutal rape of his sister, Justine, and the regret he feels in not avenging the crime. Robert believes that his inadequacy and his family's misfortune is a direct result of Martin's absence. Martin's tense meeting with Robert is only one of the strained interactions he encounters in the novel. Jonathan Robillard, Martin's "ambitious" associate minister, challenges his movement leadership; Howard Mills, his long-time comrade, questions his commitment to their protest efforts; and Billy, a young Vietnam veteran, forces Martin to assess the effectiveness of "traditional" liberation strategies in bringing about real social change. The impact of gendered racial memory on the men's words and actions is evident in their responses to Phillip Martin. Gendered racial memory also shapes the men's relationships with and attitudes toward other black men, African American women, and whites. My analysis of these characters seeks to highlight Gaines's narrative exploration of the civil rights and black power eras and their failure to fully address the complexities of black intraracial existence. As the novel suggests, tackling these complexities, for African American men, is essential to promoting greater understanding between black men and the communities of which they are part.

Gaines's use of gendered racial memory in the novel reflects what Edward P. Morgan calls a "democratic exchange": an interpretation of the past that opposes what

Morgan sees as the central quality of media-perpetuated “public memory” (138). Public memory, he insists, is retained “within the market-driven mass media culture,” a culture that has played an undeniable role in creating the foundation of public discourses emerging from and responding to “the” Civil Rights and Black Power Movements (Morgan 138). Conversely, a democratic exchange “respects evidence [yet] tries to understand the subjective dimensions of interpretation” (138). Gaines’s novel participates in such an exchange.

In My Father’s House engages with historical memory of the civil rights and black power movements, and it illuminates the limits of subjective understandings of these moments and their participants. The novel shows how certain interpretations of each movement has emphasized African Americans’ interpersonal relationships with whites, but such analyses have done so at the expense of engaging black intraracial alliances, especially those involving African American men. Gendered racial memory in *In My Father’s House* inspires African American men to acknowledge the catalytic effects of their actions on others, to recognize the necessity of personal accountability, and it forces black men to come to terms with their unique experiences as men in a southern context shaped by the civil rights and black power eras.

Contemporary scholars have discussed the ways in which writers have interrogated the impact of the civil rights and black power movements in their fiction. In his analysis of Gaines and Alice Walker’s work as illustrative of the power of historiographical fiction, Richard H. King insists: “[Historical] understanding may be enhanced…by a fictional working-through of historical phenomena. […]. At its best fiction, can illuminate certain dimensions of the experience of politics that otherwise might have remained hidden" (163). Sharon Monteith and Peter J. Ling assert that one such "hidden" dimension is gendered subjectivity. Building upon King's formulations, Ling and Monteith assert: "By choosing the medium of fiction, writers should acquire a freedom to think beyond the dominant gender discourse and to posit alternatives. […]. [Their writing] may also operate to highlight overlooked possibilities or substantiate alternative scenarios" (10). Such cogent assessments of fiction and its function in informing our understanding of historical accounts not only continues the familiar line of reasoning that history and literature are interconnected disciplines, but these evaluations also affirm the importance of fiction in illuminating the nuances of historical discourse.[44] While African American writers including Gaines, Walker, Toni Morrison, and Charles Johnson have used their works to render such "overlooked possibilities" and have called us to imagine "alternative scenarios" in reconsidering the civil rights and black power movements, book-length discussions of such "democratic exchange[s]" are limited.

Studies conducted by Melissa Walker and Rolland Murray are notable examples of this important work. In *Down from the Mountaintop: Black Women's Novels in the Wake of the Civil Rights Movement, 1966-1989* (1991), Walker suggests that African American women writers such as Morrison, Alice Walker, Sherley Anne Williams, and Toni Cade Bambara revisit previous historical moments in precisely the way Ling and Monteith describe as "a dialectic between past and present which prefigures the future" (10). Walker insists that African American women writers "might write directly into the prevailing cultural values or into the counterforces challenging those values," but in either case, "the spirits of the time are at work shaping [black women's] narratives" (8). Rolland Murray also considers the influence of culture as well as the historical moment shaping black writers' work, but specifically examines writings by African American men. His important study, *Our Living Manhood: Literature, Black Power, and Masculine Ideology* (2007), Murray examines how the works of James Baldwin, John Edgar Wideman, and others comment on the "masculinist ideologies" of the Black Power era in ways that both correspond and contradict narratives of black male chauvinism and standards for what is deemed "revolutionary" black manhood (3). Gaines participates in a project similar to those discussed by Murray and Walker. His novels not only engage the racial and gender politics of the period in general, but they also situate these politics within a specific historical and cultural milieu. Moreover, the role that gendered racial memory performs in his works allows for a critical analysis of how southern identity impacts Gaines's male characters' participation in the civil rights and black power eras.

Previous analyses of *In My Father's House* have not engaged Gaines's use of historical movements, more specifically, the impact of civil rights and black power ideologies on its characters, at length. Critics have often focused their attention on his treatment of the absent bond between fathers and sons.[45] Appropriating that which Gaines has suggested as the most significant relationship in black men's lives, scholars including Daniel White, Annisa Wardi, Alisa Ann Johnson, and Mary Ellen Doyle have offered insightful commentary on Gaines's use of fathers and sons in the novel. White suggests that *In My Father's House* is centered on the primary father in the text (Philip Martin), and the impact Martin's abandonment of his older children have both on the minister and his eldest son, Robert. Noting Gaines's decisive shift from focusing on the plight of young men in prior works (i.e. Jackson Bradley and Marcus Payne in *Catherine Carmier* and *Of Love and Dust*, respectively), White argues that Gaines's attention to the psychological dilemma of the wayward father illuminates the motivations behind a man's failure to assume his responsibilities and the inevitable, far-reaching consequences of such negligence (164); Gaines's attention to this wayward parent, one critic further insists, links Phillip Martin to the delinquent-turned-devout father, Gabriel Grimes, in James Baldwin's *Go Tell It on the Mountain* (Nash 355).[46] Wardi identifies Robert X as "a reminder" to Phillip Martin of the "costs of disremembering the past" (132): a past that must be reconciled in order for Martin to fully advance into his future. This disremembered or abandoned past is precisely what Johnson notes as having shaped aspects of father-son relationships in Gaines's corpus in general, and in *In My Father's House*, more specifically. Legacies of abandonment pass from fathers to sons resulting in destructive behaviors that cycle throughout generations (Johnson 18).

In her critique of the novel's structure, Mary Ellen Doyle not only highlights its engagement with the broken bonds between African American fathers and sons, but she also cites this theme, coupled with character development, as the narrative's greatest strength and limitation (155). Doyle writes:

> Gaines is clear that the story was meant to reflect his constant concern about the separation of black fathers from their sons and the resultant damage, moral and physical, to both. […]. But Gaines asks, if he has not in the past, can he [the father] hope to retrieve his error, attain his full manhood, and lead others to their responsibilities and rights? (156)

Doyle's cogent assessment, as have prior interpretations, leads us to ask important questions not only of the central theme discussed but also of the historical eras treated in the novel. Gaines's exploration of the civil rights and black power movements is a significant dimension. Attention to this detail, coupled with analyzing Gaines's representation of black men in the text, reveals a gender-focused engagement with history previously underdeveloped in scholarly analyses of *In My Father's House.*

Gaines offers his most direct commentary on the importance of the civil rights and black power periods to the action of *In My Father's House* in a 1978 interview with Patricia Rickels. Refuting claims that the novel was a pointed critique of persons involved (namely Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr.), Gaines contends that the narrative responds to the impact of the civil rights and black power movements and the seeming lack of progress in intraracial relationships, particularly between black fathers and sons. He declares:

> 'What I am saying…what the story is saying, is all the things we've done—we fought to drink together, ride on the bus together, eat in the same places, but we have only recently realized that we are strangers. [Phillip] Martin and his son are strangers. We're not close. […]. [The] movement was not aimed at fathers and sons. It was aimed at breaking down social conditions.' (Rickels in Lowe 131)

Gaines's particular critique of integrationist tactics implicates both African Americans and their white supporters in not recognizing the latent tensions within black communities. Though Gaines responds specifically to the broken promise of integration (a product of "civil rights" activism), historians concur that intraracial tensions continued even as rhetoric of "black power" promoted an ethos of racial solidarity.

Gaines further expresses his views in a 1990 interview with Marcia Gaudet and Carl Wooten. As he had in Rickels's interview, Gaines does not indict failure on the part of particular movement leaders. He insists that his leader-protagonist, Philip Martin, is faced with dilemmas similar to his real-life models. In their single-focused attempts to attain rights outside their racial communities, movement leaders underestimated the importance of attending to black relationships. Of Philip Martin, Gaines insists, “His weakness is…he let the [white] liberal decide who the heck he is […]. That’s part of the scheme: We [liberals] can help you to get a drink of water, we can have you sit at the counter, but we cannot help you to understand your son or your son to understand you. Our policies are not written that way” (Gaudet and Wooten 59).[47]

Gaines’s repeated reference to the historical context and ideological tensions shaping the novel, and their particular import to the central theme and action of *In My Father’s House* not only enhances our understanding of Martin’s relationship with Robert X, but it also draws our attention to other black men in the novel. Male figures surrounding Martin and Robert illuminate how the severed bond between fathers and sons is one of many endangered relationships involving African American men. It is important in any reading of the novel to analyze such relationships, and to explore how certain conflicts are shaped by the sociopolitical dynamics of the historical period and by the regional backdrop of the U.S. South.

Historical discussions of gender and gendered relationships during the civil rights and black power eras predominantly have focused on African American women and their experiences with black men.[48] Some scholars, however, have rightly identified African American men as gendered racial citizens and have analyzed the impact of “civil rights” and “black power” upon their unique subjectivities. More recent historiographies of the period not only have considered the ideological influences on black men’s gender performance but also have explored the meanings of such when they are complicated by southern regionality. In his 2005 study, *I am a Man! Race, Manhood and the Civil Rights Movement*, David Estes notes several moments of significance in southern black men's development of a gendered racial consciousness. These moments include: African American men's return from World War II as "citizen-soldiers" intent on contesting racism at home as they had combated fascism abroad (32); their manner of illuminating the absurdity of "macho" white male posturing by way of non-violent protest (59); black men's insistence on the "practical necessity" of armed self defense (63); their advocacy of patriarchal proscriptions of masculinity as a response to claims made in the Moynihan Report (125); and the gradual projection of non-violence as a demonstration of "unmanliness" in favor of more militant approaches to black liberation. Simon Wendt's study of the era also highlights the particular gendered racial experiences of southern black men. He argues that the men's demonstration of armed resistance reflected "a determination to reclaim and affirm the role of patriarchal provider and protector that white men denied them" (Wendt 3). Southern black men's belief that the fight for equality should infuse what Wendt describes as "the spirit" (evoking the temperance required by non-violence) and "the shotgun" (exercising the right to bear arms) characterizes the distinctive character of much of the men's movement participation.

Attitudes surrounding non-violent direct action and its complementing strategy, armed self-defense, were most often seen as determinants of manhood by advocates of "civil rights" and "black power," respectively. Moreover, proponents of each perspective attribute Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. and Malcolm X as the original masculine prototypes of their aims. As I will discuss later, with the rise in black militancy after 1964 and the assassinations of both Malcolm X (1965) and Dr. King (1968), the mantle of black masculinity erected by these men was passed to others who “signified” upon their leadership.[49]

Dr. King’s entrance into the national spotlight for the cause of civil rights (launched by his involvement in the 1955 Montgomery Bus Boycott) and his advocacy of non-violence initiated an example of black masculinity that took into account the life experiences of southern black men. Ever cognizant of the dire consequences often associated with black men’s insubordination to the laws of Jim Crow, Dr. King’s brand of southern manhood called African American men to use strength of mind to combat racism, and to view self-discipline as an ultimate demonstration of manly power. Steven F. Lawson writes:

> In pursuing his goals, Dr. King furnished a new model of black manhood. Given the long history of violence against black men and the attempted evisceration of their manhood to preserve white male supremacy, it is not surprising that by the late 1960s, appeals to a muscular masculinity, identified by Malcolm X, Muhammad Ali, and the Black Panthers, had attracted widespread support among African Americans. Malcolm X had belittled King for preaching a nonviolent philosophy in which men allowed their wives and children to be beaten without fighting back to protect them. King offered an alternative vision of what it meant to be a black man. For him, self-control in the face of immediate danger provided the ultimate test of courage, and it was no less a sign of masculinity for black men to demonstrate bravery and measure their self-worth by

> disciplining themselves to endure suffering in pursuit of their higher cause of social justice. In doing so, they did not show passiveness or cowardice, but demonstrated personal strength and heroism. (44)

Dr. King's gender performance was greatly shaped by his tight-knit familial upbringing and by his deep Christian faith: two factors that heavily influenced the lives of black men in the South.[50] His ability to draw upon these aspects of southern black men's experience transcended intraracial differences, and Dr. King inspired thousands of men to see their non-violent responses to racism as connected to a greater good.

As recent historiographies of the period suggest, southern black men supported Dr. King's approach to social change, but they frequently demonstrated non-violent resistance while bearing arms.[51] This notion of armed self-defense and overt militancy typically has been attributed to the example of Malcolm X.[52] In his introduction to *The Autobiography of Malcolm X* (1964), M.S. Handler writes:

> As a man, Malcolm X had the physical bearing and the inner self-confidence of a born aristocrat. And he was potentially dangerous. No man in our time aroused fear and hatred in the white man as did Malcolm because in him the white man sensed an implacable foe who could not be had for any price—a man unreservedly committed to the cause of liberating the black man in American society rather than integrating the black man into that society. (ix)

Charles Payne maintains that Malcolm X's use of violence was "largely symbolic" (150), and as James Cone asserts, his "uncompromising militancy" was the leader's greatest contribution to the African American freedom struggle (264). "With streetwise, truth-telling oratory, emphasizing the revolutionary and African side of African-American history," Cone writes, "[Malcolm X] inspired urban blacks to take a good look at themselves in the mirror of his analysis and then be transformed by the true knowledge of who they are—the lost children of a proud and mighty African people" (253). Although Cone insists that Malcolm X's "macho" approach was better suited for a northern black audience and that Dr. King's advocacy of non-violence was a more effective alternative for black southerners, Malcolm X's perspective served as one of the inspirations for notions of "black power" that have their roots anchored in the U.S. South.[53]

While these assessments of Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. and Malcolm X cite the significance of their particular proscriptions of black manhood and highlight their viability for black men in the South, these leaders and the respective ideologies they represent were largely similar in their attitudes toward gender. Their views were particularly aligned regarding the role of African American women in black liberation. For most of their careers, Dr. King and Malcolm X advocated traditional roles for black women; that is, until Malcolm X broke away from the Nation of Islam and began to reassess his philosophies on women's roles in revolutionary struggle.[54] Critics not only have documented this shift in consciousness but also have signaled the importance of not dismissing Malcolm X's early pronouncements.[55]

Similarly, groups with which both leaders were associated (either directly or indirectly) have often been critiqued for their treatment of black women and for their influence on the gender performances of black men. Judith Newton's analysis of the gender politics shaping the Black Panther Party, for example, not only highlights the group's attitudes toward black women, but she also identifies the profound effect its philosophies had on constructions of black masculinity. “In crafting what they saw as a higher masculine ideal [influenced largely by the example of Malcolm X],” Newton writes, “the Black Panthers would attempt to translate elements of the individualistic, ‘baad,’ and often criminal, masculinity of the streets into self-sacrificing militancy on behalf of the black community as a whole. At the same time they would hold on to the more nurturing forms of personhood that informed black, rural, Southern culture and the movement for civil rights” (55). Though these ideas grounded the intended work of the black power organization, Newton points out that the interpretation of these tenets varied based on the perspective of individual members of the Party (62).[56] The ideological conflicts between Huey P. Newton and Eldridge Cleaver best exemplify these significant differences in opinion.[57]

Peter J. Ling’s similar critique of the SCLC reveals how conflicting attitudes about black manhood were shaped by ideologies grounding the organization. Dr. King’s manner of “signifying” upon westernized proscriptions of manhood by emphasizing men’s endurance of pain (by way of non-violence) was met with alternative “cool” and “hot-headed” versions of manhood advocated by his colleagues, including James Bevel, Wyatt Tee Walker, and Hosea Williams (Ling 114, 116).[58] Andrew Young’s “moderate” perspective and self-fashioning also provides a model for black manhood that adds another dimension to these examples (117). “These competing modes [of black masculinity in the SCLC],” Ling insists, “overcame fear and courted attention in a way that compelled federal action. They may have undervalued the less conspicuous, movement sustaining work of frequently female bridge leaders, but such manhood compelled action and the will to act was the very essence of the freedom struggle” (126).

Ling’s observation of men’s varied gender performances within the SCLC shows their connections to, yet significant deviation from the example of manhood shown by the organization’s most famous member. Like the male members of the Black Panther Party and the organization’s indebtedness to the example of Malcolm X, the model of manhood provided by Dr. King evoked admiration but left room for revision.

Gaines’s *In My Father’s House* fictively illustrates what happens when these old and new models interact, and the ideological clashes that occur as a result. His exploration into black masculine identity formations during the Civil Rights and Black Power eras is made most evident in his movement leader-protagonist Reverend Phillip J. Martin. We learn very early in the novel of the town’s reverence for the man of whom a local woman, Virginia Colar, proudly hails “[our] civil rights leader” (Gaines, *Father’s House* 10). St. Adrienne’s admiration and adoration of Martin is reflected not only in the woman’s pronouncement but also in the town’s overall assessment of him. “‘Everybody round here proud of [Phillip Martin],’” Virginia declares. “‘Done such a good job here, people thinking ‘bout sending him on to Washington” (10). The woman’s praise of Martin’s “good job” is supported by what she and most other parish inhabitants witness in Martin’s actions. She recalls the leader’s ability to head civil rights efforts, bravely contesting racial injustice on behalf of African Americans living in their small town, with the support of blacks and whites. Armed with what another character praises as his remarkable “political and moral leadership” (16), Phillip Martin has managed to lead the fight against segregation and has maintained a record of success. We learn that Martin’s latest quest—to stage a protest against the parish’s “biggest store,” especially its owner, Albert Chenal—will further enshrine his status as their version of "Martin Luther King" (16).

Like Dr. King, the senior pastor of St. Adrienne's Solid Rock Baptist Church infuses his social gospel with that of Christianity, thereby demonstrating for his followers that their fight for justice is linked to a higher purpose. Certainly, our knowledge of Phillip Martin's deeds precedes his actual appearance in the novel. His accolades, in fact, are outward manifestations of Martin's commanding presence: a charismatic quality that draws people, especially women, to him:

> [Phillip Martin] was sixty years old, just over six feet tall, and he weighed around two hundred pounds. His thick black hair and thick well-trimmed mustache were just beginning to show some gray. Phillip was a very handsome dark-brown-skinned man, admired by women, black and white. The black women spoke openly of their admiration for him, the white women said it around people they could trust. There were rumors that he was involved with women other than his wife, but whether these rumors were true or not he was very much respected by most of the people who knew him. And no one ever questioned his position as leader of the civil rights movement in the parish. (Gaines, *Father's House* 34-35)

This description of Martin's magnetic appeal to women not only foreshadows what we later learn about indiscretions he committed in his youth but also links the fictive movement leader to real life activists. While women of various ages admired black male leadership during the era and stood alongside their husbands, sons, and brothers in following the commands of leading figures, many women were intrigued by the particular brand of macho heroism certain leaders brought to combating injustice. Undaunted bravery in the face of blatant racism and violent recourse from their white foes created a sexual allure for many black men involved in liberation causes. In fact, actual or rumored extramarital relationships between movement leaders and women on both sides of the color line were not uncommon.[59] Movement participation, then, provided an opportunity for African American men to exude sex appeal not linked solely to a narrative of their presumptively innate sexual prowess, but to exhibit attractiveness that is connected to black men's demonstration of courage.

Martin's first appearance in the novel also marks the occasion of his only political speech presented in the text. Gaines uses the speech not only to highlight a few of the ideological continuities and debates between "civil rights" and "black power" but also to illuminate some of the tensions that exist between members of St. Adrienne's Civil Rights Committee, the activist organization Martin leads. Standing before a group of supporters gathered at his home, Martin explains their rationale for boycotting Albert Chenal's store. He cites Chenal's unjust hiring practices, biased treatment of black workers, and his undervaluing of African American patrons as the storeowner's major offenses (Gaines, *Father's House* 35). Martin goes on to predict Chenal's insincere accommodation tactics, of which Martin advises the group to reject (35-36). Martin asks his fellow protesters to remain resolute in their stance, but he admonishes them not to hate: "'I don't hate Albert Chenal. I don't want you to hate Albert Chenal. I want you to pray for Albert Chenal. […]. Remember, love thy neighbor, as thyself'"(37).[60]

Martin's manner of appealing to his audience's Christian sensibilities is significant. Given the ways in which Christianity has functioned as a cornerstone of black southern protest throughout the civil rights movement specifically, it is not surprising that the fictive movement leader would request that his followers adopt such an approach in their resistance to Albert Chenal. Southern blacks' deep reliance on churches as religious, political, and social centers of black communities made the rhetoric of Christianity, especially, a useful tool in their fight for equality.[61] When the plight of southern African Americans was broadcast before national and international audiences, oftentimes it was their Christian humility and moral restraint that convicted the consciences of their white counterparts.[62] What is most interesting, however, is that given the novel's 1970 context and the rise of black power rhetoric that marked the time (as well as suggested in the novel), Phillip Martin's request reflects an implicit consensus with an earlier protest strategy. As Martin's words suggest, protest should inspire the confrontation of one's enemy but it should not negate the Christian principle of loving another as oneself.

Martin knows that initiating a form of protest void of overt militancy and tempered by one's religious responsibility places his views in conflict with the discourses surrounding black power activism. He continues his speech, but adds a telling critique:

> 'Love is the only thing. Understanding is the only thing. Persistence, the only thing. Keep on pushing, the only thing. You got some out there screaming Black Power. I say, what is Black Power but what we already doing and what we been trying to do all these years? Then you have the other crowd sitting in the bars—they even worse than the Black Power screamers—they saying, "What's the use? Nothing will ever change. Hey, Mr. Wrigley, pour me another drink."' (Gaines, *Father's House* 37)

Martin's push for demonstrations grounded in love, understanding, and persistence, coupled with his blatant critique of black power advocates, closely mirrors sentiments expressed by Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. In a speech made at the SCLC's 1967 convention, Dr. King questioned the utility of the "black power" mantra in approaches to contesting racism: "Let us be dissatisfied until that day when nobody will shout, 'White Power!,' when nobody will shout 'Black Power!,' but everybody will talk about God's power and human power" (M. King, "Where do We Go" 197). Phillip Martin also sees no distinction between ideologies supporting his beliefs and those adopting "black power." Both discourses espouse a commitment to disrupting notions of black inferiority and, as demonstrated by Martin's attention to Chenal, both principles strongly oppose the devaluing of African American labor and patronage. Martin, however, parts from his critics through his support of interracial coalition. As will be explored later, Martin's relationships with his white associates, Octave Bacheron and Anthony McVay, the men's support of his community work, and Martin's interactions with influential whites, in general, are neither well-received nor legitimized by his comrades on the Civil Rights Committee. Like Dr. King, Martin views blacks' advocacy of racially biased rhetoric as alienating to white supporters and as unproductive to the kind of racial tolerance necessary for blacks' survival in the South.[63]

When Martin solicits the input of his longtime friend and elder, Howard Mills, and his young assistant pastor, Jonathan Robillard, to contest pronouncements made by black power advocates and apathy on the part of other opponents, both men endorse Martin's claims. But when Robillard's response extends into a rallying cry for more exclusively black support, the applause from those gathered foreshadows the rift that occurs between Martin and him (Gaines, *Father's House* 37). Furthermore, Mills's confession that he had witnessed the positive changes in St. Adrienne under Martin's leadership, but that he is eager to confront Chenal, is emphasized by a symbolic wave of his fist in the air (36). Though Mills's suggestive salute just precedes Martin's critique of black power, his subtle gesture signals the wide influence of the ideology on varied African American populations, including older blacks.

Among those who witness Martin's powerful oratory and manner of navigating audience participation is his estranged son, Robert X. The moment of recognition between father and son causes Martin to faint (Gaines, *Father's House* 40-41). The fallen leader's plea to be released by those who come to his aid, so that Martin can publicly acknowledge his son, is ignored by his supporters. Instead, those gathered attribute the fall to exhaustion, and they insist that Martin retreat to his home for much needed rest. It is while he is at home that Martin remembers the recklessness of his youth and his responsibility for Robert's absence. This process, however, is foreshadowed in a dream Philip has the night before his encounter with his son:

> In the dream he was sitting on the side of the bed, just as he'd been doing twenty-one years ago. In the dream, just as it had happened that day, he saw the boy's small hand in the crack of the door as he took the money from the woman. He left with the money, but soon brought it back. When he left the second time, Martin got up from the bed and ran after him. In the dream it happened like that…. (52-53)

The conflation of imagined and actual reality is made evident in Martin's memory of his and Robert's final encounter. Having built a reputation in St. Adrienne of being a doting husband to his young wife, Alma, loving father to Patrick and Joyce Ann, as well as being a respected minister and community activist, Martin tries to re-imagine a past that is more closely aligned with his present. Indeed, the Martin who has earned the adoration of his community would have chased after his son; he would not have allowed neither his child nor "the woman" (whom we learn is Robert's mother, Johanna Rey) to leave. But Martin quickly learns that for all of his will to re-create his past, he cannot disremember the truth of his actions: "twenty-one years ago he [Martin] hadn't run after the boy at all" (53). The dream continues:

> He had sat on the bed looking down at the floor until he was sure the boy had gone, then he went to the woman who was still clutching the money, tore it out of her hand, and threw it into the fire. When the woman tried to get the money out of the fire with her bare hands, he slapped her so hard that she fell halfway cross the room. She came back, not just for the money, the money had burned, she came back fighting. This time he hit her with his fist. Then he went to the bed and sat down, burying his face in his hands and crying. But in the dream they did not fight. In the dream he told her the money was hers, she could do whatever she wanted with it, and he ran out of the house to catch the boy. The boy had already gotten on the wagon along with his mother and other brother and sister, and Chippo Simon was driving them to the road to catch the bus. Martin could see Johanna calling to him; he could see the oldest boy reaching out his small arms. But the other two children sitting in the bed of the wagon neither saw anything nor heard anything. (53)

In this complex depiction of gendered racial memory, the absent bond between this black father and son is intertwined with a telling portrayal of how black women's experiences are de-emphasized in highlighting black men's relationships to one another. Martin's memory of Robert is intricately linked to his final exchange with Johanna; however, his conscience is more invested in recalling the loss of his son than claiming the violence inflicted upon the boy's mother. As a man with a known history of garnering the respect of women, Martin ironically recalls an episode of brutality against Johanna. And though Martin shows some degree of remorse for his actions by "burying his face in his hands and crying," his tears are overshadowed by cold, calculated images of him beating Robert's mother. Martin's memory of his and Johanna's violent fight is repeatedly subordinated to his interest in a young Robert. From the beginning of his recollection, Martin is more invested in his son than in Johanna; in fact, he ensures that "the boy had gone" before he commences enacting violence against her, thereby signaling Martin's desire not to have his son witness his wrath. Even while re-imagining the episode, Martin dismisses Johanna by telling her she can "do whatever she wanted with [the money]" so that he may more freely pursue his son. In his dream, Martin sees Johanna "calling" and Robert "reaching out" to him, but Martin's attention is drawn to "the boy" and not "the woman."

Perhaps Martin's interest in Robert is inspired by the lasting image of the young boy's plea for his touch and by Martin's assumption that the other children "neither saw anything nor heard anything" (Gaines, *Father's House* 53). Gaines's inclusion of Martin's altercation with Johanna, however, illuminates the fact that the severed bond between black fathers and sons is only one of the relationships impacted by African

American men's lack of personal accountability. Martin's violence demonstrates a profound level of disrespect to women that cannot and should not be ignored; both Robert and Johanna are casualties to Martin's irresponsible behavior. Martin is guilty of being a negligent father, a negligent partner to the mother of his children, and as I will discuss later, his actions significantly impact Robert and Johanna's relationship. Examining this episode of gendered racial memory reveals Gaines's attention to the necessity of exploring the complexities of black men's relationships with black women and with their children.

Tormented by gendered racial memories of irresponsibility, Martin attempts to right the wrongs of his youth by bailing a newly incarcerated Robert out of jail. Martin assumes that requesting Robert's freedom will be viewed as the expected action of someone in his leadership position, but he is sadly mistaken. Nolan, the white sheriff, is not convinced that Martin's interest in his latest inmate is solely political (Gaines, *Father's House* 86). He insists that Martin confess the real cause for his investment in Robert. When Martin admits that Robert is his son, Nolan revels in the irony of the leader's predicament and wagers Robert's freedom in exchange for the cancellation of Martin's protest against Albert Chenal (89). Nolan's request, we learn, aligns with the unspoken agreement shared between the civil rivals. "[Martin and Nolan] had no love for each other," Gaines writes, "still there was no running hatred for each other either. Each felt the other was doing his work the best way he knew how, and both accepted the fact that there would be conflicts between them" (85).

Nolan knows that Martin's attempt to confront Albert Chenal is linked to a larger community effort. The sheriff is also aware of Martin's attachment to his son. In asking

Martin to choose between his personal and political interests, Nolan plays into Martin's insecurities. Nolan is aware that although Martin's popularity has not waned, public support of the brand of activism he supports has been in a slow decline, especially with the assassination of Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. in 1968. "'When they nailed that coffin down on King,'" Nolan tells Martin, "'that demonstrating was over with. All you doing now is bullshitting the people, that's all. It's over with'" (Gaines, *Father's House* 92). Nolan's conclusion echoes earlier sentiments expressed by a group of young black teachers in St. Adrienne who also consider the death of Martin Luther King as the end of a tradition—a legacy Phillip Martin seeks desperately to maintain (20-21).

When Martin deems the ultimatum blackmail and resolves to seek the assistance of his white friend and lawyer, Anthony McVay, Nolan dismisses the idea that white liberals have a sincere investment in African Americans' personal crises: "'This personal, not political. They can't blow it up like they can do a demonstration. […]. See what [McVay] cares about blood kin. The only time they care about blood is when it's running in the street. They don't give a damn for your kin" (Gaines, *Father's House* 91). Nolan's suggestion that Martin's family dilemma is of no concern to his white ally contradicts the belief that, for marginalized groups, what is deemed "personal" is inextricably linked to one's "political" motivations. The idea that white liberals lack a vested interest in African Americans' "personal" affairs and that they are only interested when such matters cause public concern, reflects a skepticism shared by critics of those who support interracial coalition. While advocates of blacks' racial autonomy have long critiqued the extent of whites' investment in black experiences, Gaines's use of a white male protagonist to confirm some whites' insincerity effectively communicates that such skepticism was not limited to one side of the color line. In some ways, Nolan's sentiments foreshadow the more scathing appraisal of blacks' inner lives recorded by Adam Nehemiah, the ruthless, white pseudo-historian in Sherley Anne Williams's neo-slave narrative, *Dessa Rose* (1988). Like Nolan's pointed critique of Anthony McVay, Nehemiah's interest in recording Dessa's story is not for the grave misfortune she suffers; instead, Nehemiah is more concerned with using Dessa's life and the violence she commits as a cautionary tale to slave holders. The prevention of shed blood suggestively is more important than the black body from which the blood derived. Nolan's insinuation, then, supports the idea that black lives are inconsequential to many whites' participation in their liberation.

Just as Martin is brought into a greater understanding of Nolan's view of him, he is also made aware of Robert's thoughts after he and the young man leave the jail. The car ride they share is the only moment in the novel when the estranged father and son interact. Just as Martin painfully recalls the circumstances of his last encounter with Robert and is haunted by the event, Robert also remembers their parting and has experienced the last impact of Martin's absence throughout his life. From his first appearance in the text, Robert's unkempt appearance and peculiar behavior are outward expressions of his deep-seated mental instability. Self-described as having "soul sickness" (Gaines, *Father's House* 25) and described by others as "psychologically lost" (59), Robert X is troubled by what he believes is his inability to demonstrate a mode of masculinity befitting of the familial and social context in which he lives. Though his suggestive surname ("X") causes Virginia Colar to wonder if he is a member of "Black Panthers or Black Muslims," Robert is the antithesis of the kind of aggressive masculinities attributed to both activist groups (5).[64] Robert sees his father as the cause of his dilemma because Martin was not present in his life to “guide” him into manhood. Robert insists that this absence “made” him into a “eunuch,” and it is for this reason that he comes to St. Adrienne to seek “revenge” on Martin (99). Robert refers to his long awaited confrontation with his father as “a black man’s conference” (16).

Robert’s conclusion that his failure to demonstrate certain imperatives for manhood marks him as sexually inept is a troubling formulation first endorsed by Johanna in the aftermath of her daughter’s, Justine, rape (Gaines, *Father’s House* 99). We learn that Justine had been raped by one of several men Johanna entertained after she and her children relocated to San Francisco.[65] As Martin recalls in his dream sequence, his good friend, Chippo Simon, takes Johanna and the children from the Reno Plantation, not far from South Baton Rouge and located in St. Adrienne parish, and drops them off at a bus station. With very little money and resources, Johanna purchased one-way tickets for her and the children to travel westward to California. Robert does not disclose the sordid details of their life in California; we learn such details from Chippo Simon when he and Martin reunite later in the novel. Robert’s recollections, however, center on the moment of Justine’s rape and how her experience significantly altered their entire family dynamic. Describing the event to Martin, Robert reveals:

> ‘My sister viciously raped. Viciously raped. Instead of me taking the gun like I shoulda done, I took her in my arms and called on God. Viciously raped, her young body torn and bloody—and I sat there rocking her in my arms, crying, and calling on God. My brother [Antoine] brought the gun to me. Pushed it on me three times. “Go kill that dog. Go kill that dog.” But

> all I did was sit there holding my sister and crying. So he did it for me. He found the man, shooting pool, and blew out his brains' (102-103).

Robert's decision not to avenge Justine's rape and his deference to divine intervention destroys his reputation in the eyes of his mother and siblings. We learn that upon the family's arrival in San Francisco, Johanna deems Robert "man of [their] house" and bestows upon the young boy the responsibilities of being protector of their family until their intended reunion with Martin (Gaines, *Father's House* 194). Confused and scared after having witnessed his parents' violent departure and having been burdened by such adult responsibilities, Robert tries to oblige Johanna's request by "working" and "help[ing] to bring money in" to support their family (193-194).

We may infer from Robert's actions in the aftermath of Justine's rape that, in addition to helping provide for his mother and siblings, Robert demonstrates an example of black masculinity that contrasts with the violent model he witnesses by his own father (Martin). Though traumatized by the sight of his young sister's "torn and bloody body," and seemingly outraged by the offense, Robert interprets her violation as a moment to offer consolation to her and not to enact immediate retribution against her attacker. The kind of sensitivity Robert demonstrates to address Justine's need not only contradicts the unsympathetic gestures he witnesses Martin display with Johanna, but it also reveals what Robert values in family relationships, especially for the "man" of one's house. Having no model to validate his beliefs and relying solely on an attempt to subvert his father's example, Robert questions his instinctual response. He remarks that enacting violence was what he "shoulda done," reduces his acts of comfort to Justine as insignificant, and he privileges Antoine's actions as superior to his own (Gaines, *Father's*

House 103). Robert learns that the violence he tried not to replicate, in fact, is endorsed by the mother and sister he tried to protect, and by the brother for whom he tried to set an example.

Robert's position as "man of the house," and his suggestive desire to promote an alternative example of manhood are revoked when Antoine murders Justine's rapist, Quick George (Gaines, *Father's House* 195). Described by one character as a man who was known for doing everything from "pushing dope to pimping to robbing the church," Quick George set his sights on Justine "no more than a month" after he moved in with Johanna and the children (195). As a consequence of killing Quick George, Antoine served five years in prison. During that time, Antoine distances himself from Johanna (whom he blamed for bringing Quick George into their lives) and Robert (whom he suggestively labels a coward) (198). The latter estrangement, we learn, is not solely on account of Antoine's behavior; instead, his opinion of Robert changes based on his observation of others' responses to him. Of the brothers' prison visits, Chippo Simon explains, "[Antoine] and Etienne (Robert) would talk. He had even forgiven Etienne for not taking the gun. But now he was the man, and he let Etienne know it. When he pulled the trigger, then he was the man. His sister, the way she looked at him, let him know […]. Even Johanna. Even Etienne himself let him know that he was the man now" (198). Antoine's decision to ignore the law and risk imprisonment to protect Justine's honor elevates him as new "man of the house." And though he refuses to embrace Johanna (and later Robert after his release), Antoine forms an unbreakable bond with Justine that persists long after he is freed. The two siblings leave California to build new lives in the North and discontinue contact with Robert and Johanna.

Conversely, Johanna and Robert's bond is irrevocably shattered. Neither mother nor son is able to forgive themselves for their part in Justine's violation. Instead of exploring ways of healing their family, Johanna and Robert displace blame on others: Johanna blames Robert for destroying their family and he, in turn, faults Martin. Tormented by his failure to seek vengeance and by the precarious position he is placed in as a result of Martin's abandonment, Robert resolves to confront his wayward father. Johanna mocks his desire and she consequently responds in a manner reminiscent of her last meeting with Martin. Robert recalls:

> 'When I heard where you [Martin] was, I told her I wanted to come here [to St. Adrienne] and kill you for destroying the family. And she slapped me. She slapped me so hard I went blind. She went and got the jar of money and slammed it down on the floor in front of me. She made me get down there and pick up every penny. I cut my hands, I cut my knees, picking up pennies and wrinkled old dollar bills. "Get yourself a ticket and go kill him," she told me. "Sew back your nuts by killing your father."' (Gaines, *Father's House* 99)

The violence Robert witnesses enacted upon his mother is replicated in Johanna's responses to him. While we may interpret Johanna's action as a reprimand for Robert's seemingly reprehensible confession and as demonstrative of her unwavering support of Martin's status as the children's father (despite his actions), we may also consider her response as a violent critique of Robert's "failure" as "man of the house." Johanna's scornful response that murdering Martin will allow Robert to regain his manhood is similar to the reaction Richard Wright's infamous protagonist, Bigger Thomas, receives from his mother after he is unable to demonstrate the kind of black masculinity displayed by his deceased father.[66] In both instances, the young men are judged by their mothers for not proscribing to certain proscriptions for black manhood; the women's responses confirm that fathers do not have to present in order for patriarchy to thrive.

Johanna also neglects to consider how Robert's response is, in many ways, dictated by the social context in which he lives. His decision to console Justine after her rape, coupled with his reliance on law enforcement to punish Justine's rapist, demonstrates Robert's awareness of the necessity of alternative responses to injustice. Though Gaines does not give an indication of when or why Robert X abandons his birth name (Etienne), we may interpret the memorable exchange between Robert and Johanna as a final catalyst in a succession of disappointments that inspire the change.[67]

Robert's determination to "kill" his absent parent, however, is a marked contrast to his earlier nonviolent response to Quick George. We later learn from the local storekeeper who relays his memory of the event that Robert's response was not only consoling a battered Justine but also pleading with Antoine to let "the law" enact justice on her assailant. When his approach is subverted by Antoine's action, Robert questions the relevance of abiding by the law, especially when such authority fails to protect African Americans, in general, and black women, in particular. The responsibility, he believes, belongs to men—fathers (and father figures)—in black households. "'There ain't no law,'" Robert tells his father when Martin tries to validate his response. "'Why should law protect us when the father won't? You think the law should care more for the family than the father? By law she [Justine] wasn't even raped. Black girls don't get raped, black girls entice their rapist'" (Gaines, *Father's House* 103). Robert's attention to the centrality of black fathers in African American households is not only a critique of Martin's absence, but also a self-assessment of his failure to protect his family. Having recalled Johanna's earlier instruction that he "sew back his nuts" and her reprisal of his desire to kill Martin, Robert concludes that his status as "man of the house" deemed him a surrogate father to his siblings, and as such, he believes he neglected his own paternal obligations to them. Influenced by Antoine's example and reminded of Martin's abandonment, Robert suggests that black men should be willing to resort to "any means necessary" to ensure the safety of their loved ones because "the law" will not protect them. Robert's transition to a more violent, militant view is prompted by what he sees as the ineffectiveness of nonviolence as well as the inadequacy of Christianity to address his situation. Furthermore, as suggested by Johanna, Justine, and Antoine's responses to him, Robert judges his initial response as unmanly.

When Phillip Martin returns to his home after having freed Robert and having listened to the young man detail the progression of his life since Martin's departure, he is greeted by members of the St. Adrienne Civil Rights Committee. Those gathered include Peter Hebert, Aaron Brown, Mack Henderson, Howard Mills, and Jonathan Robillard. We learn that the men had been informed of a celebration thrown by Albert Chenal and other whites in the town: a joyous occasion held on account of Martin's bargain with Sheriff Nolan. As expected, Martin's colleagues are not happy with the news that their protest has been cancelled. For this humble crowd of mostly older black gentlemen, protesting against Chenal has personal and political motivations. In a scene that foreshadows Gaines's privileging black men's voices in his subsequent novel, *A Gathering of Old Men* (1983), the men express their deep investment in confronting

Chenal. Howard Mills, the most vocal of those present, asserts that Albert Chenal not only represents a white reign of terror that has plagued the South historically, but Chenal's actions also reflect a intentional disregard for blacks' lives long passed to him by his family's patriarchs. Refuting Martin's claim that their challenge to Chenal is only part (a "battle") of a larger freedom struggle (a "war"), Mills relays his gendered racial memories of the white storeowner and his family. He declares:

> 'I wanted Chenal. Because I know Chenal. […]. I knowed his daddy. […]. Thomas Chenal—I knowed him. I worked for him. I know what he was. I know how he felt about black women. No black woman looking any way presentable couldn't come in his store if he didn't go after her. I remember when he raped Elliot Toussaint daughter. I was working for him—I remember the day. […]. He raped her, and she run out the store crying. He grabbed up one of them old cheap pocketbooks and stuffed a pair stockings in it and throwed it out after her. Told the people she had enticed him, and that's what he had paid her with. That she dropped it out there on the sidewalks when she left. But I knowed he raped her. I knowed it then. I was just too scared to say a word.' (Gaines, *Father's House* 125)

In my previous discussion of *Catherine Carmier*, gendered racial memories of Carmier men are narrated primarily by Madame Bayonne. It is not until the end of the novel that we are exposed to Raoul Carmier's inner thoughts. Raoul's words and musings support Madame Bayonne's assessments of his family, and they provide an intimate portrait of a man whose life is profoundly affected by gendered racial memories of inadequacy, disappointment, and loss. Howard Mills's memory of the unnamed woman's rape expresses similar sentiments. But unlike Raoul, Mills is able to better articulate his feelings of failure and frustration, and he takes responsibility for the resulting narrative that Chenal uses to justify the woman's rape. Mills is cognizant of Thomas Chenal's indiscretion but, as earlier described by Robert X, Mills is equally mindful of his inaction. It is the latter response that provides one influence on Mills's will to protest.

Mills's recollection also signifies upon the earlier memories detailed by Phillip Martin. In both instances, African American women figure prominently in the men's remembrances: Martin relegates Johanna to the background of his recollection while Howard Mills situates Elliot Toussaint's daughter at the fore. Violence against a black woman and his active participation in such brutality is subordinated in Martin's memory, but Mills views his willed silence as irreconcilable and sees his passivity as equally participating in a black woman's violation. Unlike Martin whose feelings of failure and inadequacy are prompted by his memories of his young son, Mills believes his fault lies in his inability to protect an African American woman. He recalls his preexisting knowledge of the elder Chenal's treatment of black women, and admits that even this awareness did not empower him to stand up for an innocent victim. Though Phillip Martin's inaction is prompted by his assumption that his young son had witnessed his brutality, fear paralyzes Mills from taking action and prevents him from turning the rapist, Chenal, into authorities. What Mills "knowed" about the young woman's rape, however, does not subvert his knowledge of the South's intolerance of African Americans, especially black men, who sought to challenge white rule. Knowledge of white retribution kept a then young Mills from "say[ing] a word" (Gaines, *Father's House* 125).

Mills's witnessing the rape of Elliot Toussaint's daughter is just one of many indiscretions the elder Chenal committed against black women. In fact, Mills declares that these incidents resulted in the birth of countless children fathered by Thomas Chenal and other men of his family (Gaines, *Father's House* 126). White men's uninhibited access to black women's bodies dates back to slavery, and resulted in the birth of thousands of illegitimate children. Marked from birth to follow the condition of their enslaved mothers, mixed-race offspring were a largely undifferentiated slave population, with the exception of Louisiana's Creoles of color. White men's blatant disregard for black women's bodies had far-reaching implications for their husbands who not only were unable to protect their wives, but also could not prevent the biological fathers from bringing gifts to children black men raised (126). As constant reminders to African American men of their inability to shield their wives, mothers, daughters, and sisters from white male lust, historically, biracial children were the byproducts of violated black bodies, and they symbolized white men's disrespect for black families. Mills concludes, then, that the group's intended protest against Albert Chenal has great significance to black men in St. Adrienne. Speaking both to Phillip Martin and to an absent Albert Chenal, Mills declares:

> 'No, Chenal ain't just another battle. It's war. […]. "Look, Chenal, we ain't baboons and apes […]. We men, Chenal, and we tend to fight you till we change you or destroy you. We got nothing but our bodies to use for weapons, but we go'n use that till we get what we want. Respect for our women, our children, respect for the dead who could not get respect from your paw."' (127)

Mills's declaration shows us his keen gendered racial memory and how such memories motivate his actions. Recollections of injustice at the hands of Chenal men prompt Mills to view his participation in confronting the clan's most prominent heir as a stance reflective of deep-seated retribution that has been long overdue. Mills and the other men's disappointment with Martin's deed is inspired by what they interpret as his failure to realize the far-reaching implications of their stance and by what they believe is Martin's lack of a long gendered racial memory of injustice. The men deem Martin's alleged bargain with Sheriff Nolan as an insult to the work they have done not only to improve social conditions in St. Adrienne but also to build a free and just U.S. South to which all of their sons will one day return (Gaines, *Father's House* 124-125). Like many young black men from the South who migrated to other parts of the country at various points in history, the men's sons left the region in search of greater opportunities and a desire to flee the virulent racism that characterized southern states in general. Mills reflects on how he has little communication with his son and admits, when asked, the young man refuses to come "home" (125). Their southern "home," Mills insists, should not be a place black men must flee in order to realize their dreams. Despite African Americans' history in the South, Mills suggests that black men, women, and children are as entitled to America's constitutional promises in a region that historically has ignored their regional subjectivities.

A witness-participant to Howard Mills and Phillip Martin's exchange is Jonathan Robillard. Jonathan is chosen as Martin's replacement when, upon learning of the group's cancelled protest, the men gathered to remove Martin as president of the St. Adrienne Civil Rights Committee. Early in the novel, we are made well aware of Jonathan's attitude toward Martin and his leadership. A young man whom the narrator describes as "suspicious of everything around him," Jonathan is skeptical of Martin's rhetoric of direct action guided exclusively by Christian resilience and resistance (Gaines, *Father's House* 32). Further, Jonathan questions Martin's reliance on white supporters, namely Octave Bacheron and Anthony McVay, and expresses a desire for their group to become more racially autonomous. "I hope one day we won't have to depend on [white support]," he tells Howard Mills. "I still believe *we* must bring our own together. Not them. We. We must do it. […]. Get what we can get from them, but don't trust them all the way" (32-33, emphasis in the original). Jonathan more publicly declares his advocacy of black racial exclusivity when Martin solicits his input during his only rallying speech:

> [Jonathan] raised both fists over his head and looked around at the people in the room. 'We need more people,' he said. 'More young people. More old people. We need the ones in the bars. We need the school-teachers. We need them who go to work for the white people every day of their lives. We need them all. All, all, all. No reason to stay back, no reason at all. That wall is crumbling—let's finish tearing it down.' (37)

Jonathan, we learn, "wanted to say more" but Martin, ignoring the crowd's applause, "didn't give him a chance" to continue his call to action (37).

In his assessment of the young man, Martin insists, "Jonathan is that new breed. He thinks education, big words, is all you need to communicate. He'll have to learn he must break them big words down to reach his people. They all right in school, but not in that church, and not out there on the street either" (Gaines, *Father's House* 56). Though Martin critiques Jonathan's "big words" and deems his emphasis on education as disconnected from the majority of his followers' lives, Jonathan's position appeals to members of the Civil Rights Committee. In fact, Jonathan's declaration that he "speak[s] for the people" (124) is supported by Howard Mills. Mills's endorsement counters Martin's claim that the young activist "think[s] everything started with the sixties" and that Jonathan fails to acknowledge the long-existing freedom struggle that undergirds their contemporary moment (123). Challenging Martin's assertion, Mills admits:

> 'You right, [blacks] had a world out there. But 'fore the sixties people round here wasn't doing nothing to change that world. […]. But not till then, till the sixties, I found a way to go 'gainst Chenal, and the likes of Chenal. Tom [Chenal] was dead, but his son car' his seeds, and he ain't no better. He's got no more respect for men, for you, for any other black man or woman than his paw had. We animals far as he's concerned.' (126)

Indeed, the "sixties" encompassed a revolutionary period in American history and introduced new protest strategies in the African American freedom struggle. Charles Payne, in fact, posits that 1960 marked a new era in black protest that was headed by young black activists. Beginning in February of that year, black college students initiated sit-ins at segregated public establishments, and in so doing, catalyzed what we associate as a "movement" in the United States. Payne contends: "[Sit-ins] were the definitive break with the past, the beginning of a period of sustained mass activism that eventually came to encompass a much broader range of issues than race" (129). He attributes the sit-in phenomenon, coupled with CORE Freedom Rides Project, as responsible for launching the southern "movement." Both of these activities were spearheaded by a young guard and garnered intergenerational support. Moreover, young civil rights leaders were able to build upon the community-organizing and -mobilizing infrastructure erected by the previous generation (Payne 137).[68]

Beyond his oppositional stance against Phillip Martin and his appeal to the men of St. Adrienne's Civil Rights Committee, Jonathan Robillard's rhetoric of black racial autonomy parallels sentiments expressed by real-life rebels, among them, Stokely Carmichael (later known as Kwame Touré).[69] Clayborne Carson's analysis of SNCC attributes Carmichael as having "popularized" SNCC's separatist orientation in what Carson describes as the final "stage" of the organization's evolution in radicalism (2). This phase of SNCC's development was marked by "efforts to resolve [internal] differences by addressing the need for 'black power' and 'black consciousness,'" and by "separating from white people and building black-controlled institutions" (Carson 2). Of the man responsible for placing the "black power" mantra on a world stage, Carson writes [70]:

> Carmichael was not an exceptional prophetic figure. He became a symbol of black militancy because he sensed a widespread preparedness among blacks to reject previous habits of accommodation. His attitudes, shaped by experiences in the southern struggle, coincided with the unarticulated feelings of many other blacks, especially in northern urban centers, whose hopes were raised but not fulfilled by the civil rights movement. […]. Carmichael joined a line of audacious leaders—Martin Delaney, Marcus Garvey, Malcolm X—whose historical role was to arouse large segments of the black populace by reflecting their repressed anger and candidly describing previously obscured aspects of their racial oppression. (215)

Like Carmichael and other young leaders of the time, Jonathan Robillard's uncompromising resolve and his display of black militancy provides the older men with a mode of black masculinity discouraged in them. He understands that the men's "cause," though motivated by one's personal investments (i.e. experienced or witnessed injustice), cannot be compromised by individual desires, and Jonathan joins in the group's disappointment with Martin's actions (Gaines, *Father's House* 122).

Jonathan's unanimous election as the new president of the St. Adrienne Civil Rights Committee causes the tensions between him and Martin to erupt. Shocked and insulted by the men's vote, Martin cites Jonathan's limited views and youth as qualities that make him unprepared to lead their organization. Martin tells him that the fight for black liberation is not a matter of garnering support from "the black and the white;" rather, he asserts that an effective leader must know how to negotiate the unspoken rules of engagement set by "the Chenals and the Nolans" (Gaines, *Father's House* 131). Frustrated by the newly-elected president's arrogance, Martin warns:

> 'You [Jonathan] don't have enough sense to be scared of him [Nolan]—and that's the danger, you not scared of nobody. But you gon'n find out bravery ain't all. Knowing when to move and what to say is just as important. And, boy, you got a lot to learn. Not just about white people…you got a lot to learn about your own people. You don't even know nothing about them yet.' (131)

What Jonathan identifies as strength and resolve, Martin distinguishes as reckless and shortsighted. Martin's attention to the importance of channeling a call to action into a plan of action that takes into account the complexities of inter- and intraracial existence is reminiscent of attitudes expressed by Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. Dr. King recalls a 1966 dialog with Black Power advocates, Stokely Carmichael and Floyd McKissick. Detailing his response to Carmichael's claim that "power" must be obtained at "'any cost,'" and that blacks' advocacy of such follows in the tradition of other ethnic groups, Dr. King writes:

> 'No one has ever heard the Jews publicly chant a slogan of Jewish power, but they have power. Through group unity, determination and creative endeavor, they have gained it. The same thing is true of the Irish and Italians. Neither has used a slogan of Irish or Italian power, but they have worked hard to achieve it. This is exactly what we must do,' I said 'We must use every constructive means to amass economic and political power. This is the kind of legitimate power we need. We must work to build racial pride and refute the notion that black is evil and ugly. But this must come through a program, not merely a slogan.' (M. King, "Black Power" 35-36)

As his writing reflects, Dr. King's critique of Carmichael and similar activists' message was not a dismissal of its inspirational quality; rather, Dr. King envisioned a call for "black power" as having with it a concrete vision for fundamental social change. Such change, Dr. King promoted in his latter activism, must have a local focus, a global reach, and it should address concerns not exclusively limited to one's race. His advocacy of a Poor People's March, and the intended strike with Memphis sanitation workers just before his untimely death exemplify Dr. King's attentiveness to Americans' complex social and economic needs. Phillip Martin's warning to Jonathan suggests not only an awareness of such needs but also, as did Dr. King, a consciousness of how one's approach to addressing related concerns must be ever cognizant of (black and white) America's rules of engagement. Espousing a discourse of "black power" that dismisses the very real consequences of white, particularly southern retribution is, as Martin suggests, a most dangerous endeavor.

Jonathan Robillard is not the only young man who questions Phillip Martin's judgment. In fact, Martin meets a twenty-four year old Vietnam veteran, Billy, during his journey to the Reno Plantation near Gaines's fictive South Baton Rouge. Martin encounters Billy at a liquor store amidst a crowd of local men who use the space for gathering, drinking, and gambling; a sign conspicuously displayed hails the venue as a space in which "no women [are] allowed" (Gaines, *Father's House* 157). Clad in "an Army field jacket, an Army field cap, and combat boots" and marked with a "big scar across his left temple," Billy emerges as a man aged far beyond his years (159). His rugged exterior is only matched by his dismissive view of the other men who laugh when Billy walks away from the crowd in disgust: "'Niggers go'n be niggers,'" he tells Martin (159). Billy's cynicism, we learn, is not solely inspired by the men's actions; rather, his response to them is part of a broader critique he has of African Americans, in general. Billy rejects what he sees as apathy on the part of African Americans: a lack of vigilance he believes has prevented blacks, especially black men, from contesting institutionalized discrimination and its often dire consequences.

As an alternative to conventional protest strategies (characterized by marches and sit-ins), Billy proposes guerilla warfare and admittedly trains a group of young men in such tactics. While the men gathered at the store dismiss Billy's proposal as "a little army" (Gaines, *Father's House* 159) and they mockingly warn Martin that the young militant will "make you tie leaves all over your clothes and [run] you through [the] bayou full speed [with] nothing but a stick for a gun" (160), Martin continues to listen to Billy's plans. As he had done to Jonathan Robillard, Martin warns Billy that his approach to black liberation is "a dangerous game," and says that Billy's desire to recruit one million African Americans to engage in a "one day war" against the United States would resemble "suicide" not "war" (160). Disclosing his plan in more detail, Billy tells Martin:

> 'What could he [implying white America] do if all the fields and swamps caught fire at the same time one day? What could he do if every department store in a big city like New Orleans or New York or Atlanta caught fire at the same time one day? What could he do if ten, fifteen thousand gas pumps all waste gas at the same time, and somebody there to throw the match? The same thing for jails, the same thing for hospitals, schools, banks […]. What could he do if all this happened […]? This country here is the last crutch for Western civilization—what *they* call civilization. Burn it down, you destroy Western civilization. You put the world back right—let it start all over again.' (162, emphasis in the original)

Billy's advocacy of black extremism is a position frequently associated with the Black Panther Party, especially its noted member, Eldridge Cleaver. The Party's meteoric rise as a national symbol of "black resistance to the entire [white] American power structure" was prompted by the Panthers' bold protest and proclamation against the California State Assembly on May 2, 1967, and by their "Free Huey" Campaign, initiated by Eldridge

Cleaver, in the same year (Pearson 147).[71] Cleaver's mobilization of mass support for Newton's freedom was fueled, in many ways, by his advocacy of violent direct-action: violence that Cleaver later declared was a necessary and inevitable consequence of Dr. King's assassination.[72] Upon his release from prison in 1970 and in response to Cleaver's resignation from the Black Panther Party in 1971, Huey P. Newton adamantly rejected the Party's violent tenor, citing brutality as contradictory to the organization's founding principles.[73]

Billy's desire for "war" also is linked to his lived experiences as a soldier in Vietnam. In his study of "black power" and its impact on manhood and African American men's military experience, Herman Graham III insists, "To black men who were constantly fighting and seeing their friends wounded and killed, precise numerical statistics belied the psychological impact of these casualties" (21). Such psychological toils are recorded in Wallace Terry's 1984 collection of African American Vietnam veterans' reflections on their lives before, during, and after war service. Witnessed or committed murder and torture, recurring experiences of disillusionment with their military service, and sustained fear during their time abroad characterize much of the men's reflections on what one veteran describes as their "persistent memory" of Vietnam (Terry 16). And while most men "had neither the interest nor the liberty to join black nationalist paramilitary groups" after leaving Vietnam (Graham 138), some black veterans, like Haywood T. "The Kid" Kirkland, actively participated in revolutionary acts of insurgence.[74]

Billy's militant call for violent direct action not only is prompted by his assessment of African Americans' lack of aggressive self-assertion but also is inspired by his strong critique of integration and the presumed gains of the civil rights protest. "'Niggers can vote,'" Billy tells Martin when asked to assess the social "changes" resulting from the movement. "'Vote for what? Voting can't fill your belly when you hungry. Another nigger sit up there in the Capitol. Doing what? […]. They put another couple on television to broadcast news—them the changes you talking about? I'm talking about changes that keep white men from coming into the South Baton Rouge and shooting down our people. If it happen[s], […] we hit back. That's the changes I want to see'" (Gaines, *Father's House* 164).

Billy's resolve to avenge the senseless deaths of African Americans at the hands of whites is also inspired by his knowledge of the unfortunate treatment of peoples of color throughout the world. In a tone echoing the language expressed in the Black Panther Party's executive mandate, Billy explains how white imperialist uses of violence within the United States and abroad (what he defines as "bullets and fire") has led to the demise of "all nonwhite people," including Japanese, Koreans, Native American, and Vietnamese populations (Gaines, *Father's House* 168).[75] Billy further insists that his time in Vietnam—time in service to the United States—held more banes than blessings. While his experiences in the first fully integrated American war mission fostered community and camaraderie between him and soldiers from diverse racial, religious, and regional backgrounds, Billy reveals that their time together was cut short when an enemy's grenade killed all of his friends (168). His life was spared in the blast. Billy explains:

> 'My boys all died. Boopy died. Jerry died. Manny died. Jim died. Hal died today. All of them fought for this country—all of them dead. For what? For nothing. Nothing changed. Detroit ain't changed, Chicago ain't

> changed, California, neither South Baton Rouge. Nothing go'n change till somebody change it' (169).

The "change" for which Billy calls is not the ethic of Christian love and non-violence Martin so desires; nor is it limited to rhetorical declarations of courage in the face of one's enemy so espoused by Jonathan Robillard and Howard Mills. Billy's warrior mentality situates death as the noble consequence of unwavering persistence. Just as the speaker of Claude McKay's famous poem, "If We Must Die" (1919), calls blacks to fight "[t]hough far outnumbered" by their foes, Billy suggests that African Americans, especially black men, must be steadfast in their contestation of America's injustices, and must assert their claim to their human rights at any cost.[76] Billy knows that his ideological position starkly opposes that of his father and Martin's generation (Gaines, *Father's House* 166), and Billy insists that the approaches taken by men of their time are strategies that he cannot adopt: "'My daddy got to catch up with me. I can't go back where he's at'" (166). "I know I got to take chances,'" he tells Martin. "'[That's] the only way you get things done'" (167).

For Billy, "tak[ing] chances" implies exhibiting uninhibited action. It means using repeated affronts to one's personhood as motivation to demand radical social change, and to employ radical means to assert such changes. Through his words and his actions, Billy suggests that to "take a chance" means fighting for what one believes even if it means losing one's reputation or even one's life. Though Billy's bold declarations inspire Martin to wonder how to bridge the symbolic "gap" that lies between their different modes of existence, Billy's attitudes reveal the very real chasm that existed between African American men socially, generationally, and ideologically during the Civil Rights and Black Power eras. As the black male character who is most distanced from Phillip Martin relationally, Billy shows Martin the necessity of not retracing one’s past, but using past experiences as motivation to change the future.

Billy’s testimony changes Martin’s vision forever. Martin realizes that he cannot undo the mistakes of his past. For all his efforts, he cannot heal the psychological wounds that have been inflicted upon Robert X or Howard Mills; yet, in some way, Martin is better able to understand why these men could find the examples of Antoine, Jonathan Robillard or even Billy as more appealing than his own. Martin reasons that the rebellious spirit captured in the actions of Antoine, Jonathan, and Billy, and the men’s willingness to stand up for their personal truths regardless of the consequences, are necessary for communal healing and, ultimately, racial progress. The men’s attitudes work in concert with, and at the same time, challenge his thinking.

Though his awakening comes just after Robert X’s suicide (Gaines, *Father’s House* 203), Martin is given an opportunity to implement the lessons learned from his past as he moves forward in his relationships with Alma and their children, especially Patrick. “‘You wanted the past changed,’” one character, Beverly Ricord, tells Martin. “‘Even He [God] can’t do that. So that leaves nothing but the future. We work toward the future. To keep Patrick from [assuming Robert’s fate]’” (213). Martin’s fixation on redeeming his past caused him to lose sight of the promise held by his future. Beverly Ricord’s apt reminder encourages Martin not to dismiss Robert’s death and his role in the troubled young man’s demise; rather, she invites Martin to use the lessons learned from Robert’s life and death as inspiration for building a strong, positive relationship with Patrick. The novel ends without showing us just how Martin puts these lessons into practice; we are only left with Alma Martin's assurance to her husband that they "'just go'n have to start [the process of building their future] again'" (214). As indicated by the novel's indefinite ending, Gaines seems to suggest that the process of building life-affirming relationships in inter- and intraracial communities has no definitive course. History can be instructive, but we must not be held captive by it. We must take its lessons as we go forward into the future.

A casual exchange between two black male characters in *In My Father's House* takes up the notion of "a black man's conference." When one gentleman complains that "you never hear of a damned thing come out of them," the other retorts, "'One thing always come out of them. [Those involved] always make plans for the next conference'" (Gaines 19). Gaines's narrative engagement with the Civil Rights and Black Power Movements, and his attention to its impact on African American men and their interpersonal relationships, broadens our understanding of the era and its influences. The "conference" depicted in this novel highlights the interactions between black men whose ideologies and actions are informed by their gendered racial memories of these movements, and by their personal experiences therein. Gaines's fictive representation of African American men's intraracial tensions illustrates the complexities of these transformative moments in American history.

In chapter three, I will discuss Gaines's "next conference," *A Gathering of Old Men*, and how gendered racial memory fosters community for southern black men living in 1970s America. As men whose lives span much of the twentieth-century and have been shaped by demands for their mental and physical subordination, the African American men featured in *A Gathering of Old Men* embrace "black power" as more than a mantra: the exercise of such bold self-determination inspires them to imagine a new way of being. The men’s demonstration of such fortitude is captured in one unforgettable “day of reckonding.”

Chapter Three

“A Day of Reckonding”:

The “Power” of Black Men’s Memories in *A Gathering of Old Men*

The year 1962 marked a “turning point” in Ernest J. Gaines’s creative project (Doyle 21). According to Mary Ellen Doyle, in that year, Gaines declined an invitation from friends to travel to Mexico to write, opting instead to retreat to his home state of Louisiana. Gaines’s motivation did not come from the rural landscapes and “folk” communities that characterize his tales; instead, his journey home was prompted by the experiences of a determined black college student, James Meredith.

On October 1, 1962, Meredith became the first African American to integrate Mississippi’s flagship institution, commonly known as “Ole Miss.”[77] The racial melee that followed the event placed Mississippi before an international audience in highlighting the U.S. South’s tense racial climate. Meredith’s grace under immense pressure, and his determination amidst violent social unrest “called Gaines to take his own chance in order to write about his home state” (Doyle 22). Beginning in January 1963, Gaines stayed six months in Baton Rouge and “experienced the indignities of segregation and police questioning”; he credits the stay as having “‘sav[ed] [his] writing and quite possibly [his] life’” (22). “This trip and subsequent others,” Doyle contends, “enabled [Gaines] to know the experiences of young and old in a society changing from sugarcane to oil, from rigid segregation to limited integration, from oppression and fear to activism and assertion” (22). The challenges Meredith faced—trials that were replicated, intensified, and placed on a world stage, once again, by his “March Against Fear”—inspired Gaines to embrace the place of his birth, to cast light on its blessings and its banes, and to situate the life stories of his Louisiana heroes and heroines within a longer narrative about black life in the United States.[78] For Gaines and countless others, the historic events of 1962 will never be forgotten.

In this chapter, I examine how Gaines harnesses the magnitude and meaning of this remarkable moment by similarly depicting one fateful day in the lives of a collective of elderly African American men in his 1983 novel, *A Gathering of Old Men.* In recalling memories of their gendered racial experience in the South, Gaines's "old men" claim "(black) power" on their own terms. Like other collectives of African American men (and women) throughout history, the men use the request for their "armed self-defense" as a catalyst for speaking the truth of their lives without the fear of white reprisal. In fact, the men's bearing of arms links them more closely to a black southern past that used armed defense as a means of buttressing nonviolent, civil rights protest than to the suggestively violent connotation of bearing arms associated with the black power era. As illustrated by the life accounts discussed in the novel, the old men's "power" comes in sharing their experiences within a community of their peers and in proving to themselves that they are not bound to their past. Disclosing gendered racial memories within the (southern) place that has possessed more banes than blessings in their lives grants Gaines's men the authority to reclaim it as their own.

Set in 1978, *A Gathering of Old Men* takes place years after James Meredith's experiences and the symbolic "end" of the Civil Rights and Black Power Movements in the United States.[79] Eighteen armed, older black men—among them Mathu, Chimley, Mat, Jacob, Uncle Billy, Coot, Johnny Paul, Tucker and Yank—gather to claim responsibility for the murder of a racist Cajun farmer, Beau Boutan. We learn that the men's assembly is prompted by the request of Candy Marshall, heiress to the property on which the murder takes place, who summons them to Marshall Plantation and instructs the men to arrive armed with shotguns. Though the actual offender is revealed as Mathu's godson, Charlie Biggs, the old men maintain their guilt until Charlie admits to committing the murder in self-defense. As Charlie and each of Gaines's older characters confesses his crime, every man justifies his actions by drawing upon memories of both witnessed and experienced encounters with racism and voices his previously unshared qualms with and fears of white society. By disclosing their gendered racial memories, each man assembled gains personal satisfaction not only in having his voice heard in a community of black men who have had similar experiences but also in unashamedly sharing his story before an audience of African American women, children, and whites. Gaines's seasoned citizens also learn that they are not alone in harboring painful pasts; the burden of their southern memories is also carried by those they least expect, namely the brother of the slain farmer, Gil Boutan, and the proprietor of Marshall Plantation, Jack Marshall.

Gendered racial memory in *A Gathering of Old Men* demonstrates what Pierre Nora describes as the transformative quality of memory. "The transformation of memory," he writes, "implies a decisive shift from the historical to the psychological, from the social to the individual, from the objective message to its subjective reception, from repetition to rememoration" (Nora 15). This "shift" from examining communal unconsciousness to individual thought is precisely the work that Gaines's novel performs. The specificity of the old men's memories shows how particular life events helped to define the men's individual existence. Similarly, close examinations of the men's recollections identify commonalities in their lived and witnessed experiences, especially those involving women and youth. For the men of Gaines's novel, "rememoration" requires not only recollection of specific events in their pasts but also identifying how given experiences have profoundly shaped their identities as gendered racial citizens and their interpersonal relationships with African American women, black youth, and whites.

The work of "rememoration" is a task frequently undertaken by women writers in general, and by African American women, in particular.[80] Zora Neale Hurston's powerful depiction of Janie Crawford's journey to self-discovery, *Their Eyes Were Watching God* (1937), for example, is presented as the protagonist's reflections on defining moments in her journey toward greater gendered racial consciousness. Mostly centered on her relationships with men, Janie shares her story with her longtime friend, Phoeby, who listens as Eatonville's assumed prodigal daughter recounts significant people, places, and events that shaped the way Janie defines her identity as a widowed black woman. Similarly, letters penned by Celie, the central protagonist of Alice Walker's *The Color Purple* (1985), function not only as a way of reflecting upon poignant events in her life but also as an avenue for recalling critical moments in the lives of others. For Celie, lived and witnessed experiences teach her unforgettable lessons about relationships, race, gender, spirituality, and sexuality.

Toni Morrison's concept of "rememory," articulated in her 1987 classic, *Beloved*, most famously places the idea of rememoration in a literary context. According to Lisa Cade Wieland, "rememory" encapsulates how recalling events from the past—to "re-member"—is a creative reconstruction not solely limited to one individual's frame of reference. In fact, *Beloved* introduces a "community of rememberers," persons whose consciousnesses "overlap," to establish predominantly racial "rememories" (Wieland

208). In addition to establishing such a community, writings by Hurston, Walker, Morrison, and other African American women reflect attentiveness to experiences beyond those affecting members of their gendered racial group exclusively. Morrison's skilled attention to the experiences of Sethe and Paul D, for example, demonstrates her awareness of the ways in which slavery impacted enslaved women and men in mutually horrific ways. And while Morrison's novel is preceded and richly enhanced by the memories recorded in traditional slave narratives, *Beloved*, as she contends, rewrites the established record by imagining the "memories within" African Americans' experiences, thereby lending voice to that which has been deemed unspeakable (Morrison 110). As *Beloved* illustrates, fiction can "powerfully supplement elusive psychological 'facts'" about black women's and men's lives throughout the African American freedom struggle (Fox-Genovese 3).

Black male writers including Ralph Ellison, Chester Himes, and James Baldwin also participate in the important work of "rememoration," but such recollections often appear in the absence of a community of rememberers. For instance, we are reminded of Ellison's anonymous black male protagonist whose profound understanding of his existence in the United States is not shared until he is "underground." While the narrator maintains that a position of seclusion affords him a more enlightened perspective from which to evaluate American society, his meditations are limited to his purview. As Ellison presents, this nameless, faceless black man claims invisibility because he believes race and gender disallow him from establishing a meaningful connection to anyone, including other African American men. His conclusion that a state of invisibility is an inevitable consequence of his gendered racial existence precludes the possibility for dialogue with other black men who have shared similar experiences and, resultantly, it prevents the prospect of discovering socially inclusive ways of being.

Similarly, Robert Jones, the central figure in Chester Himes's *If He Hollers Let Him Go* (1947), is so tormented by what he sees as the ill-fated consequences of being a black man in America that his fears are realized when he is accused of committing the ultimate crime: raping a white woman. As does Ellison's narrator, Jones concludes that his life trajectory had long been determined by societal expectations set for him at birth. James Baldwin's meditation on the gendered racial memories of the Grimes family in *Go Tell It on the Mountain* (1953) offers an alternative to those of Ellison and Himes by highlighting the recollections of African American men and women. The "community of rememberers" whose life experiences shape the narrative come into greater understanding of themselves, but such understanding does not heal the psychological wounds they have both incurred and inflicted. In *A Gathering of Old Men*, Gaines signifies upon the work of Ellison, Himes, Baldwin and others by centralizing the communal qualities of "rememoration" and by suggesting, through the old men's memories, that voicing shared experiences has the potential to promote group solidarity, personal growth, and collective healing.

Previous analyses of *A Gathering of Old Men* have rightly identified Gaines's use of older black men to complicate narrow scholarly renderings of the aged and of militant behavior. Similarly, scholars have discussed Gaines's manner of situating the men's boldness as a necessary prerequisite to their acquisition of "true" manhood.[81] As mentioned in the previous chapter, Daniel White positions the novel as yet another example of Gaines's preoccupation with the broken bonds between fathers and sons

(170). By “standing” up for their beliefs, the men attempt to model new modes of masculinity of which their “sons” (future generations) will be inspired to imitate (White 171). Moreover, White notes that the men’s willingness to conquer their fears is not demonstrative of Gaines’s creative license exclusively. Such boldness, he argues, follows with Erik Erickson’s theory on the life stages of humankind, and “[body] sacrifice is a natural response to [the elderly men’s] developmental crises” (171).

Charles Heglar, Annye Refoe, Sandra Shannon, and Mary Ellen Doyle also link Gaines’s seasoned citizens to broad discussions of aged persons in America, but the authors also recognize the tripartite nature of Gaines’s project. Gaines’s focus on age is supported by his concern for highlighting African Americans’ persistent race consciousness and by his knowledge that group solidarity promotes positive transformation. Heglar and Refoe’s precise assertion that the older characters’ example of “surviv[ing] with dignity” inspires youth complements Shannon and Doyle’s discussions of how Gaines uses his cohort of older black men to debunk certain myths of their participation in radical social change (Heglar and Refoe 140). Shannon credits Gaines for “dispelling any notion of cowardice” among his unsuspecting heroes (213). “[Gaines’s men],” she asserts, “are indeed conscientious men who display profound ties with the land, the communities, their families, and their ancestors. [Their] separate confessions reveal individuals suddenly awakening from the sleep of despair, fear, and ignorance of their own potential. […]. By focusing on these individual heroes, Gaines draws attention to the possibility of group action” (Shannon 213). The “group action” that results from the men’s individual preoccupations is intricately linked to their memories. Doyle’s analysis of the novel reiterates this point: “By reviving old versions of who they *were*, [Gaines's men] assert their right to be who and where they are. They kill old pain by asserting that they have killed the old racist power that caused their pain. Having once more looked at their lives, they free themselves by voicing pain and truth […]" (186, emphasis in the original).

As Shannon and Doyle's particular analyses suggest, the relevance of memory and the contextual influences upon Gaines's rendering of embittered, aged black men should be considered in readings of *A Gathering of Old Men*. Unlike his critique of civil rights- and black power-influenced masculinities offered in *In My Father's House*, Gaines uses *A Gathering of Old Men* to engage the significance of collective action—common to both "civil rights" and "black power" ideologies—on black men's resistance years after the movements' end. This continued influence demonstrates the manner and method in which the spirit of protest birthed within these historical periods arrived to different locales throughout the South. "When Americans think back on the 1960s," Sokol contends, "many refer less to a specific period of time than to a certain feeling—they conjure images of flux, tumult, the spirit of political protest, and either the wonder or the horror of a changing world. […] The 'civil rights movement' did not so much as arrive in some places until ten years after the passage of the Voting Rights Act [of 1965]" (353).

The old men's momentous "day of reckonding," therefore, illustrates their belated embrace of the call to black self-assertion emphasized during the civil rights and black power movements. Their collective action aligns them with other noteworthy moments in the African American freedom struggle when black people, especially black men, have taken a united front against injustice and have used firearms to reinforce their demands for equality. While Gaines has not formally acknowledged the influence of actual protest groups upon his vision for African American men's collective resistance in the novel, we cannot ignore similarities between his imagined heroes and literal freedom fighters whose stories enrich historical memories of the civil rights and black power movements. One such collective—originating from Gaines's home state—are the Deacons for Defense and Justice.

Contemporary scholars have written at length about Louisiana's legendary Deacons as exemplars of armed, nonviolent self-defense during the Civil Rights Movement. Often seen as conflicting ideas in popular understandings of civil rights protest, armed self-defense was a complementary strategy to non-violence, especially for African Americans living in the U.S. South. For black southerners, armed defense marked "a 'paradigmatic shift' in black consciousness" and was a powerful "expression of self-determination" (Strain, *Pure Fire* 178-179).[82] The Deacons for Defense and Justice formally organized in February 1965, but the organization's initial act occurred more than six months prior. Christopher Strain writes:

> The origins of the Deacons trace to Jonesboro, Louisiana [,] in the summer of 1964, when young field workers for the Congress for Racial Equality (CORE) went to Jonesboro to organize desegregation efforts and voter registration. After white toughs visited the CORE headquarters and threatened to return with reinforcements, word spread through the black neighborhoods known as 'The Quarters,' which consisted of 'rows of unpainted frame houses with tin roofs, set closely together on poorly paved streets.' Dozens of older black men carrying guns spontaneously

> assembled on the street and averted trouble. ("Deacons for Defense and Justice," 14)[83]

This first action was soon followed by other demonstrations of self-defense by Deacons throughout Louisiana and Mississippi. With more than twenty-one chapters and a membership consisting of "several hundreds" throughout these deep South states, the Deacons' activities grew to include "guard[ing] marches [including the "March Against Fear"], patrol[ing] the black community to ward off night riders, engag[ing] in shoot-outs with Klansmen, and even defy[ing] local police in armed confrontations" (Hill 2). As historians have rightly noted, the Deacons were not the first group of African Americans to engage in armed resistance. Armed black insubordination to institutionalized racism dates back to slavery, especially enslaved blacks' participation in conscious and unconscious "antislavery" violence.[84]

The Deacons' uniqueness came from their highly public demonstrations, their southern regional orientation, and their formal organization (Hill 2-3). Prior to their emergence, Lance Hill asserts, "armed self-defense efforts were almost always conducted by informal and disconnected covert groups that avoided open confrontations with authority and purposefully eschewed publicity" because such groups "feared retaliation" and "they wanted to maintain the illusion of nonviolence in the [Civil Rights] movement" (2). According to Strain, the "illusion" was important to sustaining the successes of civil rights efforts because of the difficulties armed self-defense introduced to nonviolent protest. Such problems included: misunderstandings in defining "non-violence" and "self-defense"; the "contradiction of activists using firearms in a self-described 'nonviolent movement'"; assumptions that the presence of weapons "heighten[ed] tensions and [fed] violence”; and the “gratuitous,” false sense of security carrying guns inspired in armed persons (*Pure Fire*, 176). For the Deacons for Defense and Justice, however, the presumed problems of armed resistance were essential to the kind of “manhood ideal” they promoted. Their brand of “defensive violence” placed black men’s self-respect, dignity, and honor as superior to the consequences associated with bearing arms (Hill 263-264).

Coupled with these assessments of the group, Strain contends that the Deacons’ ages add another dimension to their uniqueness. As “older activists willing to take up guns,” he insists, the Deacons “force a reconsideration of the ageist assumption that it was young, hotheaded activists…who pushed the movement in a more militant direction” (Strain, “Deacons for Defense”19). The Deacons’ “militancy” was birthed out the men’s myriad life experiences, namely war and their mostly working-class backgrounds (Wendt, “Roots of Black Power,” 147; Hill 266). Characteristic of many black World War II veterans, their experience in fighting fascism abroad inspired a desire to contest racism in their own communities, especially those in the South. As native sons of states known for their histories of discrimination against African Americans, the Deacons for Defense and Justice had first-hand knowledge of the regulations imposed upon their identities as southern black men. They were keenly aware of the “state of constant watchfulness or fear” and of the “perpetua[l] aware[ness] of racially defined prescriptions for behavior” that came to shape southern black existence over time (Strain, *Pure Fire* 178). The men’s active engagement in armed self-defense practices transcended these proscriptions in body, mind, and spirit. As Strain cogently asserts:

> In practice and in spirit, self-defense reached beyond the mere need to protect one's person. Adopting a mindset of self-defense reflected an individual ultimatum, a kind of personal Maginot line, drawn in the sands of white southern contempt and hostility. It represented a quantum leap in the ability to define one's own space and identity and, when more than one black person decided on a course of self-defense, it represented a watershed in race relations. Deciding that one would fight back against racist intimidation meant an empowerment heretofore unknown among a people pestered by the lingering notions of self-doubt, reinforced by centuries of involuntary servitude. (*Pure Fire* 179)

For African American men, especially, embracing self-defense not only signaled a turning point in their racial subjectivities but also marked a significant moment in defining themselves as men. In role models like the Deacons for Defense and Justice, southern black men saw a form of masculinity that, as Gaines has suggested, "take[s] responsibility for the whole [community]" (Lowe 321). "[The] Deacons," Hill argues, "instilled manhood in black men—a quality missing in most blacks 'over the age of twenty-one.' [The] Deacons' philosophy was clear: Freedom for black men depended on manhood and manhood meant the willingness to use force to defend one's family and community. […]. For black men to be free, whites had to fear as well as respect them" (226). Black men's acquisition of respect in the U.S. South, as the Deacons' actions reflect, was best realized in the uncompromising display of firearms and the bold determination to engage in armed resistance if necessary. Participating in such deeds demonstrated African American men's commitment to ensuring not only the protection of black communities but also the maintenance of their constitutional rights as American citizens. With the Deacons for Defense and Justice as their models, southern black men's use of guns was in keeping with what Huey P. Newton later acknowledged as the purpose of firearms in liberation struggle—to "symbolize revolution" not to "initiate violence" (Newton 203).

Nevertheless, equating manhood and armed self-defense was also seen in demonstrations and declarations of black power. Unlike the community consciousness attached to self-defense and masculinity during the civil rights movement, black power advocacy has been assessed as limiting armed resistance to a gendered symbol of defiance where concern for community is subordinated to machismo. In the foremost 1960s black power organization, the Black Panther Party, Simon Wendt asserts that its members' "preoccupation with guns" and their "public pledges to use [firearms] to confront racist violence" were strategies used to "affirm and nurture" black masculinity ("Roots of Black Power" 158). As historians and even Huey P. Newton has acknowledged, the group's "armed militancy" was more a vehicle of psychological liberation than a tool for ushering tangible social change ("Roots of Black Power"161; Van de Burg 175, 199). [85] The Black Power Movement's intangible successes writ large, however, are what define its enduring legacy for African Americans in general, and for black men, more specifically. As Judson L. Jeffries cogently argues:

> The [movement] profoundly impacted the way whites viewed blacks, the way blacks viewed whites, and the way blacks saw one another. The refusal to back down and the willingness to meet aggression with resistance caused many whites to rethink the way they had historically

> treated blacks—as childlike figures that could be overrun fairly easily. The movement also showed blacks that whites were not omnipotent—that it was possible to alter white people's behavior if the appropriate pressure was administered. Blacks realized that they no longer had to tolerate being manhandled by the police, vigilantes, and other agents of oppression. ("Conclusion" 305-306)

Perhaps the most memorable example of such "pressure" during the black power era was demonstrated by the Black Panther Party, in 1967, when the group interrupted the California State Assembly to contest the prohibition of carrying loaded firearms in public areas. As was mentioned in Chapter Two, this fearless gathering of gun-carrying men and women elevated the Panthers to iconic status in the United States and abroad. This demonstration and its lasting image of black militancy, coupled with the memorable depictions of the group's most notable members (namely Newton, Angela Davis, and Stokely Carmichael), have become a part of public memory not only of the Panthers but also of the black power movement.

In *A Gathering of Old Men*, Gaines grants his seniors a "day of reckonding," one final opportunity to "speak the truth" of their lives "without fear"—even at the risk of imprisonment or death (94). The men—mostly aged beyond seventy years—never participated in protest commonly associated with either the Civil Rights or Black Power Movements. As their stories reveal, the men's physical world was confined to the rural locales of southern Louisiana, and demands for their deference to white authority curtailed any propensity the men may have had to rebel. The men's lack of formal education limited their engagement with written works promoting both civil rights and black power. Their knowledge of events beyond those in their immediate frame of reference was gained by listening and, as Gaines contends, by “simply having lived” (Wooten and Gaudet 42). The old men (and women) featured in *A Gathering of Old Men* “[acquire knowledge] through observation of things about them […], by seeing life and hearing about things” (42).

Given that Gaines’s men witnessed and experienced much of the racial injustice that marked the twentieth century, and they presumably had some knowledge of activities associated with “civil rights” and “black power” by way of “hearing,” even this cursory understanding of the larger African American freedom struggle influenced the old men’s willingness not only to bear arms in defense of themselves and their community but also to admit murder. The readiness expressed and collective stance taken by Gaines’ seasoned warriors is akin to the unbridled determination of the “Seven Days,” a revolutionary group committed to “avenging the murders of black people,” featured in Toni Morrison’s *Song of Solomon* (1977) (Story 150). Of Morrison’s revolutionaries, Ralph Story contends:

> [In] *Song of Solomon*, [Morrison] has not chosen to depict an estranged, disconnected, solitary ‘native son’ who murders or an ‘invisible man’ who runs from the South and goes to the white world to plead his case but ends up in contemporary ambiguity in a basement with 1,369 lights. Instead, Morrison has focused her vision on *the community and its men*—separate, distinct individuals who come together as a collective entity yet remain complex, whole characters. (157, emphasis in the original)

Just as individual lived and witnessed “experiences and tragedies” inspire Morrison’s men to come together and “embrace a revolutionary praxis,” recalling memories of their gendered racial experience in the South, for Gaines’s “old men,” reveals individual pasts marked by pain, guilt, and regret (Story 155). Through their testimonies, however, Gaines’s characters are able to foster a sense of communal solidarity that prompts them to challenge a racist, Cajun regime. As *A Gathering of Old Men* reveals, memory becomes a powerful vehicle for the men’s self-actualization.

Gaines’s examination of the gendered racial memories of older black men in the novel is prefigured by the inner thoughts of African American women, white women, and youth. In fact, our knowledge of Beau Boutan’s murder and its significance is signaled by the initial responses of Snookum, Janey, Merle Bouchard and Bea Marshall: just a few of those who are present when the men are summoned to Marshall Plantation. Candy Marshall, initiator of the assembly, instructs Snookum, an inquisitive nine-year-old African American boy, to alert the elders and specific whites to gather at Mathu’s home (Gaines, *Gathering* 5). Though Candy and other adults seek to exclude him from knowing the urgency of the matter, Snookum is quite observant of his surroundings and suspects that something of significance has occurred:

> I shot out of the yard [after receiving Candy’s instructions]. When I hit the road, I saw the tractor in front of Mathu’s house. The motor was running, I could hear it, I could see the smoke, but Charlie wasn’t on the tractor. He had two big loads of cane hitched to the back of the tractor, but he wasn’t on the tractor. On the other side of the road, in front of Mathu’s house, I could see Candy’s big black car shining in the sun. I knowed Candy didn’t

> tell me to tell Mathu anything, but looked to me like since all them people was gathering at his house, looked to me like he ought to know what was going on, too. So when I came up even with the house, I ran in the yard, and that's when I seen Beau. Beau was laying over there in the weeds all bloody. (5-6)

Snookum's presence in the novel and his assessment of this scene are significant to the action that develops throughout *A Gathering of Old Men.* His reflection not only foreshadows the connections that are later revealed between Charlie and Beau but also shows Snookum's youthful understanding of his physical and social world. His juvenile interest in the sights and sounds of the atmosphere, his keen awareness of Charlie's absence, and his manner of cleverly negotiating Candy's instructions with his young judgment demonstrate Snookum's perceptiveness. With the same skill he uses to describe the scene, Snookum observes striking characteristics of members of his community. His attention to skin color (describing Mathu as "black black" and Janey as "not as light as [his] Gran Mon" [6,8]), for example, is both indicative of Snookum's youthful fixation with physicality and of the strong preoccupation with skin complexion that has been used historically to substantiate intraracial distinctions, in general, and in Louisiana especially. Demands made by African American adults that Snookum address white men and women as "Mister" and "Miss," and his elders' use of such distinctions, not only signal the premium placed on respect for grown persons in the community but also show the specific regard for white racial authority observed by blacks regardless of age (8).

Moreover, Snookum's early dilemma in keeping his cousin, Toddy, from revealing his indiscretion in "playing mama and papa in the weeds" with their relative

Minnie is a juvenile representation of the quandary we later see affecting Gaines's old men: memories of experiences and the threat of fully disclosing one's past deeds limit an individual's ability to act (Gaines, *Gathering* 3). Prior to Candy's arrival, Snookum fears that he will be tormented by Toddy's knowledge of his misdeed and that he is destined to endure Toddy's mistreatment in exchange for silence (4). Having the opportunity to assist in the "business" of adults and to see Beau's "bloody" body, Snookum believes, frees him from the threat of Toddy's tattling. To Snookum, "what [he] saw" is knowledge more valuable than having his secret exposed. In his estimation, this new knowledge becomes a powerful grounding for his budding "manly" identity; witnessing the men's gathering furthers this development.

While Snookum does not realize the consequence of Beau's "bloody" body, Janice Robinson immediately recognizes the significance of the young Cajun's death. Affectionately known throughout the Quarters as "Janey" and as the longtime servant of the Marshall family, Janey is immediately unnerved after being alerted by Snookum of Candy's request and by the scene Snookum describes at Mathu's house. All the while uttering ceaseless prayers, Janey frantically adheres to Candy's instructions, but Janey constantly anticipates the violent response of the Boutan family, led by Beau's father, Fix: "I looked toward the highway, toward the river, 'cause I expected to hear Fix and his drove coming in them trucks with them guns any minute now" (Gaines, *Gathering* 11). Knowledge of the Boutans' history of racial violence is shared by African Americans and whites alike. Like Janey, "Miss Merle" Bouchard is keenly aware of acts committed by "Fix and his drove" (13).

As one of only a few whites alerted to the situation at Marshall, Miss Merle fears the worse outcome for the blacks' gathered. Self-described as knowing "most of the history of [the] river and of [the] parish [over] the past fifty years," Miss Merle is knowledgeable of the events, experiences, and behaviors of the community across racial lines (Gaines, *Gathering* 25). Tactics of racial intimidation and outright deadly violence performed by the Boutans and other Cajun families is a part of that history. Miss Merle anticipates that African Americans in the Quarters will react as they have in past instances by retreating in fear; however, as she approaches the gathering of those assembled at the crime scene, Miss Merle is most surprised by what she observes:

> I didn't see any of the people as I drove past the old houses. Just like little bedbugs, I told myself. Just like frightened little bedbugs now. But when I stopped before Mathu's house, I could see that they were not bedbugs after all. They were all there, in the yard, and on the porch. Three of them had shot guns—Mathu, Johnny Paul, and Rufe. None of the women had guns; they and the children just sat there watching me. […]. I had never seen anything like this in all my life before, and I wasn't too sure I was seeing it now. (15)

The disbelief Miss Merle experiences at seeing the armed men and their witnesses is replicated when she listens to Candy confess to the murder. "'I shot him,'" Candy explains to her, "'But all of a sudden Mathu said he shot him. Then all of a sudden Rufe said he shot him. Johnny Paul was nowhere around here. But after he came here and saw what happened, he said he had as much reason to shoot Beau as anybody […]. But I shot him'" (Gaines, *Gathering* 16). Miss Merle knows and Candy suggests that her insistence on claiming responsibility for the crime is drawn from Candy's desire to "protect" blacks in the Quarters, in general, and Mathu especially (17). Miss Merle recalls how she and Mathu—more than Candy's uncle and aunt, Jack and Bea Marshall—helped to raise her after Candy's parents were killed in a car accident over twenty-five years prior (16); she took responsibility to "raise [Candy] as a lady" and Mathu taught the orphaned child to "understand the people who lived on her place" (129). Miss Merle knows that Candy, now age thirty, feels a great connection to Mathu not only for his role in Candy's rearing but also for his presence as the symbolic link between Candy, her deceased parents, and many of members of the Marshall family; we learn that Mathu knew Candy's parents and grandparents and that he shared his memories of them with her (176). "How many times had I stood in that yard talking to [Mathu]…and she [Candy] sitting across from him at the end of the porch?," Miss Merle ponders. "How many times had I sat on the porch at Marshall House talking to him while he sat on the steps, holding his hat between his knees, and she sitting on the banister closer to him than she was to me, her aunt, or her uncle? How many times? How many times?" (19).

Miss Merle's vivid recollection of the endearing connection between Candy and Mathu is similarly reflected in her memories of the violent links between Fix Boutan and countless black families throughout the Quarters. Recalling an incident involving Clatoo, one of the men who later joins Mathu and the others, Miss Merle explains:

> I tried to remember now what Fix and Clatoo had had it about. Then I remembered. It was not Fix, it was that crazy brother of his, Forest Boutan, who had tried to rape one of Clatoo's sisters. She defended herself by chopping him half a dozen times with a cane knife. She didn't kill him,

> but he was well marked for the rest of his days. And she was sent to the pen for the rest of hers, where after so many years she died insane. That happened just before the Second World War. (Gaines, *Gathering* 25)

Like Janey, Candy, and other rural inhabitants, Miss Merle knows there is "'not a black family in [their] parish Fix and his crowd hasn't hurt sometime or other'" (18). As the gendered racial memories of Gaines's old men reveal, the experiences of Clatoo's sister and countless other African American women and youth provide the impetus for the men to avenge the wrongs incurred by their family members. Claiming responsibility for the murder of a single individual affiliated with all those responsible for past hurts allows the men to challenge the idea that they are unwilling to contest injustice—even against those whom they love. To Gaines's seasoned citizens, Beau Boutan is certainly one who stands for a violent whole.

Miss Merle's candid memories of the Boutans' violence against blacks are matched by Bea Marshall's remembrances of the family's impact on other whites. Specifically, Bea voices her disdain for Cajun occupation of lands once exclusively controlled by the Marshalls and other prominent white families. As the daughter of the family patriarch and Civil War Colonel, Nate Marshall, Bea resents white Cajuns for their methods of land cultivation, particularly their use of machines to complete tasks once done by workers: "'About time she [Candy] shot one of them Cajuns, messing up the land with those tractors. […]. Why we ever let that kind on this land, I don't know. The land has not been the same since they brought those tractors here'" (Gaines, *Gathering* 23). Bea's response not only reflects long-standing intraracial conflicts between Cajuns and whites historically but also draws our attention to women's investments in preserving traditional agrarian southern values.

As Gaines dramatizes in *Catherine Carmier*, farming and landownership are traditionally male-centered preoccupations, but black and white women frequently have served as witness-participants in upholding men's values. The nature of women's participation, however, has varied along racial lines. Unlike Della Carmier who is forced and feels obligated to aid her proud black Creole husband, Raoul, in competing against their Cajun rivals in farming, Bea Marshall willingly maintains her family's legacy of land ownership and ethnocultural superiority that distinguished the Marshalls and other white families from Cajuns and African Americans. This sense of entitlement and racial privilege not only impacts Bea's thoughts on Cajuns and blacks but also her interactions with members of both groups. She and Merle Bouchard use verbal and physical intimidation, respectively, in their interactions with Janey; the women's aggressive modes of communication are more aligned with gendered race relations of the antebellum South. Gaines's incorporation of these particular exchanges between women and his inclusion of Janey, Miss Merle, and Bea Marshall's various interpretations of Cajun identity are powerful examples of the permanence of the past in the characters' contemporary moment.

Though black and white women's articulated experiences are not privileged in the novel, women and children hold prominence in black men's memories shared throughout the narrative. Gaines's placement of women and children's voices at the beginning of the novel reveals his recognition of how women's gendered racial memories complement men's recollection, his awareness of the ways in which children's lived and witnessed experiences impact their development into adulthood, and Gaines's cognizance of how women's and children's experiences throughout history have inspired men to act. As witnesses to men's manhood quests, in general, women are more apt to articulate how certain moments impact men's lives through their interpersonal relationships as mothers, wives, sisters, lovers, and observers of men. We are reminded of the poignant insights made by Madame Bayonne in *Catherine Carmier* as exemplifying this idea. Similarly, Snookum's role as witness-participant in the men's "day of reckonding" has the potential to shape his definition of manhood. As Snookum and other children present at the gathering of Gaines's old men grow into adulthood, their gendered racial understanding will be influenced by their memories of the day's events. Lastly, Gaines's recognition of the ways in which women and children compel men to action reflects the great value placed on men's demonstration of honor, especially as it is regarded in the U.S. South.[86] In each of the memories shared throughout the novel, Gaines's black men reference experiences involving women and children either in their lives or in the lives of men whom they know. Even their principal Cajun rival, Fix Boutan, considers the impact of men's responses to injustice on the women and children of his ethnocultural group. Ultimately, the old men's various reflections illuminate the ways in which notions of honor inspire their willingness to "reckond" with their pasts.

Gaines complicates our understanding of women's particular witness-participatory role in men's gendered racial memories through Candy Marshall. Candy, we learn, is a descendent of a clan known in the Quarters for their progressive treatment of blacks. The Marshalls once owned Mathu's family, and with the abolishment of slavery, they allowed emancipated blacks to continue residing on their property. The death of Beau Boutan within yards of Mathu's home, coupled with Mathu's claiming responsibility for the murder, immediately prompts Candy to act. She knows that despite his old age, Mathu is destined to face the wrath of the notoriously racist, violent Boutan family and their peers if he confesses to the crime. Mathu's known propensity to resist white racism—a reputation he long acquired in his youth—makes him a ready target for avenging Beau's death, even if he had not claimed responsibility. Candy believes that by implicating herself, by acquiring the aid of the other black men, and by soliciting police protection, offered in the form of Mapes, the white sheriff, she will be able to continue her family's legacy of protecting "helpless" African Americans who reside in their community (Gaines, *Gathering* 66).

Though her call for the men to gather is prompted by her desire to deflect attention from Mathu specifically, Candy's petition—"control" poorly disguised as "protection"—inspires the old men in ways that exceed her expectations of them. The idea of the men "standing" that Candy understands (armed defense permitted by her) is, in their view, an action demonstrative of their intolerance not only of physical intimidation but also of long-standing fear of white retribution. Further, Candy's "masculine" appearance (signaled by observations others make of her "white shirt and khaki pants" [Gaines, *Gathering* 5], her "black LTD [vehicle]" [15], her hair "cropped too short for a young woman" [16]), Candy's domineering personality (suggested by her insistence on committing the crime and wanting to manage the men's gathering), and Candy's keen allegiance to the Marshall family patriarchs, simultaneously continues and contradicts popular images of white southern womanhood.

Candy's demand for black deference to her authority is akin to the behaviors of her aunt Bea and Miss Merle, but her appearance and unwillingness to marry are not in keeping with certain stereotypes of southern women. The latter distinction, one may argue, is indicative of generational differences between Candy and her elders; however, the behavior expressed by the white women of the novel, in general, is more reflective of the time in which they live. In his book, *There Goes My Everything: White Southerners in the Age of Civil Rights, 1945-1975* (2006), Jason Sokol argues: "By the 1970s and 1980s, many white southerners had not yet confronted, and had hardly accepted, [the] racial changes [of decades prior]. The struggle for racial change would continue, for many were still not free. […]. For some whites who observed the South of the 1970s, racial tension hovered as a fact of life and harmony remained a naïve goal" (324, 325). In *A Gathering of Old Men*, Gaines not only highlights this level of white ambivalence (exemplified by the "paternalistic" attitudes held by Candy and the other white women and later by the barbaric tactics used by white males to intimidate the old men) but also shows (older) African Americans' acquiescence to southern codes of conduct. "As the years unfolded into the 1970s," Sokol continues, "the South did not look like a land of racial harmony, nor a testing ground for reconciliation […]. While some white southerners confronted and accepted the pain of the region's racial past, many more preferred to forget" (326). Gaines uses the novel to highlight varying levels of "forgetfulness" through his white and Cajun characters, and the methods they use to facilitate dis-remembering. For African Americans, however, forgetting is not a viable option. Gaines's old men convert memory from a key to survival exclusively into a catalyst for resistance.

The men’s response to Candy’s request that they come to her family’s estate armed with “twelve gauge shot guns” and empty “number five shells” provide telling insights on the significance of Beau’s murder to them (Gaines, *Gathering* 28). While fishing at their favorite spot along the St. Charles River, longtime friends, Robert Louis Stevenson and Mathew Lincoln Brown (known as Chimley and Mat, respectively), are made aware of the situation at Marshall by a young man named Fue. Mocked by Chimley as “sissy-looking,” Fue tells the men that they are to follow Candy’s instructions immediately. “‘Something to do with Mathu, and something to do with Beau Boutan dead in his yard,’” Fue explains. “‘That’s all I know. […]. Y’all can go and do like she [Candy] say or ya’ll can go home, lock y’all doors, and crawl under the bed like y’all used to’” (28). Though Chimley insults Fue’s masculinity by labeling him the disparaging term “sissy” and insinuates that Fue is effeminate due to his presumed homosexuality, Fue retorts by challenging Chimley and Mat’s manhood, particularly the old men’s willingness to defend themselves. Fue’s suggestion that the men are bound to replicate past patterns of behavior is similar to Miss Merle’s assumption that the black Quarters’ inhabitants are “little bedbugs”: individuals who are incapable of demonstrating actions that contradict popular assumptions of them as timid and subordinate. The brief interaction and juxtaposition of the “sissy-looking boy” and the old “men” raises interesting questions about the construction of manhood, particularly in demonstrations of masculine honor. Certainly, Fue suggests that even he is more “manly” than Gaines’s seniors.

Silenced by what he had learned of the day’s events and by Fue’s observation of them, Chimley observes how he and Mat engage in an unspoken exchange about the implications of Beau’s death. Both men, Chimley confesses, are preoccupied with their memories of the Boutans’ past responses to such acts of black insubordination to the established code of conduct between members of their respective racial groups. “We was thinking about what happened to us [African American men] after something like this did happen,” Chimley muses. “I had never knowed in all my life where a black man had killed a white man in this parish. I had knowed about fights, about threats, but not killings. And now I was thinking about what had happened after these fights, these threats and how white folks rode. […]. That’s why we didn’t look at each other for a while. We didn’t want to see the fear in each other’s face” (Gaines, *Gathering* 29). Chimley’s reluctance to “see” Mat’s fear is largely attributed to the closeness of their friendship, a bond formed in their youth. Chimley fondly recalls how he and Mat “had been young men together,” “had done [their] little running around together” and even “had been in a little trouble now and then, but nothing serious” (31). Despite his and Mat’s history of rebelliousness, Chimley admits that the idea of boldly challenging their intimidators had never moved beyond mere thought. The “fear” Chimley suspects, and Mat later confirms, is shared by many men in the Quarters with the exception of Mathu. Chimley recalls how Mathu’s repeated altercations with the members of the Boutan family, including Fix, earned him the respect of white and black men alike. Chimley tells Mat that Mathu’s bravery should be enough to inspire them to “be brave”—even in old age (32).

Like Chimley, Mat also recalls Mathu’s courage and is stirred by his example. Mat’s desire to honor Candy’s request, however, is prompted by what he observes as the dire effects institutionalized discrimination had upon his family, especially his marriage and his son, Oliver, who bled to death after being denied medical treatment “‘just ‘cause he was black'" (Gaines, *Gathering* 38). After parting ways with Chimley in preparation for the journey to Marshall, Mat is met by his concerned wife, Ella. Unsatisfied by Mat's explanation that he is going "hunting," Ella questions her husband's urgency, challenges his insistence on carrying a gun, and tries to stop Mat from leaving their home. Mat, enraged by her interference, painfully confesses to Ella the source of his deep-seated discontent and the rationale behind his actions. He furiously laments:

> 'All these years we been together, woman, you still don't know what's the matter with me? The years we done struggled in George Medlow's field making him richer and richer, and us getting poorer and poorer […]. The years I done stood out in that backyard and cussed God, the years I done stood out on that front garry and cussed the world, the times I done come home drunk and beat you for no reason at all—and woman, you still don't know what's the matter with me.' (38)

The external ravages of southern racism, a system predicated on instilling fear and dismantling black manhood, become internalized and, as a consequence, Mat confesses, Ella became the unsuspecting victim of his frustration. Feeling defeated in the world, Mat, like many of the other men, uses his home as a site for exerting masculine authority, even though such exertion typically resulted in the abuse of his wife. Like the relationships between many African American men and women in the novel, Ella's display of the slightest challenge to Mat's authority, coupled with memories of their son's death, reminds Mat of his limited social status and prompts his retaliation. Claiming responsibility for Beau Boutan's murder affords Mat the opportunity to imagine the possibility of actualizing his deep-seated desire of confronting and destroying the representative source of his discontent.

In the company of other men gathered at Marshall, Mat learns that he is not the only man whose immediate family had been affected by the injustices of racism, especially through the loss of a child. One of the men, Gable, candidly shares how his son was sentenced to death by electrocution after being falsely accused of raping a white girl forty years prior. Despite the young woman's known reputation for engaging in sexual relations with "any" man in the parish (including Gable's son who was mentally challenged), Gable recalls how he knew that the charge of rape would go unquestioned even with public knowledge of her promiscuous behavior. We learn that the first attempt at electrocuting the young man was unsuccessful due to a mechanical error; oblivious to his surroundings and the delay, the teen assumed that "'he was already dead and in Heaven'" (Gaines, *Gathering* 101). As a "courtesy" to Gable and his wife, the parents were not allowed to witness their son's demise; they were informed of the delay and dismissively told that their boy's death would "'take a while yet'" (102). Gable explains that after the apparatus was repaired, "'[authorities] brought the boy out, strapped him in, and pulled the switch. [After] it was all over with, them white folks walked out that room like they was leaving a card game'" (102). "'Some went as far to say my boy shoulda been glad he died in the 'lectric chair 'stead at the end of a rope,'" Gable reveals, "'They said at least he was treated like a white man'" (103). Gable's long-standing, hidden anger, he confesses, rests on his inability to adhere to the recommendation of those who witnessed his son's death that he and his wife simply "forget" about the event and their son. The suggestion that death by electrocution is a more "respectable" death for black men especially is, for Gable and the others, a crude reminder of the dispensability of their bodies and an insult to their very existence.

In recalling lived and witnessed experiences of blatant disregard for African American humanity, the men also are forced to confront their personal implication in crimes committed against members of their communities. Such confrontations are prompted by the men's memories of their responses to injustice, even wrongs enacted within their own families. Grant "Cherry" Bello, for example, remembers the actions of Jacob Aguillard when they, and several of the others, visit the parish cemetery. We learn that Jacob's "mulatto," presumably black Creole, identity and his family's known aversion to interacting with local African Americans, made him an unsuspecting participant in the old men's rebellion. Within moments of passing the cemetery, Cherry says, "Jacob stood up and went inside the graveyard. I looked back over my shoulder, and I seen him pulling up weeds from Tessie's grave" (Gaines, *Gathering* 45). We learn that Tessie is Jacob's sister: a woman whom Cherry describes as "one of them great big pretty mulatto gals" who had relationships with white as well as black men (45). Liaisons between Creole and mixed raced women and white men in Louisiana can be traced well into the state's history. Tessie's associations with African American men, however, prompted violence from her white suitors who, Cherry says, "ran her through the quarters out into [the] St. Charles River" during a Mardi Gras celebration held some thirty years prior (45).

The tragedy of Tessie's death did not garner sympathy from her family. The Agulliards' adherence to Louisiana's strict social codes of ethnocultural distinctiveness made them neglect Tessie even in death. Though Gaines does not offer a lengthy narrative detailing the events of Tessie's murder, we can infer from Cherry's recollection that for Tessie's family, the horror of her death does not stem from the cruelty of her white lovers, but rather, they are outraged by her ill-regard for Louisiana's system of color caste. As a blatant gesture of disdain, the Aguillards "buried [Tessie] with the kind she lived with"—namely, "full-blooded" blacks (Gaines, *Gathering* 45). Jacob's silence in his youth, a complicit response to his family's treatment of Tessie, prompts him to visit the site of her burial. His tending to her grave is an act of atonement. The care with which he removes the weed-covered plot is his way of bestowing brotherly love to the sister he failed to protect from both the hatred of whites and of their family. As he "[kneels] down at the head of Tessie's grave" and "[makes] the sign of the cross," Jacob offers a gesture of respect and repentance (45). Driven by a guilty conscience, coupled with the momentum of his and the other old men's will to stand, Jacob musters the courage to admit his wrong: his outward motion signals an eternal dialogue between himself, his dead sister, and God. Seeking and accepting forgiveness for his past behavior frees Jacob to assume personal blame for Beau Boutan's murder. For Jacob, killing the racist, Cajun farmer is a bold, symbolic expression of his disdain for the very ideologies that support racial and ethnocultural hierarchies, that foster separatist group mentalities, and that inspire individuals, like him, to compromise their personal truths for maintaining group distinctiveness.

For men like "Uncle Billy" Washington and Sidney "Coot" Brooks, murdering Beau Boutan is also a symbolic expression of their disdain for institutionalized discrimination. Their self-proclaimed cruelty is a direct reaction to whites' prejudiced responses to black men's participation in armed services. Billy, the oldest of all those gathered at the Marshall estate, attributes his murdering Beau Boutan to memories of his son, a World War II veteran, who was beaten savagely by whites upon his return home from war. Recalling the incident, Uncle Billy explains, "'They beat him till they beat him crazy, and we had to send him to [a mental health facility in] Jackson. He don't even know me and his mama no more. We take him candy, we take him cake, he eat it like a hog eating corn. That's no way to be. It hurt his mama every time she sees that'" (Gaines 80). The image of this psychologically broken young man and the devastation it brings to his mother is one that Gaines revisits in his subsequent novel, *A Lesson Before Dying* (1993). What is most interesting in this recollection, however, is that Uncle Billy, as both father and husband, admits that he too is impacted by his son's unfortunate decline. The pain Billy carries in watching his son's demise is magnified by his wife Salina's obvious heartbreak. Though the narrative does not reveal whether Uncle Billy's frustration prompts him to enact violence against Salina, his experience, like that of Mat Brown, illuminates how that tension impacts black men's relationships with black women.

As a veteran of World War I, Coot understands Uncle Billy's anger and has lived through the very trauma Billy's son experienced. Clad in his army uniform, Coot asserts that his enacting violence against Beau Boutan avenges the harassment and murders of black soldiers returning from war throughout United States history. As a member of the "369th", an all-African American army battalion, Coot recalls how feelings of self-confidence and patriotism he experienced abroad were quickly shattered upon his arrival "back home": "'The first white man I met […], told me I better not ever wear [that] uniform or [that] medal again no matter how long I lived'" (Gaines, *Gathering* 104). The level of white disgust Coot received from this anonymous stranger is part of a larger chorus of resentment other soldiers encountered. Reflecting on other examples and calling on the memories of his assembled peers, Coot explains:

> ‘Look what happened to Curt’s boy when he come home from World War II. Because they [whites] seen him with that German girl’s picture, they caught him—and y’all remember what they did to him with that knife. Korea—same thing. That colored boy had throwed his body on that grenade to protect his platoon. Still the politicians here wouldn’t let them bury him in Arlington like the rest of them was buried there. Vietnam, the same thing—It ain’t changed. Not at all.’ (104)

When coupled with Uncle Billy’s account of his son’s outcome, Coot’s candid recollections of his experiences and his observations of other returning soldiers’ treatment broaden arguments made by the angry, young veteran in *In My Father’s House*. The younger Billy, discussed in Chapter Two, voices strong contempt for the American government’s response to war service and for the lack of improvement in social conditions in the United States as a result of soldiers’ efforts abroad. Coot’s reflection places the young Billy’s observations into a longer narrative about African American soldiers’ particular post-war experience. As Coot’s memories suggest and his admitting murder confirms, killing Beau Boutan is the old soldier’s manner of contesting decades of blatant disregard for sacrifices made and injustices endured by black veterans of war. Moreover, the act of wearing his army uniform to commit the crime not only suggests that Coot’s alleged role in Beau’s demise makes a provocative statement about what constitutes war and what justifies one’s participation in such acts but also speaks to the fact that the old men’s confessions have broad political implications. Each of Gaines’s black men is a warrior in his own right.

As reflected in Bea Marshall’s response to Beau’s murder, investments in traditional southern agrarian values inspired resentment against white Cajuns in individuals across lines of gender, race, and class. For three black men, Johnny Paul, Tucker, and Yank, Cajun acquisition of lands formerly cultivated and inhabited by African Americans as well as the strong sense of community fostered under such agricultural working conditions provides the impetus behind their alleged murder of Beau Boutan. Johnny Paul’s memories of pastoral landscapes, black farming communities, and the accomplishments of past generations consume his consciousness. These specific recollections, to which Johnny Paul refers as what he “don’t see,” are what prompt him to commit the deadly crime. He claims:

> ‘I did it [killing Beau Boutan] for them back there under them trees. I did it ‘cause that tractor is getting closer and closer to that graveyard, and I was scared if I didn’t do it, one day that tractor was go’n come in there and plow up them graves, getting rid of all proof that we ever was. […]. Sure, one day they will get rid of the proof…but they ain’t go’n do it while I’m still here. […]. I’m the last one left.’ (Gaines, *Gathering* 92)

Like Bea Marshall, Johnny Paul resents Cajun use of mechanized labor (“the tractor”) and comments on its adverse effects on lands once maintained by way of human resourcefulness. He too views the land as part of a legacy bequeathed to him by his ancestors, and both he and Bea Marshall seek to maintain their respective family’s memories. Johnny Paul is concerned, however, with the threat of memory loss: the failure to acknowledge the lives and life works of those who have passed on. Unlike Bea Marshall, Johnny Paul cannot look to landownership as a sustaining feature of his ancestors' legacy: a fact exemplified in the fact that the men's "day of reckonding" takes place on the Marshall estate. His ancestors were tenant farmers on lands owned by others. Johnny Paul's source of pride lies in the values and life lessons passed to him by his ancestors, among them, principles of hard work, respect, ingenuity, unity, and perseverance. As he explains, the remains of these teachers and role models are laid to rest in graves that are frequently threatened by the imposition of Cajun-driven tractors. Johnny Paul's claim that he killed Beau Boutan in order to prevent his rivals from "getting rid of all proof" of his ancestors' existence is an attempt to preserve their literal and figurative remains. The remnants of his fore parents' bodies—kept sacred by the graves in which they are laid—are testaments to the incredible lives they led, the pride they instilled, and the legacies their descendants hold dear. In Johnny Paul's view, protecting the graveyard signifies his determination to defend this heritage; its maintenance is worth far more than incurring the consequences of murder.

Tucker joins Johnny Paul in recalling the lives of those who once cultivated land now controlled by Cajuns. He vividly remembers his brother, Silas, "the last" of the black sharecroppers who tried to "fight against" the infamous "tractor" to which Johnny Paul refers (Gaines, *Gathering* 93). In a manner similar to that of Robert and Raoul Carmier in Gaines's *Catherine Carmier*, Silas demanded farm labor from his wife and children in an attempt to compete with his Cajun rivals' machines. Silas's wife eventually succumbed to a nervous breakdown as a result of his commands, but, as Tucker explains, even this tragedy was not enough to stop Silas from competing. We learn that Silas's determination led him to surpass his rivals, but this victory was short lived. "'They beat him,'" Tucker reveals. "'They took stalks of cane and they beat him and beat him and beat him. […]. I saw the race, I saw my brother beat Felix Boutan on his tractor […]. We all knowed [Silas] was supposed to lose. Me, his own brother, knowed he was supposed to lose, they beat him'" (97). Silas's failure to acquiesce to white demands for his deference, his refusal to give in to their intimidation, ultimately cost him his life. Memories of Silas's humiliation by way of being beaten with "stalks of [sugar] cane"—a blatant gesture of dishonor and disrespect—flood Tucker's consciousness because he believes his silence implicates him in Silas's demise. "'I went along with the white folks,'" Tucker laments. "'Out of fear of a little pain in my own body, I beat my brother…as much as the white folks did'" (98). Tucker's regret for not coming to his brother's aid is guilt shared by others who, as one character admits, "had all seen [our] brother, sister, mama, daddy insulted once and didn't do anything about it" (97). Like his fellow professed murderer, Jacob Aguillard, Tucker considers killing Beau Boutan to be an act of atonement: he too seeks forgiveness for not coming to his sibling's aid—in both word and deed. Having admitted his wrong, Tucker reasons that he now has the courage to withstand any "little pain" that may be inflicted as a result of the Cajun farmer's murder.

Sylvester "Yank" Battley did not lose his life as a result of Cajun intrusion on lands African Americans traditionally farmed; instead, Yank lost his livelihood. We learn that Yank is much like the memorable Joe Pittman in Gaines's *The Autobiography of Miss Jane Pittman* (1973): both men were known throughout the parish for their reputations as a horse breakers. As Yank reveals, however, his skills were deemed obsolete with the arrival of mechanized farm labor. Yank explains how this loss in occupation fostered a loss in identity, especially in the ways in which he was once perceived by others: “They look at you today and they call you trifling, ‘cause they can’t remember when you used to break all the horses and break all the mules” (Gaines, *Gathering* 99). Symbols of “progress” (i.e. farm machinery), Yank contends, are embraced often at the expense of those whose lives depend on their natural talents and gifts. For the former horse breaker, Beau Boutan’s death compensates for years of lost labor, vanished respect, and stolen dreams.

Though the men had previously voiced their rationale for killing Beau Boutan before Candy, Sheriff Mapes, and the black women and children gathered around Mathu’s dwelling, it is when they are assembled inside Mathu’s home that the men express the implications of their gathering. Speaking before the group crowded in the small residence, Rooster, one of the elderly men admits, “‘Till a few minutes ago, I felt…you never would ‘mount to anything. But I was wrong. [Now] I know. And I thank y’all. And I look up to you. Every man in here’”(Gaines, *Gathering* 181). Their decision to make a united front against the Boutans and contest their treatment, and to vindicate the insults incurred by their families and the community at large, required the men to reconcile ill feelings that they had with each other. It requires them to look at themselves as being a part of a collective of black men, and to put their individual will and pride aside in promoting a greater cause. The men’s assembly in Mathu’s home ultimately becomes a site of transformation. “I’ve been changed,” Mathu tells the crowd of men, “I’ve been changed by y’all” (182). In expressing such sentiments, Mathu confirms the transformative possibilities of African-American men’s solidarity. Moreover, it is through his listening to the men’s confessions that Beau’s actual killer, Charlie, who is also Mathu's fifty-year-old godson, reveals his identity. Charlie's admission of guilt allows him to join the men in their quest to fight through his actual commitment of murder: his actions are thus a physical manifestation of the old men's secret desires.

In the presence of his elders gathered in Mathu's home, Charlie explains that his murdering Beau was an act of self-defense: a needed strategy of self-protection not just from Beau's racist fury, but also from a long history of intimidation he experienced throughout his life. He candidly reflects on being mistreated by individuals on both sides of the color line, often responding to such ill-treatment with no form of resistance. Describing Charlie's testimony, one character explains:

> 'All my life, all my life,' Charlie said. Not to Mapes, not to us, but to himself. 'That's all I ever done, all my life, was run from people. From black, from white; from nigger, from Cajun, both. All my life. Made me do what they wanted me to do, and 'bused me if I did it right, and 'bused me if I did it wrong—all my life. And I took it. I'm fifty now. Fifty years of 'busing. All my natural-born black life I took the 'busing and never hit back.' (Gaines 188-189)

Charlie further reveals how it was not until Beau attempted to beat him with "a stalka cane" (Gaines, *Gathering* 190), coupled with Charlie's coming to understand the significance of his being "half a hundred" years old (189), that he realizes the great importance of him standing up for himself as a man, but more importantly, as a human being. Though Charlie initially attempts to retaliate after Beau exchanges the "stalka cane" for a gun and Mathu must force him to bear arms in his own defense, Charlie kills Beau, and in the process, he commits the first self-affirming act of his life.

We cannot ignore the large implications of the cathartic quality of male violence perpetuated through Charlie’s actions. Such outcomes are problematic yet emblematic of particularly male-centered ways of proving one’s personhood. Gaines, however, uses the scene to illustrate the way in which psychological violence often necessitates a physical response and to show how defending one’s humanity may inspire and require violent recourse. For Charlie, killing Beau Boutan ushers the “man who had been a boy for fifty years” into greater understanding of these ideas (Gaines, *Gathering* 193). Enacting violence teaches Charlie the importance of recognizing his human value—worth previously unrecognized by him and often ignored by others.

Gaines’s examination of men’s gendered racial memories is not limited to stories offered by his African American characters; in fact, he illustrates how memory impacts white and Cajun characters in the novel as well. This idea is best evinced in the experiences of the Boutans and Candy’s uncle, Jack Marshall. Told from the perspective of outside observers, Thomas Vincent “Sully” Sullivan and Jacques “Tee Jack” Thibeaux respectively, the life experiences of Gilbert Boutan and Jack Marshall enriches our understanding of African Americans’ narratives presented in the novel. “Gil” Boutan, we learn, is an anomaly to the ruthless reputation attributed to his family. As brother of Beau and youngest son of Fix Boutan, Gil has worked hard to disassociate himself from this family’s legacy by seeking higher education, showcasing his athleticism, and befriending others across lines of social difference. His college friend, Sully, explains: “Gil was a football man all the way, and eventually he would go pro, but what he wanted most while attending LSU was to be All-American along with Cal [his black teammate]. It would be the first time this had ever happened, black and white in the same backfield—and in the

Deep South, besides" (Gaines, *Gathering* 111-112). "Salt" and "Pepper," nicknames given to Gil and Calvin Harrison, fittingly describe their close partnership and the favorable opinion others have of them. Their well-matched athleticism and effortless camaraderie on and off the football field are, as Sully believes, an inspiration.

The teammates' seemingly perfect pairing is challenged when Gil learns of Beau's death and turns against Cal: "Whether he [Cal] had anything to do with it or not, he was guilty because of his color" (Gaines, *Gathering* 115). Sully attributes Gil's response to his hurt over Beau's death and not, as Gil tries to explain, on account of his Boutan roots. He and Gil are fully aware of the Boutans' violent past, but Gil seeks to transcend his family's reputation. Gil, however, believes that his family's brutal treatment of African Americans is a direct response to their precarious social positioning in Louisiana's hierarchy of racial, ethnocultural privilege. Like the state's black Creole population, white Cajuns' ethnocultural distinctiveness separates them from individuals within and beyond their racial group. Their claims to "whiteness" align them their non-Cajun white peers, however, their identity as Cajun invites scrutiny from these same individuals. Gil's words to Candy, when he arrives at Beau's murder scene, illustrate this point: "'You [Candy] never liked any of us [Cajun whites]. Looking at us as if we're a breed below you. But we're not, Candy. We're all made of the same bone, the same blood, the same skin. Your folks had a break, mine didn't, that's all'" (122). Gil's recognition of the ways in which "bone," "blood," and "skin" function as unifying qualities between Cajuns and whites inspire some respect from local blacks; however, negative distinctions imposed as a result of Gil's family's Cajun roots afford the Boutans' scrutiny from their "inferior" African American counterparts. The family's history of terrorizing blacks is a cruel demonstration of white privilege and a direct response to Cajuns’ uncertain standing in Louisiana’s complex racial system.

Despite Gil’s claim to his allegiance to his family’s past, Sully knows that Gil is an exception. He recalls their journey into Gil’s home place, “Cajun country,” and the young Boutan’s unbiased treatment of whites and African Americans. “Gil loved all the people back here,” Sully explains, “and they all loved him, white and black. He would shake a black man’s hand as soon as he would a white man’s, and the blacks would beam with pride when he did” (Gaines, *Gathering* 132). Though Gil takes pride in others’ recognition of his efforts to challenge his family’s reputation, he still respects his family members, especially his father, Fix. Sully explains how Gil cautiously describes the scene at Marshall—the gathering of armed black men—and how Beau and their family inspired the men’s resolve: “‘Old black men, Papa. Who have been hurt. Who wait—not for you, Papa—what you’re supposed to represent’” (137). Gil’s keen understanding of the older black men’s stance, his understanding that their willingness to bear arms is prompted by disdain for his family’s dark history, is not well-received by Fix. Fix does not easily comprehend Gil’s petition that their family not engage in violent recourse; he views avenging Beau’s death as a familial obligation. Gil knows that even if their actions were motivated by family allegiance exclusively, their retaliation would be placed justifiably in the context of their clan’s history of vigilante justice and senseless violence. Pleading with his father, Gil explains, “‘Those days when you just take the law in your own hands—those days are gone. These are the ‘70s soon to be ‘80s. Not the ‘20s, the ‘30s, or the ‘40s. People died—people we knew—died to change those things’” (143).

Though we may readily concur with Gil's apt reading of the United States and the American South's evolved, racial landscape, we cannot negate the significance of Fix's claim to family loyalty and his willingness to protect his family's honor. Like his waiting black rivals, Fix Boutan is motivated to action by what he perceives is the unmerited death of his son. This highly personal affront is more powerful than the motives behind any of his previous acts of violence against blacks. He views Beau's murder as a direct challenge to his manhood, but finds it difficult to negotiate his desire to seek vengeance with admonitions from Gil and another son, Jean, that he initiates a different response. "'[Gil and Jean] say my ideas are past,'" Fix laments. "'They say to love family, to defend family honor, is all past. What is left? All my life, that is all I found worthwhile living for. My family. […]'" (Gaines, *Gathering* 146). He continues: "'I have no other cause to fight for. I'm too old for causes. […]. This is family. A member of the family has been insulted, and family, the family must seek justice. But [Gil and Jean], they say no. They say it is past when a man must live for his family. So what else is left but to go lay in that cemetery […]'" (147). Fix's telling confession that he is "too old for causes" and his adamant desire to protect his family ironically aligns him with the elderly black men in *A Gathering of Old Men*. Despite the belated influence of protest discourses on their historical and cultural milieu, men of both groups view their actions as repayment for wrongs enacted against their loved ones—and not linked to larger "causes." As the novel suggests, however, the men's "personal" motivations do have "political" consequences, even if such results are unrecognized by the aged rebels.

To Gaines' black and Cajun elders, the political implications of their extremely personal actions are left to the interpretations of others. Gil Boutan knows that, for the men of his family, any act of retribution will be assessed based on communal memories of the Boutans' tainted past. And while he knows that his family cannot undo this dark history, Gil begs Fix to use Beau's death as an opportunity to create the Boutans' future anew. He implores Fix to consider non-violence in response to Beau's murder not only as a means of acknowledging the senselessness of vigilante justice but also as a gesture to recognize the ways in which their family's history (coupled with Beau's ruthless behavior) understandably inspired the older black men's desire for retribution. Despite Fix's inability to understand Gil's rationale, the elder Boutan's decision to disown him, and the resolve of their family friend, Luke Will, to avenge Beau's death, Gil tearfully pledges to uphold his beliefs in transcending barriers of race that have proscribed his family's behavior and have stigmatized his Cajun ancestry. He vows to initiate a new legacy of the Boutan clan for both younger generations of Cajuns, namely his nephew Tee Beau, and for members of other racial groups by cultivating positive relationships within and beyond the color line. Ultimately, memories of his family's violent past empower Gil Boutan to imagine their future.

Jack Marshall does not share Gil Boutan's promising outlook on the responsibility imposed on whites by African Americans' lived and witnessed experiences in rural Louisiana. In fact, he views these experiences, coupled with gendered racial memories of the Marshall patriarchs, as burdensome. As the proprietor of Marshall Plantation, Jack Marshall feels obligated to protect his family's reputation and legacy of land ownership; however, maintaining the Marshall standing—and the racial privileges associated with such—is a task he tries desperately to flee. Consuming alcohol and moving about the community in a drunken stupor provide temporary ways of escape, pathways to dis-remembering. As one character, Tee Jack, observes:

> [Jack Marshall] never wanted to be responsible for name and land. They [white patriarchs] dropped it on him, left it on him. That's why he drinks the way he does, and let that niece of his run the place. […]. Don't care if it go to hell. He want it to go to hell. […]. He go by the name [Marshall] 'cause they gived him that name, he live on the land 'cause they left it there, but he don't give a damn for it. Don't give a damn for nothing. Women or nothing. [Sex] or nothing. Politics or nothing. Nigger or nothing. Buy [blacks] a drink 'cause Nate or Dan or Brother [the family patriarchs], one of them, left it in a will to buy it. […]. I reckon for people like him they have always been complicated. I reckon for people like him they have always been complicated—protecting name and land. […]. Feeling guilty about this, guilty about that. It wasn't his doing. He came here and found it, and they died and left it on him. […]. (Gaines, *Gathering* 154)

As Tee Jack cogently surmises, Jack Marshall is doubly burdened by the fact that his family's liberal race politics are complicated by their participation in the very institutions that circumscribed blacks' lives (i.e. slavery and Jim Crow segregation). The protection of "name" (the Marshalls' noted reputation of living harmoniously with African Americans) and "land" (the clan's willingness to reallocate formerly black-inhabited lands for Cajun use) defines the Marshalls' complex relationship to their black and Cajun counterparts: protecting one responsibility compromises the family's commitment to the other. As the last of Marshall men, Jack Marshall finds it difficult to negotiate the complexities of his family's legacy. He blames his ancestors (and whites, in general) for their complicit involvement in discriminating against African Americans, in inspiring inter- and intraracial hatred in Cajuns, and in leaving him, Jack Marshall, with the responsibility for negotiating the implications of his ancestors' misdeeds. Theirs is a "debt" that is forever carried by those who are left behind, and, as Gaines's black and white characters express, it is a "rememory" shared by all (Gaines, *Gathering* 164).

In *A Gathering of Old Men*, Gaines uses one fateful "day of reckonding" to bring the inner thoughts of older African American men to the fore. The men's gendered racial memories of their lived and witnessed experiences in the South are enhanced by the recollections of women, white men, and youth—individuals whose lives also are shaped by the experiences of Gaines's seasoned citizens. Accepting the call for their armed resistance inspires in Gaines's seniors a resolve to demand a new way of being for themselves and their loved ones. Claiming responsibility for Beau Boutan's murder marks a decisive shift in the men's consciousnesses; Gaines's "old" men realize that courage is ageless and unity is power. In the final chapter, I will discuss the ways in which the U.S. South and certain sites therein similarly inform black men's gendered racial consciousness. Like Marshall Plantation, "places" such as the classroom, the courtroom, the plantation, and the region writ large, function as catalysts for memory. As depicted in *A Lesson Before Dying*, particular sites—and memories evoked from their specific placement in the South—function as platforms for teaching African American men and boys profound lessons on "how a (black) man should live."

Chapter Four

“How a (Black) Man Should Live”: Southern “Places” of Memory, Instruction, and Transformation in *A Lesson Before Dying*

In a 1976 interview with Charles Rowell, Ernest J. Gaines comments on a common trope in his writings: broken familial bonds within African American communities. He explains:

> ‘[A] pet theme I deal with in so much of my fiction…is that blacks were taken out of Africa and separated traditionally and then physically here in this country. We know that on the slave block in New Orleans, or Washington, D.C., or Baltimore, or wherever the slave ships docked, families were separated. Mothers were separated from their children, husbands from their wives, fathers from their sons, mothers from their daughters. And I feel that because of that separation they still have not…reached each other again.’ (Rowell in Lowe 87)

As Gaines admits and scholars of his works rightly have concluded, his manner of exploring the strained relationships within African American communities—fissures created by way of slavery—is a hallmark of Gaines’s creative project. His artistic vision calls us to ask important questions about the enduring impact of America’s “peculiar institution” on black intraracial ties. But more than responding to what he sees as the perpetual plight of African American families, Gaines attributes the origins of relational absence to a particular location—to a *place*—that literally and figuratively catalyzed the severed bonds that preoccupy his fiction. Gaines’s pointed reference to the “slave block"—a site that is uniquely linked to the U.S. South and often inspires memories of humiliation, separation, and loss—implores us to reconsider the significance of specific sites to his fiction.[87]

This chapter examines how Gaines envisions particular locations as central to the formation of gendered racial consciousness in African American men and boys. Specifically, he uses his most recent novel, *A Lesson Before Dying* (1993), to draw our attention to four key places, namely, the courthouse, the jail, the home, and the church. With their distinctive American and keenly southern histories, each site holds particular significance to the ways in which the region is imagined. Furthermore, these places have served as platforms for setting certain directives on how African American males "should" live. For the black men and boys in *A Lesson Before Dying*, each location functions as a poignant place of memory, instruction, and transformation. Gaines's fictive representation of the role of physical sites (and experiences occurring therein) in the development of black male consciousness is linked to broader discussions on how African American men understand the U.S. South.

My discussion of *A Lesson Before Dying* centers on the life experiences and relationship established between the novel's central black male protagonists: the young, college-educated school teacher, Grant Wiggins, and the wrongly-accused, death row inmate, Jefferson. We learn that Grant is asked to "teach" Jefferson what it means to be a "man" and how to face his impending death with dignity. Commanded by his aunt, Tante Lou, and Jefferson's godmother, Miss Emma Glenn, to complete what appears to be a most impossible task, Grant's charge transforms into a powerful teaching-learning exchange where both he and Jefferson gain invaluable knowledge about their particular social positioning in 1940s rural Louisiana. As the narrative highlights, the courthouse, the jail, the home, and the church function as definitive "places" wherein these "lessons" are taught, remembered, and negotiated by Grant, Jefferson, and other African American males.

Though my analysis of place and memory benefits from Pierre Nora and Edward Casey's respective insights on "lieux de mémoire" and "place memory," I examine key locations in this chapter as "places" according to Wesley A. Kort's important formulations in *Place and Space in Modern Fiction* (2004). Conversant with Nora and Casey's apt claims, Kort asserts that "places" have "force and meaning," they "are related to human values and beliefs," and they "are part of a larger human world including actions and events" (11). He insists:

> [Institutions]—including hospitals, prisons, [and] the military—are arenas that determine who will appear and what kinds of things will go on. Kinds of buildings, differing rooms of a house, open fields, and other locations can affect character and plot. The language of place becomes even more determining when…action or characters are restricted to a particular place. Characters are thrown or held together by the confines of the [literal] space and they are forced by place to deal not only with one another but also with the spatial conditions that they share. (Kort 16)

In *A Lesson Before Dying*, the courthouse, the jail, the home, and the church function as "places" in a region that is, in itself, a distinctive "place" of gendered racial memory. These physical sites are, as Steven Hoelscher contends, "containers" or "displays of memory" that function as "active vehicles in producing, shaping, and giving meaning to cultural memory and heritage" (661).

Key places in *A Lesson Before Dying* not only act as "vehicles" for shaping African American cultural memory of the region but also function as stages for informing and transforming black men's particular gendered racial consciousness. The courthouse, the jail, the home, and the church featured in the novel operate as symbolic "classrooms" where African American males are made aware of the limitations proscribed to their specific gendered racial identities and are conditioned to accept such restrictions. Gaines, however, imbues these places of black men's instruction with transforming potential as well. As seen through the experiences of Grant Wiggins and Jefferson, these places of black men's gendered racial memories function much like Stuart Hall's aptly theorized "metaphors of transformation" (Hall 287). Black men's ability to imagine and enact alternative possibilities for their lives in the context of specific locations is akin to "being caught on the median between two variants of the same idea": the "ambivalence" that emerges when situating black men's encounters with injustice in the American South alongside life-affirming depictions of their experiences in select places demonstrates Gaines's awareness of the "interdependency" that exists within the myriad ways the U.S. South is remembered (299).

Scholars have written at-length about the significance of place to literature, among them, Leonard Lutwack. His 1984 investigation, *The Role of Place in Literature* is a comprehensive examination of the variety of articulations of "place" across literary genres and is touted as the first of its kind (vii). As a precursor to Wesley A. Kort's valuable study, Lutwack's seminal examination reveals how fictional expressions of place appear as idea (expressed through “attitudes about places and classes of places that the writer picks up from his [or her] social and intellectual milieu and from his [or her] personal experiences”) and as form (conveyed as “materials for the forms [the author] uses to render events, characters, and themes”) in American and British literature (12). “Places,” he argues, “are neither good nor bad in themselves but in the values attached to them, and literature is one of the agencies involved in attaching values to places” (35). Students and cultural critics of the U.S. South certainly have identified the ways in which fiction writers use their works to imagine the region as “place” in the manner Lutwack outlines. Studies conducted by Evans Harrington, Lucinda Hardwick MacKethan, J. Bill Berry, Joyce Dryer, and Martyn Bone are among the manuscripts that purposely examine the South as “place” in the fiction and autobiographies of writers who claim the region as “home” and who explore its significance to the broader United States.[88]

Book-length discussions of the manner and methods by which writers imagine particular places *within* the region, however, are limited. Gabriele Gutting’s *Yoknapatawpha: The Function of Geographical and Historical Facts in William Faulkner’s Fictional Picture of the Deep South* (1997) meticulously traces Faulkner’s depictions of specific locations—ones inspired by sites in his home state of Mississippi—throughout his novels and short stories. The recurring presence of certain public, social, and private spaces and Faulkner’s ability to blur the boundaries of fact and fiction are, as Gutting asserts, strategic and useful elements of his literary corpus. She writes:

> [Faulkner] repeatedly combines the spatial and historical elements of his observation with his literary imagination to design pictures which enhance an artificial spatialization of time. Public buildings as well as private

> domains receive significance as containers of time or icons of history and myth. Not only the Jefferson courthouse, the jail, and the Confederate monument, but also the old aristocratic mansions of Yoknapatawpha exemplify the author's technique of joining the source material of his Southern home county with his view of existential truth. (Gutting 280-81)

Gutting's keen observations of a single author's use of places to expound "existential truth" foregrounds what Laura Sloan Patterson observes more generally in the works of several women writers. Her book, *Stirring the Pot: The Kitchen and Domesticity in Fiction of Southern Women* (2008), explores how "the home, and its nexus, the kitchen, operates not only as a physical space, but also as an ideological tool for investigating larger cultural and historical issues" addressed in the works of Ellen Glasgow, Eudora Welty, Lee Smith, and Toni Morrison (3). Sloan's insightful focus on the role of southern homes and kitchens in the particular development of women's consciousness rightly highlights the intersections between region, place, and gendered racial identity.

Focused studies of ethnic literature have also examined the significance of specific places to identity formation; however, such analyses do not assign these locations to a particular regional context. As its title aptly suggests, María Claudia André's edited volume, *Chicana and Latin American Women Writers Exploring the Realm of the Kitchen as a Self-Empowering Site* (2001), situates the kitchen as a place of reflection, knowledge, and the "articulation of new meanings and values" associated with gendered racial selfhood (Rangil 98). Similarly, Valerie Sweeney Prince's *Burnin' Down the House: Home in African American Literature* (2005) identifies the "intertextual quest" for a "primordial home" (expressed as the city, the kitchen, and the womb) in selected novels by Richard Wright, Ralph Ellison, Gayl Jones, and Toni Morrison. Prince's discussion of the ways in which home is represented in myriad forms, coupled with the insights offered by contributors to André's collection, provide appropriate models for interpreting Gaines's primordial "classroom"—the U.S. South—and locations contained therein as powerful sites for developing African American men's gendered racial consciousness.

Maurice O. Wallace comes closest to identifying a correlation between place, region, and black men's gendered racial identity; however, he does not consider African American men's southern experience in ways that even his evidence demands. In his book chapter, "A Man's Place: Architecture, Identity, and Black Masculine Identity" (2002), Wallace astutely suggests that the "trope of the racial closet" is a prominent feature of black men's "literary and cultural figuration" (119). "[Within] African American men's cultural forms," he insists, "the 'internal space' of the domestic structures housing black male bodies in individualistic solitude (closets, cabins, prison cells, small rooms, houses) approximates the very 'structure' of black male consciousness […]. It is an interiority at once protected from and imperiled by the superficially exterior matters of race and gender" (112). To support his claims, Wallace references the function of housing structures in Frederick Douglass's *My Bondage and My Freedom* (1855), Martin R. Delaney's *Blake, or the Huts of America* (1859), Charles Chestnutt's *The House Behind the Cedars* (1900), and, most extensively, Jean Toomer's *Cane* (1923). The predominantly southern context engaged in each of these writings is not acknowledged in Wallace's analysis; however, recognizing this aspect of each work adds another dimension to his important discussion. Douglass, Delaney, Chestnutt, and

Toomer's lived and witnessed experiences with virulent white southern contempt inspire the very "longing to abscond from the neurotically uncanny experience of social spectragraphia" that Wallace theorizes (123).[89] For the men of Gaines's *A Lesson Before Dying*, their experiences in domestic places are informed by the placement of these structures in the U.S. South. This fact, Gaines suggests, cannot be ignored.

Studies conducted by Jeffery J. Folks, Jeffery B. Leak, Phillip Auger, Keith Clark, and Valerie Babb are among the many interpretations of *A Lesson Before Dying*. Their analyses, however, specifically acknowledge Gaines's use of key locations in the novel. Folks identifies the jail, particularly its dayroom, as "an important setting for Jefferson's transformation": encounters experienced therein inspire Jefferson's "knowledge of a humanity" and allows for him to engage his visitors with "a sense of dignity" (270). Leak also distinguishes the jail as a site of transformation that "manifests itself in the relationships [Jefferson] affirms before his electrocution" (85). In an alternative assessment of the jail, Auger insists that it, like other architectural structures in the novel (i.e. white-owned homes, the courtroom, and the school house), reinforces discursive "structures" of white patriarchy (77). Such structures are created "to disempower, to convict, to imprison, and to enslave" African Americans featured in the novel, especially black men (Auger 77). Clark also interprets specific locations as emasculating to African American males, namely the classroom and the kitchen. He contends that Grant's particular feelings of frustration and humiliation in both sites are attributed not only to the kitchen and classroom's historic association with female subjectivity but also to their signification, for Grant, of his inability to progress (Clark 83).

In a more general assessment of Gaines's use of place in the novel, Valerie Babb highlights the particularities of the rural Louisiana community he creates and suggests that Gaines's inclusion of certain places is important to his engagement with (southern) history:

> [The community Gaines envisions] has a courthouse with a statue of a Confederate hero; a white Catholic church, a black Catholic church; a white movie theater, a black movie theater; a white elementary school, and a black elementary school. Situated in the rural areas are the Pichot plantation and the small tenant plots farmed by blacks, institutions that have essentially remained unchanged since the time of slavery. […]. Through the characters, Gaines offers revisionist interpretations of history and current events, and the composite of these views makes new meanings out of old forms and traditions. (Babb 254)

Gaines indeed uses the experiences of Grant and Jefferson in each location to present a "composite" view of the region and, by extension, the United States. Historically, the harsh realities of segregation and injustice faced by African Americans were coupled with their relentless determination to maintain their dignity. Similarly, the desire to flee the South's baneful history of racial intolerance was matched by blacks' keen investment in the region as a powerful grounding for identity and community. The South's position as a place for simultaneous test and triumph within the African American experience is precisely what Gaines highlights in *A Lesson Before Dying.* Black men's gendered racial memories and experiences in the novel enrich our understanding of the ways in which locations such as the courthouse, the jail, and the home, and the church exemplify this duality. By exploring the function of place and its complexities in informing gendered racial consciousness, Gaines undoubtedly "makes new meanings out of old forms and traditions" used to interpret literary constructions of black manhood (Babb 254).

In the opening chapter of *A Lesson Before Dying*, Gaines directs our attention to the novel's first place of significance: the parish courthouse. As an architectural structure, the courthouse, as Grant Wiggins later describes, is "like most of the public buildings" that comprise the municipal district of Bayonne, the central town of the parish (Gaines, *Lesson* 68). We learn that the "red brick" building had been "built around the turn of the [twentieth] century" and closely resembles "a small castle [one] might see in the countryside somewhere in Europe" (68). Grant acknowledges "a statue of a Confederate soldier" conspicuously placed "to the right of the walk that [leads] up to the courthouse door," and he recognizes the "national, state, and confederate flags" that wave just above the stone figure (69). Grant's observations about the building's aesthetic features, particularly the strong European influence, not only suggest correlations between Gaines's imagined judicial center and actual courthouses throughout the United States but also signal the great significance of the actions that occur within the confines of the space. As physical representations of America's constitutional promises of liberty and justice and as symbols of the nation's democratic republicanism, courts of law function as political sites wherein an individual's ability to fully realize these rights are determined. These "political places," Wayne K. Durrill cogently argues, "[have] shaped the people who passed through [them] lending the dignity of the state to some and excluding others from it. […]. [Each] person who [enters] these buildings [affirms] his or her status as a citizen, if not in practice, at least symbolically" (660).

For African Americans, claiming the basic rights of citizenship, historically, not only has been shaped by the caveat written into America's founding documents regarding their marginal social positioning but also was once complicated by the laws of Jim Crow. This battle for lawful equality—justice administered in courts of law—is further rooted in blacks' experiences in the antebellum era. "The system of trying, convicting, and punishing blacks [in pre-Civil War America] may have seemed informal and capricious," Michael S. Hindus contends, "but that is to judge it by the standards of Anglo-American criminal law, where the fundamental presumption of the adversary system was that both prosecution and defense enter the courtroom on terms of equality. But this presumption…was simply inadmissible for blacks. Black Justice…was never intended to be just" (599). In *A Lesson Before Dying*, the assembly of "national, state, and confederate flags" ultimately serves as an ominous reminder of the complex history of legalized injustice facilitating Jefferson's demise. The immortalized Confederate soldier guarding the courthouse entrance further compels parish blacks who enter its doors to remember the South's role in perpetuating such inequalities. The treatment African Americans receive once inside the building also reiterates the racial politics it maintains: "The toilet [for example] was for colored people who came to the courthouse, and it was down in the basement. You entered it from the courthouse parking lot. […] [It] was always filthy [and] was the only place [for African Americans] to go. The toilets inside were for whites only" (Gaines, *Lesson* 69). Together, elements inside and outside the novel's courthouse signal the ways in which national and regional discourses of African Americans' inferiority have been upheld in courts of law. As Gaines narrates through

Jefferson’s experiences, the maintenance of such ideals has led to African American men’s “social” and physical deaths.[90]

It is in the parish courthouse that we are made aware of Jefferson’s dilemma and the rationale used to justify his guilty verdict. The story, we learn, is simple: “[A] white man had been killed during a robbery, and though two of the robbers had been killed on the spot, one had been captured, and he, too, would have to die” (Gaines, *Lesson* 4). Though he did not witness the trial, Grant admits that he “was there as much as anyone else” because of the nature of the crime, the racial identities of those involved, and the conclusion drawn by blacks and whites alike that these elements alone predetermined “what [the verdict] would be” (3). Jefferson’s account of the fateful day’s events, however, sharply contrasts the “simple” narrative that finds its way in public discourse surrounding the incident. The presumed assailant confesses how he had been taken to a local grocery store by the real culprits, Brother and Bear, who murdered the store owner, Mr. Gropé, and who, in the process of their robbery attempt, were killed by their intended victim. We are told that Jefferson, an unsuspecting accomplice, witnesses the murders and resultantly is left in utter shock and confusion; he even pleads with the wounded store owner to confirm his innocence: “‘It was Brother and Bear. Brother shot you. It wasn’t me. They made me come with them. You got to tell the law, Mr. Gropé. You hear me, Mr. Gropé?’” (5). Unfortunately, Jefferson’s desperate request goes unheard because “he was talking to a dead man” (5).

As Jefferson contemplates his next move, struggling to decide whether he should “call someone or run,” Gaines reveals how the 21-year-old Jefferson “never dialed a telephone in his life” and, as he considers taking money from Gropé’s open register, Jefferson briefly remembers his godmother Miss Emma's warnings: "His nannan had told him never to steal" (6). Jefferson's limited experience with household technology and his reliance on his godmother's teachings, in many ways, validate the reputation of immaturity for which he is known throughout the community in which he lives. General assumptions about his mental state, however, are challenged by Jefferson's desperate appeal for the dying Gropé to attest to his innocence. Despite his naiveté, Jefferson is fully aware of the inevitable consequence of his presence at the gruesome site. He knows that without substantiation from a (white) witness he, a black male, has no way of contesting conclusions drawn by "the law," which is signified by any entity, individual, or institution involved in assessing the crime (5). Unfortunately, Mr. Gropé cannot aid him from the grave. Jefferson's placement at the store, coupled with his possession of stolen goods (money and a bottle of whiskey), automatically implicates him in committing the heinous act (6).

The bloody scene upon which two white patrons arrive is enough for them to assign blame without considering alternative explanations for Jefferson's presence at the store. This level of white indifference to Jefferson's testimony is similarly demonstrated by the public defender appointed to his case. Gaines allows the defense attorney to perform the duties assigned to his position—to advocate Jefferson's innocence—but Gaines also shows the ways in which the defender employs degrading language and draws upon racist discourses to support his claims. Arguing before an all-white jury, the public defender proclaims:

> 'Gentlemen of the jury, look at this—this—this boy. I almost said man, but I can't say man. O, sure, he has reached the age of twenty one, when

> we, civilized men, consider the male species has reached manhood, but would you call this—this—this a man? No, not I. I would call it a boy and a fool. […]. Look at the shape of this skull, this face as flat as the palm of my hand—[…] A cornered animal to strike out in fear, a trait inherited from his ancestors in the deepest jungle of blackest Africa […]. What you see here is a thing that acts on command. A thing to hold the handle of a plow, a thing to load your bales of cotton, a thing to dig your ditches, to chop your wood, to pull your corn. […]. Ask him does Christmas come before or after the Fourth of July? Mention the names of Keats, Byron, Scott, and see whether the eyes will show one moment of recognition. Ask him to describe a rose, to quote one passage from the Constitution or the Bill of Rights. […]. Gentlemen of the jury, be merciful. For God's sake, be merciful. He is innocent of all charges brought against him. But let us say he was not. Let us for a moment say he was not. What justice would there be to take this life? Justice, gentlemen? Why, I would just as soon put a hog in the electric chair as this.' (Gaines, *Lesson* 7-8)

The attorney's closing statements present a range of arguments that have been used throughout history to justify African Americans,' especially black men's, exclusion from the very rights to human dignity protected by courts of law. The demeaning reference to Jefferson as a "boy" not only reflects a dismissal of the manhood he has been afforded by virtue of his age but also is a contextually appropriate acknowledgement of the ways in which African American men have been denied full recognition of their status as men when compared to their white counterparts. The perpetual reference to nine wrongly-convicted southern African American males as “boys”—individuals whose court trials in Scottsboro, Alabama, generated international attention—is a clear example of the extent to which black men’s position as men has been disregarded in American history. As similarly depicted in Richard Wright’s *Native Son* (1940), Gaines’s novel’s setting in 1940s rural Louisiana, and the nature of Jefferson’s case, provide creative parallels to the famous legal saga that began in 1931 and lasted nearly twenty years.[91] The defender’s references to the shape of Jefferson’s head and his manner of demonizing Jefferson’s African ancestry are strategic uses of scientific racism: rhetorical maneuvers employed to solicit consensus and critique from the all-white jury. Furthermore, the attorney’s suggestion that an individual’s knowledge of particular writers’ works, that one’s ability to articulate the distinguishing features of a rose, or that a person’s capacity to recite passages from national documents each demonstrate one’s intellectual prowess are reminiscent of the ways in which such criteria were once used to exclude African Americans from exercising their voting rights.[92]

The public defender’s humiliating designation of Jefferson as being a “boy” is joined by his debasing reference to the young man as being a “thing” and “fool” (Gaines, *Lesson* 7). These labels not only demonstrate the attorney’s profound disregard for Jefferson’s humanity but also provide the impetus for Jefferson’s eventual acceptance of the indifference to which he is held in eyes of “the law.” (8). The defender’s use of pejorative terms, coupled with his manner of employing racist discourse to “defend” Jefferson’s innocence, act as powerful vehicles for Jefferson’s interpellation as, what he later describes, non-“youman” (83); the attorney’s successive insults culminate in Jefferson’s adoption of the animal referent, “hog” (8). Having had his intelligence questioned, his manhood insulted, and his humanity denied, Jefferson internalizes the brutish term and thus begins to participate in the psychosocial assassination enacted upon him by the public defender's words. Though Grant is asked to inspire Jefferson to develop the psychological resilience needed to endure this form of death, Grant is unable to eradicate Jefferson's ultimate fate. As Gaines suggests throughout *A Lesson Before Dying*, social death is an outcome one cannot undo; African American men, especially, only have the capacity to change their response to this most unfortunate end.

The social death Jefferson experiences during his initial appearance at the parish courthouse is transformed into a physical death when he returns to the site at the novel's end. Gaines signals the building's deadly significance in his description of "Gruesome Gerty," the electric chair designated to facilitate Jefferson's demise (Gaines, *Lesson* 239). Labeled the dark moniker because "whoever sat in Gruesome Gerty's lap when she was hot never sat down again," the electric chair is transported to "the storeroom on the bottom floor in the back of the courthouse" on the morning of Jefferson's execution (240, 239). We learn that the "high-backed wooden chair with leather straps" is brought to Bayonne's judicial center on the back of a truck that draws the attention of all those who witness its arrival (239). Gaines, however, highlights the distinct differences in the ways in which black and white witnesses respond to the intimidating apparatus. For African Americans, the infamous chair inspires silence and fear; in fact, as one black woman, Melvina Jack, admits, "[the sight of it] took all her strength…to remain on her feet" (239). Conversely, for white onlookers, "Gruesome Gerty" reinforces the necessity of Jefferson's sentence not only to avenge the storeowner Gropé's murder but also to remind other African Americans (especially black men and boys) that they too can share

Jefferson’s fate. Fee Jenkins, a “fifteen or sixteen year old” prisoner who watches officials bring the chair to the courthouse basement, for example, is taunted by a white court employee who shamelessly advises Fee to “watch himself, or maybe they would have to bring Gerty back for him to sit in her lap” (69, 241). Moreover, white parents use Jefferson’s death sentence, exemplified by the chair’s arrival, as a means of reassuring their children that criminals such as Jefferson are justifiably punished. A conversation between a white woman clerk and female patron at the parish bank reiterate this point:

> The clerk told the woman that her little boy had asked her last night what was going to happen at [the jail] today, and she said that the sheriff just had to put an old bad nigger away, and she didn’t want him to worry about anything. The clerk said that she checked on her little boy just before she went to bed last night, and he was sound asleep. And today when he left for school with his little book sack, there was not a solitary word; he had forgotten all about it. (242)

The opportunity for forgetfulness afforded to the “little [white] boy” is a courtesy not extended to his black male counterparts. Though Fee Jenkins’s imprisonment and his status as a teenager marks significant differences between him and the bank clerk’s son, Fee and the younger child are both “boys” who, by virtue of their gendered racial identities, are presented very different interpretations of what “Gruesome Gerty” means for their lives. As I will address later, black males’ particular racial and gendered self-awareness is a consciousness developed through other apparatuses (i.e. the ax and saw) as well. Though the white child is encouraged to forget Jefferson’s punishment and he seemingly obliges his mother’s request, as Gaines suggests, the young boy will encounter experiences in adulthood that will compel him at least to ponder the significance of even lawful violence. Nervous gestures, indirect glances, conflicted thoughts, and reluctant engagement with the accused describe the actions of many white men on the morning of Jefferson’s execution, especially those who are responsible for administering his fate. Gaines subtly details white males’ responses to show how the youthful compulsion to forget is a fleeting notion when an individual is faced with acknowledging one’s participation in authorized murder and condoned injustice.

Jefferson’s execution in the courthouse basement exemplifies the building’s function as a place of multiple transformations in the novel. As I mentioned earlier, Jefferson’s physical life ends inside the very structure that originally mandated his social death. Jefferson’s death on the “bottom floor” of the courthouse ultimately unites him with the many African Americans who, regardless of their socioeconomic status or their purpose for visiting the court, have been forced to occupy this level of the building; the ground floor symbolically represents blacks’ literal and figurative status in the social hierarchy of Gaines’s imagined Louisiana community (Gaines, *Lesson* 239).

Despite the courthouse’s transformation from a site for Jefferson’s social demise into a place for his physical death, Gaines shows that the judicial center operates as a place of Jefferson’s positive transformation as well. Having accepted his fate and been encouraged to dispel notions of his inhumanity, Jefferson chooses to face death with dignity. Jefferson’s courage, as Deputy Paul Bonin recounts, inspires all those who witness his execution. The white jailer explains:

> ‘[Jefferson] was the strongest man in that crowded room…. […]. Ask that preacher, ask Harry Williams. He was the strongest man there. We all

> stood jammed together, no more than six, eight feet away from that chair. We all had each other to lean on. When Vincent [the executioner] asked him if he had any last words, he looked at the preacher and said, “Tell Nannan I walked.” And straight he walked…[s]traight he walked. I’m a witness. […]. After they put the death cloth over his face, I couldn’t watch anymore. I looked down at the floor. […]. I heard two jolts, but I wouldn’t look up. I’ll never forget the sound of that generator as long as I live on this earth.’ (254)

His memories of Jefferson’s resilience in the face of death are tempered by Paul’s inability to forget the sounds of the electric jolts that ultimately claim Jefferson’s life. Jefferson’s simultaneous valor and victimization in his final moments operate in ways that exemplify Stuart Hall’s described “metaphors of transformation”: the “ambivalence” that emerges between the two ideas highlights the duality of transformation evoked in the place of the courthouse (“Metaphors” 299). Jefferson’s ability to be empowered while imprisoned, affirmed though afraid, mindful yet mistreated is not realized at the moment of his death in Bayonne’s judicial center; instead, this skill is a result of self-consciousness developed and articulated in the novel’s next important site. This powerful place of memory, instruction, and transformation is the parish jail.

Like its judicial counterpart, the parish jail is located in Bayonne’s municipal district. Though its external features do not include relics commemorating the region’s “Lost Cause” (i.e. confederate flags and statues), the jail is similar to the courthouse in that its internal elements reflect many of the social mores that characterize the novel’s 1940s context. Grant Wiggins observes the ways in which the jail functions as a segregated space when he and Jefferson's godmother visit the site for the first time. He describes how he and Miss Emma passed "bathrooms for white ladies and men" on their ascent to the area where the prisoners were "quartered" and how white inmates were housed "in a separate section" from black prisoners occupying the same floor (Gaines, *Lesson* 71). Though specific differences in the treatment white and African American prisoners receive are not mentioned in the novel, we can infer that institutionalized separation between the races has limited influence on the particular conditions under which the inmates live. In fact, Grant's description of Jefferson's jail cell not only provides a detailed observation of Jefferson's most immediate surroundings but also gives keen insight into the prisoners' experiences in incarceration across racial lines. Grant explains:

> The cell was roughly six by ten [feet], with a metal bunk covered by a thin mattress and a woolen army blanket; a toilet without seat or toilet paper; a washbowl, brownish from residue and grime; a small metal shelf upon which was a pan, a tin cup, and a tablespoon. A single light bulb hung over the center of the cell, and at the end opposite the door was a barred window, which looked out onto a sycamore tree behind the courthouse. [I] could see the sunlight on the upper leaves. But the window was too high to catch sight of any other buildings or the ground. (71)

Meager provisions, squalid accommodations, and limited ability to gaze beyond the strategic barriers of the structure characterize the life experiences of individuals sentenced to confinement in the parish jail. While these restrictions are set in place to regulate the social privileges of incarcerated persons and to emphasize their loss of certain freedoms, the specific position of Jefferson's cell in partial view of the courthouse serves as a constant reminder that even unwarranted confinement is protected under the law, especially those established in the court of public opinion. For Jefferson and other young incarcerated black men, the jail in Gaines's imagined Louisiana community functions much like the same structure found in Faulkner's fictional county: "With the jail, the values and shortcomings, virtues and vices that are not only present in the Southern world of Yoknapatawpha, but are at the heart of history, prevail" (Gutting 68). In *A Lesson Before Dying*, the idea that the jail is a distinctive place, and that African American men's gendered racial consciousness is developed by way of their lived and witnessed experiences within the site, highlights the manner and method in which these "virtues and vices" coexist.

The parish jail not only participates in the culture of segregation characterizing the period but also operates as a gendered space due to its existence as an exclusively male community of inmates and employees. Though the incarcerated population is diverse in its racial composition, Grant Wiggins is most candid about the lives of imprisoned African American males; Grant specifically discusses his and the men's inter- and intraracial experiences within the jail. We learn that black prisoners in the novel are mostly "in their late teens or early twenties," and "colored" inmates are charged with performing domestic tasks around the site, including cleaning restrooms and barbering (Gaines, *Lesson* 81-82; 69, 127). Empathizing with the young men's imprisoned status and feeling gendered racial kinship with them, Grant routinely gives black prisoners his spare change during his visits with Jefferson; in turn, inmates either "put their money together" in order to "get a pack of cigarettes" to share, or an individual prisoner may purchase “a pack of gum or a candy bar” for himself (82). Though the financial courtesy Grant extends to the inmates is, in his estimation, an insignificant gesture, this interaction between African American males suggestively bonds Grant to the prisoners in the minds of white authorities who control the jail. As demonstrated by their blatant disregard for Grant’s presence at the facility and their futile attempts to test his politics of respectability (by using threatening words and glances), Sheriff Guidry, the jail’s racist supervisor, and his chief deputy, Clark, for example, adhere to the general belief that black men’s gendered racial identities supersede all other qualities of individual distinction. Like most of the town’s white inhabitants, Guidry and Clark insist that African American males, regardless of difference, are expected to adhere to southern rules of interracial engagement at all times and in all settings. As I will show later, similar expectations are made of Grant when he visits the home of Henri Pichot, Guidry’s brother-in-law who reluctantly petitions for Grant and others to be granted visitations with Jefferson, and when Joseph Morgan, superintendent of the parish school system, visits Grant’s rural school. A notable exception to this expectation for black male deference, however, is found in Deputy Paul Bonin.

We know that Paul is present at Jefferson’s execution, and he is also responsible for relaying Jefferson’s final requests to Grant. Paul’s kindness, however, is expressed long before Jefferson’s final moments in the courthouse basement; in fact, Paul demonstrates mutual respect for Grant, offers civility to Jefferson’s visitors, and extends compassion to Jefferson and other African American men imprisoned at the parish jail. “Of the three of them at the jail,” Grant insists, “I figured [Paul] was the most likely to be honest with me. He was nearer my age, and he seemed better educated than the chief deputy or the sheriff. And I had heard from people in the quarter who knew his people that he had come from pretty good stock" (Gaines, *Lesson* 126). We observe Paul's gentle interactions with Miss Emma and Tante Lou when asked to search the elderly women's belongings and food offerings to Jefferson, his courteous manner of honoring Miss Emma's request that discarded food be distributed to other prisoners, and his thoughtful responses to Grant's inquiries about Jefferson's daily activities (71, 127). Paul, Grant reveals, acknowledges the prisoners' humanity; he is heard "speaking to the prisoners, calling them by their first names, threatening this one with hard work, praising another for being good" (131). Paul's impartial treatment of African Americans visiting and inhabiting the jail not only counters the biased responses of Sheriff Guidry and Deputy Clark but also dispels certain myths of a staunchly racist, southern white male consciousness. With Paul's daily presence and powerful example, the space of confinement functions as a site of enlightenment, especially for Jefferson and other incarcerated black males. His demeanor and actions offer a version of white manhood that complicates the jail's rigid gendered racial hierarchy and proves to the inmates that not all (white) men are created equal. Paul's is an example from which Grant learns as well.

In *A Lesson Before Dying*, Gaines not only designates the parish jail as place of instruction but also establishes the site as a place of memory. This idea is particularly true when examining the memories Jefferson conjures while in confinement. It is within the jail setting, for example, that Jefferson recalls and initially embraces the animal referent "hog" first assigned to him by his public defender. During Miss Emma and Grant's early visits with him, Jefferson repeatedly refers to himself as non-"youman" and requests corn, “roasted ‘nyers” and other foods commonly eaten by swine as alternative to the comfort cuisine Miss Emma lovingly provides (Gaines, *Lesson* 122). He also purposefully eats from the floor of his jail cell, and Jefferson asks his godmother and Grant to throw food at him as if he were an animal, much to Miss Emma’s grave disappointment (122). When Miss Emma desperately petitions to have their visits with Jefferson moved to the jail’s dayroom, Sheriff Guidry begrudgingly grants her request but issues a stern warning: “‘[Jefferson] can meet her in the dayroom if he wants, but he will be shackled. Every moment of the rest of his life, he’s going to know he’s in jail, and he’s going to be here till the end. This ain’t no school and it ain’t no picnic ground’” (134).

The sheriff’s vindictive mandate that Jefferson wear chains while meeting his visitors—to reinforce the young man’s knowledge of his incarceration and unavoidable demise —is a command issued with no knowledge of Jefferson’s preexisting self-consciousness. In fact, as he explains to Grant, Jefferson declares that his keen self-awareness had been forged long before his arrival to the jail. In a powerful expression of gendered racial memory, Jefferson, within the confines of his cell, ponders:

> ‘Who ever car’d my cross, Mr. Wiggins? My mama? My daddy? They dropped me when I wasn’t nothing. Still don’t know where they at this minute. I went in the field when I was six, driving that old water cart. I done pulled that cotton sack, I done cut cane, load cane, swung that ax, chop ditch banks, since I was six. […]. But nobody didn’t know that [I was human] ‘fore now. Cuss for nothing. Beat for nothing. Work for nothing. Grinned to get by. Everybody thought that’s how it was s’pose to

> be. You too, Mr. Wiggins. You never thought I was nothing else. I didn't neither. Thought I was doing what the Lord had put me on earth to do.' (Gaines, *Lesson* 224)

Jefferson's internalization of the animal referent "hog" and his demonstration of brutish behaviors, then, were outward expressions of his burgeoning internal agreement with a longstanding account of his diminished human value. Similar to the memorable Charlie Biggs in *A Gathering of Old Men*, Jefferson candidly reflects on a lifetime of abuse and shares how he often responded to such mistreatment without resistance. Having been ridiculed, battered, and forced to labor "for nothing," Jefferson poignantly confesses that he was afforded neither the comforts of attending "school" like his peers nor the opportunity to experience life as a proverbial "picnic" as Sheriff Guidry claims. Instead, Gaines suggests that Jefferson's jail time is a literal manifestation of the state of perpetual confinement he endured mentally and physically since childhood and, as a result, Jefferson's senseless death is plausibly the young man's inescapable end. Despite his unfortunate upbringing, Jefferson's insight and honesty about his life not only causes him to acknowledge his complicity in the treatment he receives from others but also inspires Jefferson to use revelations about his past to change his future. These thoughtful reflections, coupled with Grant's words of encouragement and Jefferson's acceptance of Miss Emma's request that he "walk like a man" to the electric chair, motivate Jefferson to recognize and appreciate his humanity for the first time. Armed with a transformed self-consciousness, Jefferson realizes that "what the Lord had put [him] on earth to do" far exceeds even his own existence.

The inner transformation Jefferson experiences in preparation for his execution is matched by outer changes of which he is forced to undergo before dying. We learn that, at Sheriff Guidry's request, Murphy, another black prisoner, is instructed to shave Jefferson's head, wrists, and ankles so that electrodes can be strategically placed in these areas to facilitate his electrocution (Gaines, *Lesson* 245). As Murphy carefully prepares his body, Jefferson is observed "looking down at the floor" of his jail cell and "obey[ing] [the commands of deputies surrounding him and the barber] as if he were in a trance, as if he felt nothing" (245). We can infer that the silence Jefferson assumes at this moment is unlike the quietness he displays at the courthouse; interpellation in the former instance is replaced by reflection in his final hours. And instead of understanding Jefferson's quiet response as evidence of him reflecting on the purpose of his death, we can interpret Jefferson's pensive actions as his manner of contemplating the meaning of his life. In fact, Jefferson demonstrates a desire to leave tangible remnants of his existence with others. This wish is best revealed when we consider Jefferson's actions after his body is prepared for execution. Grant explains:

> [When Murphy had finished shaving his body parts], Jefferson raised his head and looked at [Paul]. He told Paul that he wanted him to bring me the notebook and that he wanted Paul to have the radio. Paul told him he couldn't take the radio, but he would give it to the other inmates, for use in the dayroom, if Jefferson didn't mind. Jefferson asked Paul if he wanted the marble that Bok had given him, and Paul told him he would accept the marble. He told Paul to be sure that Mr. Henri [Pichot] got the pocket knife and the little gold chain. (245)

Ultimately, the jail in *A Lesson Before Dying* is transformed from a place of Jefferson's confinement into a place for his catharsis. Designating recipients for his only worldly possessions is a material expression of Jefferson's newfound appreciation of his self-worth: an awareness of individual value Jefferson believes can and should be shared impartially with others. The "pocket knife" and "little gold chain" Jefferson specifically bequeaths to Henri Pichot exemplify this idea; his decision to allocate gifts to Pichot proves Jefferson understands that consideration should be extended even to those who condone his fate. This final directive, issued in a place of incarceration, demonstrates Jefferson's ability to transcend the literal and figurative imprisonment to which he has been assigned. Jefferson's willingness to be self-less, at a moment when self-pity would be an expected and accepted response, confirms his realization that violence enacted upon his body does not have the power to destroy his mind and spirit. His ability to exercise mental and spiritual fortitude amidst insurmountable injustice reflects a quality African American men and women developed as a result of their historic battles against discrimination throughout the South and broader United States. In *A Lesson Before Dying*, Gaines assigns the birthplace of blacks' psychological resilience to a particular location. This important place is the home.

Black homes have a dynamic function in the formation of black men and boys' gendered racial consciousness in Gaines's novel. The ability of these places to evoke memory, inspire instruction, and foster transformation in Gaines' African American males is rooted in what bell hooks aptly theorizes as "homeplace." In positing the homeplace as a critical "site of resistance," hooks credits black women as the chief architects of this literal and figurative space in African American communities.

"[Homes]," hooks asserts, "belonged to women, were their special domain, not as property but as places where all that truly mattered in life took place—the warmth and comfort of shelter, the feeding of our bodies, the nurturing of our souls. There we learned dignity, integrity of being; there we learned to have faith" (41). As depicted in black homes featured in *A Lesson Before Dying*, Gaines suggestively concurs with hooks' conception of the homeplace not only as a female-dominated space but also as a powerful grounding for African American identity writ large. In the novel, the most prominent homeplace belongs to Grant's aunt, Tante Lou.

As the proprietor of the only home Grant Wiggins has ever known, Tante Lou, we learn, has resided in the dwelling for many years; in fact, Grant reveals that his parents previously occupied his bedroom "before they went to California during the war" (Gaines 104). The well-maintained bed, "chifforobe," washstand, table, and chairs that comprise the room's modest furnishings are complemented by a few family pictures, a "photocollage of Fredrick Douglass, Abraham Lincoln, and Booker T. Washington," and faded multi-colored wallpaper (104). Though aged over time, the room's "rustic" contents provide us with strong evidence of Tante Lou's pride in her meager possessions, her investment in preserving family memories, and her commitment to passing tales of African-Americans' tests and triumphs—signified by the iconic photos of prominent race and political leaders—to future generations (104). Tante Lou's belongings symbolize the elder woman's unwavering dedication to maintaining personal, familial, and communal legacies: a commitment that is deeply rooted in the ways in which black women create homeplaces. In "Homeplace: A Site of Resistance" (1990), bell hooks cogently insists:

> [It] has been primarily the responsibility of black women to construct domestic households as spaces of care and nurturance in the face of the brutal harsh reality of racist oppression, of sexist domination. Historically, African American people believed that the construction of a homeplace, however fragile and tenuous (the slave hut, the wooden shack) had a radical political dimension. Despite the brutal reality of racial apartheid, of domination, one's homeplace was the one site where one could freely confront the issue of humanization, where one could resist. Black women resisted by making homes where all black people could strive to be subjects, not objects, where we could be affirmed in our minds and hearts despite poverty, hardship, and deprivation, where we could restore to ourselves the dignity denied us on the outside in the public world. (42)

Though the features of Grant's bedroom give us significant insight into his aunt's affinities, the cultivation of the kind of gender-neutral "care and nurturance" hooks describes takes place in another location within Tante Lou's modest dwelling. This defining space is the kitchen.

Like Grant's bedroom, modest, dated furnishings mark Tante Lou's kitchen. Its contents, Grant reveals, consist of a "wood stove," a white "icebox," a handmade table and chairs, a dish "safe," a broom and ax that had "seen better days," and "several black pots and aluminum pans"(Gaines, *Lesson* 105). Identifying the distinguishing features of the room is important in two key ways. First, as he does with the description of Grant's bedroom, Gaines draws our attention to the contents of Tante Lou's kitchen to show the ways in which ownership, sentimentality, and humility operate in her life. Secondly, in referencing the room’s minimal furnishings, Gaines commends the level of ingenuity Tante Lou and other African American women employed not only to satisfy the physical needs of their immediate and extended families but also to create the kind of dynamic homeplace bell hooks identifies. The profundity of Tante Lou’s homeplace, especially her kitchen, is made most evident when Grant recalls a conversation had between him and his aunt in the space. In fact, this powerful instance of Grant’s gendered racial memory occurs when he accompanies Tante Lou and Miss Emma to Henri Pichot’s plantation as the women request Pichot’s assistance in securing permission to visit Jefferson in jail. Standing in Pichot’s kitchen awaiting Tante Lou and Miss Emma’s meeting with their former employer, Grant reflects:

> I had come into this kitchen many times as a child, to bring in wood for the stove, to bring in a chicken I had caught and killed, eggs I had found in the grass, and figs, pears, and pecans I had gathered from the trees in the yard. Miss Emma was the cook up here then […]. She had been here long before I was born probably when my mother and father were children. […]. [Miss Emma] ran the house; my aunt washed and ironed […]. As a child, growing up on this plantation, I could not imagine this place, this house existing without the two of them here. But before I left for the university, my aunt sat me down at the table in our kitchen and said to me, ‘Me and Emma can make out all right without you coming through [Pichot’s] back door ever again.’ (118-119)

Though childhood innocence, Miss Emma’s authority, and Tante Lou’s occupation mark his recollections of Henri Pichot’s home, Grant reveals that his limited perception of the dwelling and its inhabitants was broadened with Tante Lou's poignant directive. Issuing the command in the confines of *her* home, Tante Lou urges a then college-bound Grant to dispel any notions of her and Miss Emma's level of influence in Pichot's house and to challenge the appropriateness of him having to use their white employer's "back door." Her insistence that Grant refrain from performing this customary act of deference to white authority is a fitting request given Grant's impending college attendance; in fact, matriculation at a black university increases Grant's self-awareness and inspires him to question the attitudes held by other African Americans and whites. And while he later questions Tante Lou's commitment to this charge—especially when Grant, a college graduate, is expected to enter Pichot's "back door" in order to meet with him and other whites—Grant's inquiry can be understood as a result of an evolution of his racial consciousness inspired by his collegiate experience and first ignited by Tante Lou's instructions (79). When Grant, for example, contemplates "[acting] like the teacher that he [is]" or "the nigger that [he] [is] supposed to be" when interacting with Pichot in his home, the momentary conundrum in which Grant is placed causes him to recall the powerful lessons he obtained in Tante Lou's kitchen and in school (47). Ultimately, Tante Lou's home, "unlike and in deliberate contrast to that of [her] employer, [functions as] a site of resistance in significant ways: as a source of control over material conditions, as a source of spiritual nurturance, and as a site for political change" (Patton 145).

Exerting control over material conditions, providing space for spiritual nourishment, and setting an atmosphere for Jefferson's positive change are precisely the actions Miss Emma performs when she re-creates her kitchen within the confines of the parish jail. Unmoved by Sheriff Guidry's insistence that Jefferson spend "every moment of his life" reminded of his ill-fated confinement, Miss Emma ignores Guidry's demands and commits her efforts to converting the jail's modest dayroom into a "homeplace" for Jefferson's physical, spiritual, and mental transformation. "The large room," Grant reflects,

> contained three tables, made of steel, with benches attached on either side, also of steel. There were no other visitors in the dayroom, and Miss Emma selected the center table. […]. [Miss Emma] took out the food ["mustard greens with pieces of pork fat, stewed beef meat, rice, biscuits… (and) a little cake for dessert" [137]] and placed it on the table. [She] set places for four, two on either side of the table. […]. My aunt would say later that Miss Emma went about setting the table the same way she would have done at home. (Gaines, *Lesson* 136)

Miss Emma's desire to prepare the room "just as she would do" at her own dwelling not only signals her blatant dismissal of the sheriff's vindictive mandate but also demonstrates Miss Emma's steadfast love for her godson. Though Miss Emma knows that a change in Jefferson's outcome is impossible, she remains hopeful that his outlook can be saved. It is her unwavering belief in Jefferson's ability to see beyond the injustices he faces that motivates Miss Emma to remain by his side. The care with which she prepares and serves Jefferson's meals, coupled with Miss Emma's soliciting the assistance of Grant and her pastor Reverend Ambrose as Jefferson's mentors, literally and symbolically represents the elder woman's determination to feed Jefferson's entire being. Miss Emma's dedication to affirming her godson's humanity, despite his odds, is in keeping with bell hooks's thoughts on black women as homeplace builders: "[Making a] homeplace…was about the construction of a safe place where black people could affirm one another and…heal many of the wounds inflicted by racist dominion. We could not learn to love or respect ourselves in the culture of white supremacy, on the outside; it was there on the inside, in that 'homeplace'…that we had the opportunity to grow and develop, to nurture our spirits" (hooks, "Homeplace" 42).

In *A Lesson Before Dying*, Miss Emma's decision to create a homeplace *within* the jail—a site used to perpetuate the prerogatives of white supremacy—is a courageous, political act; indeed, we can infer, her boldness inspires similar actions from Grant Wiggins. Though Grant was initially reluctant and resentful for assuming the task of "teaching" Jefferson what it means to be a "man," we observe how his perspective changes upon entering Miss Emma's invented homeplace. With Tante Lou, Miss Emma, and Reverend Ambrose seated within an earshot of their exchange, Grant and Jefferson walk the perimeter of the dayroom and, in the process, Grant offers the young inmate a poignant lesson in heroism:

> 'Do you know what a hero is, Jefferson? A hero is someone who does something for other people. He does something that other men don't and can't do. He is different from other men. He is above other men. No matter who those other men are, the hero, no matter who he is, is above them. […]. A hero does for others. He would do anything for people he loves, because he knows it would make their lives better. I am not that kind of person, but I want you to be. You could give them something that I never could. They expect it from me, but not from you. The white people out there are saying that you don't have it—that you're a hog, not a man.

> But I know they are wrong. […]. I want you to show them the difference between what they think you are and what you can be. To them, you're nothing but another nigger—no dignity, no heart, no love for your people. You can prove them wrong. You can do more than I can ever do. […]. The last thing they ever want is to see a black man stand, and think, and show that common humanity that is in us all. It would destroy their myth. They would no longer have justification for having made us slaves and keeping us in the condition we are in. As long as none of us stand, they're safe. They're safe with me. They're safe with Reverend Ambrose. I don't want them to feel safe with you anymore.' (Gaines, *Lesson* 191-192)

Though Grant rightly discerns Jefferson's tearful silence following his speech as initial evidence of the young man's transformation, we may further interpret both men's actions as confirmation of their mutual change within Miss Emma's homeplace (192-193). For Grant, conveying the characteristics of a hero to Jefferson causes him to reflect upon his own inadequacy in realizing this ideal. Despite his education and his community's expectations that he will be their proverbial hero, Grant admits that he does not possess the selflessness and pride needed to actualize this request. These qualities, Grant suggests, must come from an individual who has the courage to remain steadfast through adversity, hopeful in the midst of despair, and cognizant of the heroic charge to which one has been called. Voicing his inability to accomplish this most noble and challenging task to Jefferson marks the first and only time Grant expresses his vulnerability to another African American male in the novel; in fact, Grant most often shares his shortcomings with his lover, Vivian Baptiste. Grant's honesty creates an opportunity not only for

Jefferson to recognize his humanity but also for sincere dialogue between the men to commence.

In addition to generating conversations between him and Jefferson, Grant's request for the young man to demonstrate heroism and to dispel preexisting myths of black men's inhumanity eloquently articulates the very desires held by Miss Emma. As Grant earlier had detailed to Vivian, Miss Emma's ardent wish to see Jefferson "stand" and face his impending death with dignity not only is connected to the elder woman's desire for a particular gendered racial memory of Jefferson but also is linked to what Grant understands as the longstanding aspirations of other African American women in his community to see black men "stand, and think and show that common humanity that is in us all" (192). Grant explains:

> '[Miss Emma] wants memories, memories of [Jefferson] standing like a man. […]. We black men have failed to protect our women since the time of slavery. We stay here in the South and are broken, or we run away and leave them alone to look after the children and themselves. So each time a male child is born, they hope he will be the one to change this vicious cycle—which he never does. Because even though he wants to change it, and maybe even tries to change it, it is too heavy a burden because of all the others who have run away and left their burdens behind. So he, too, must run away if he is to hold on to his sanity and have a life of his own. […]. What she wants is for him, Jefferson, and me to change everything that has been going on for three hundred years. She wants it to happen so [she can proudly tell others], "You see, I told you—I told you he was a

> man.” And if she dies an hour after that, all right; but what she wants to hear first is that he did not crawl to that white man, that he stood at that last moment and walked. Because if he does not, she knows that she will never get another chance to see a black man stand for her.’ (Gaines, *Lesson* 166-167)

Grant’s assessment of Miss Emma’s wishes, and their broader implications, demonstrates his awareness of the catalytic effects of African American men’s experiences in the U.S. South. Black women not only have witnessed their men’s responses to the banes of their southern existence but also have been forced to bear the consequences of black men’s (re)actions. As Gaines suggests and as Tante Lou and Miss Emma demonstrate, the remains of black men’s actions—permanently inscribed as gendered racial memory—neither have deterred African American women in their commitment to building homeplaces nor have dissuaded black women in supporting black men. Their gendered racial memory gives Tante Lou, Miss Emma, and other black women in the novel the audacity to hope. For Gaines’s men, conversely, Hope is an uneasy burden. The meaning of this weight is a lesson taught to black men and boys in the novel’s final place of significance: the church.

Throughout Gaines’s corpus, the role of the black church is akin to the ways in which actual churches have operated in the African American freedom struggle: in real and imagined forms, churches literally and figuratively serve as “institutional and emotional anchor[s]” of the black community’s social, cultural, educational, political, and religious life (Fairclough, *Class* 5). Though the black church in *A Lesson Before Dying* operates as both a place of worship and a place of instruction, the latter function primarily is highlighted in the novel as significant to black males' development of a gendered racial consciousness. This idea is particularly true for Grant Wiggins—both as a teacher and as a former student at the only school in the Quarters.

Gaines's manner of acknowledging the church's multi-purpose demonstrates his awareness of what Heather Andrea Williams notes in *Self Taught: African American Education in Slavery and Freedom* (2005). "African American churches," she asserts, "doubled as schoolhouses throughout southern states…as the buildings were among the few places outside the financial control of local whites. […]. In the emancipation period, churches served as sanctuaries, as sites for political meetings, and as classrooms" (Williams 107). In the 1940s rural Louisiana community of *A Lesson Before Dying*, the church building continues this function. Of his classroom, Grant Wiggins describes:

> My classroom was the church. My classes ranged from primer to sixth grade, my pupils from six years old to thirteen and fourteen. My desk was a table, used as a collection table by the church on Sundays, and also used for the Holy Sacrament on the fourth Sunday of each month. My students' desks were the benches upon which their parents and grandparents sat during church meeting. The students either got down on their knees and used the benches as desks to write upon, or used the backs of their books upon their laps to write out their assignments. Ventilation into the church was by way of the four windows on either side, and from the front and back doors. Our heat came from a wood-burning stove in the center of the church. There was a blackboard on the back wall, and another on the right side wall. Behind my desk was the pulpit and the altar. There were three

> pictures on the wall behind the altar. One was a head-and-chest black-and-white photo of the minister in a dark suit, white shirt, and tie; the other two pictures were color prints of Jesus: *The Last Supper* and Christ knocking on a door. This was my school. (Gaines, *Lesson* 34)

To provide instruction for all his pupils, Grant continues:

> I assigned three of my sixth-grade students to teach the primer, first, and second grades, while I taught third and fourth. Only by assigning the upper-grade students to teach the lower grades was it possible to reach all the students every day. I devoted the last two hours in the afternoon to the fifth and sixth grades. While the classes separated and moved to their respective areas, I asked my third and fourth graders to go to the back of the church to work on the black boards. The third-grade class would do arithmetic on the board on the back wall, and the fourth graders would write sentences on the board on the right side wall. I moved from one blackboard to the other with my yard-long Westcott ruler. (Gaines, *Lesson* 34-35)

Grant's detailed description of his classroom, and his use of the space, is significant not only to our knowledge of his character but also to our understanding of the church-school as integral to the formation of black men and boys' gendered racial consciousness. Grant's attentiveness to the dual functions of the sanctuary's furnishings, his familiarity with their operations, and Grant's awareness of the communal histories attached to each item shows his cogent recognition of the interlocking values of faith, family, and education signified by the worship structure. Similar to the meager contents of Tante Lou's kitchen, the church's modest furnishings serve as a testament to its worshippers' humility, sentimentality, and implicit belief that places are created by people, not possessions. Moreover, Grant's ability to use the church's furniture as instructional tools, the skill with which he manipulates the space to teach students of varying learning levels, and his capacity to maintain order under such limiting conditions is a fictive representation of the ingenuity particularly employed by southern African American teachers during the era of Jim Crow.[93]

Despite Grant's resourcefulness and the continuous support and respect he receives from the black community, he does not find such acknowledgement from local whites. This level of white indifference is best illustrated through his interactions with Dr. Joseph Morgan, the white superintendant of the parish's school system. During an annual visit from Dr. Morgan to his church-school, Grant recalls the superintendant's degrading inspection of the students' hands and teeth, his passionate insistence on lecturing to the students on the importance of nutrition and farm labor, and his blatant disregard for Grant's request for adequate school supplies (Gaines, *Lesson* 56-57). Notwithstanding these insults, Grant is particularly perturbed by Dr. Morgan's praise of one first-grader, Louis Washington, Jr. (56). Described by Grant as "the worst child in the school," Louis, we learn, "came from a large family" which led the young boy to "fight for every crumb of food he got"; Grant reveals that Louis demonstrates this same aggressive behavior in interacting with his peers as well (56). When he is asked by Dr. Morgan to display his hands for inspection, to say his name, and to recite the "Pledge of Allegiance," Louis, much to Grant's displeasure, reveals "black and grimy" hands, inarticulately says his name, and unashamedly delivers the national oath in a manner unreflective of Grant's stern instruction: "'Plege legen toda flag. Ninety state. 'Merica. Er—er—yeah, which it stand. Visibly. Amen" (55-56). To this disheartening recitation, Grant surmises that he "would have to do a lot more work" in instructing the young boy (56).

Though Louis's actions may rightly be attributed to his youth and his difficult home life, Grant's particular disappointment with Louis is better understood when we consider not only the superintendant's "quite satisfied" response but also the way in which Louis's presentation compares to the performance of his classmate, Gloria Hebert (Gaines, *Lesson* 56). When asked to present her hands for inspection and to recite a bible verse, Gloria "timidly" offers her hands and clearly and accurately articulates the scripture with ease (54). And though Dr. Morgan tells Gloria that she is "a bright little girl" of whom her parents "ought to be proud," the superintendent's compliment is undermined by his reminding Gloria that he had "heard that [verse] before" (55). The juxtaposition of Louis and Gloria's different performances, coupled with the superintendent's particular affirmation of the former's lack of knowledge, suggests Gaines's awareness of the gendered expectations of African American children's academic prowess—intra-racial disparities in education that persist even in our contemporary moment.[94] In *Teaching Equality: Black Schools in the Age of Jim Crow* (2001), Adam Fairclough historicizes this point:

> In the rural South, certainly, the labor of sons was more vital to raising cotton and other life-sustaining crops; it mattered less if daughters, especially the younger ones, left the fields to attend school. [More] girls than boys attended school, a disproportion that increased as children grew

> older. By grades eight to eleven, according to…[a] 1940 survey of Louisiana, girls outnumbered boys by two to one. By then, girls also comprised a majority of black college students and were more likely to graduate. (53-54)

The preponderance of African American women graduating from college similarly translated into their acquisition of jobs as teachers and their participation in the widespread "feminization of America's teaching profession" across racial lines (*Teaching Equality* 53). Yet, Fairclough attributes African American women's distinct ability to assume roles as educators to their gendered racial identities and not numbers. "Black women," he insists, "were often preferred by white school boards and education officials, who saw them as more pliable and accommodating than black men;" furthermore, African American women "found it easier to sustain faith in education" by being "more hopeful about the future generally" (*Teaching Equality* 52, 53). The young Gloria Hebert, Grant's student teacher Irene Cole, and his girlfriend and fellow educator Vivian Baptiste, then, signify Gaines's recognition of black women and girls' ability to acquire an education. Collectively, these female characters not only symbolize a progression of black women's educational achievement from youth to adulthood but also serve as counterparts to black males positioned in contrasting succession: Louis, Jefferson, and Grant. Grant's ability to subvert the ill-fated trajectory on which Louis and Jefferson are placed is attributed to self-determination, communal support, and attaining a higher education. His position as teacher affords Grant the opportunity to inspire other black males to follow his courageous example.

Grant's frustrated yet hopeful response to Louis Washington, Jr. is the first of two experiences in the church-school that prompt Grant to reflect upon his capacity to affect the lives of his male students. In fact, it is while observing older boys chop and gather wood for the classroom's "wood-burning stove," and noticing parallels between the students' behavior and those of their male elders, that Grant not only contemplates his effectiveness as a teacher but also remembers his own participation in such activities (Gaines, *Lesson* 61-62). In a poignant moment of reflection, Grant muses:

> What am I doing? Am I reaching them at all? They are acting exactly as the old men did earlier. They are fifty years younger, maybe more, but doing the same thing those old men did who never attended school a day in their lives. Is this just a vicious cycle? With my back to the fence as I watched [the boys], I remembered when it was I who had swung that ax and pulled my end of the saw. And I remembered the others too—Bill, Jerry, Claudee, Smitty, Snowball—all the others. They had chopped wood here too; then they were all gone. Gone to the fields, to the small towns, to the cities—where they died. There was always news coming back to the quarter about someone who had been killed or sent to prison for killing someone else: Snowball, stabbed to death at a nightclub in Port Allen; Claudee, killed by a woman in New Orleans; Smitty sent to the state penitentiary at Angola for manslaughter. And there were others who did not go anywhere but simply died slower. (62)

Analogous to my discussion of the electric chair as an apparatus for facilitating African American men and boys' gendered and racial self-awareness, Grant's remembrance of the ax and saw, and his and his peers' use of these instruments, suggests that these tools also were used as symbolic intimations of black males' fates. This fate, Grant reveals, was foretold to him and his classmates by their Creole teacher, Matthew Antoine, who informed them that death—in its myriad manifestations—was the only recourse for black men living in the South. "[Antoine] could teach any of us only one thing, and that one thing was flight," Grant recalls. "Because there was no freedom here. […]. And when he saw that I wanted to learn, he hated me even more than he did the others, because I challenged him when the others did not. They believed what he said. They went out into the fields, went into the small towns, and into the cities and died. […]. Even after I had gone away for further education…I could still see the hatred in him" (Gaines, *Lesson* 63).

Reminiscent of the family patriarch in Gaines's *Catherine Carmier* (1967), Matthew Antoine has a particular disdain for African Americans; like Raoul Carmier, his hatred is fueled by whites' lack of full recognition of his ethnocultural distinctiveness from blacks. Antoine's resentment is further compounded by the dilemma faced by many southern African American teachers: a class of professionals of which he is inevitably, though begrudgingly, part. "Many [black educators]," Adam Fairclough argues, "would rather have been lawyers, journalists, businesspeople, or government workers—anything but teachers—had they not been restricted by discrimination" (*Class* 4). Though the historical record is "unclear" on mixed-race teachers' specific self-perceptions and attitudes toward their students, Fairclough speculates that existing color-prejudice—with its class associations—may have appeared "informally or subconsciously" in teacher-student interactions (*Class* 293, 294). Accounting for Fairclough's observations and

Gaines's previous depiction of black Creole men, then, we may interpret Matthew Antoine's ethnocultural frustrations as a contributing element of his larger critique of educated African American men's experiences in the U.S. South. Far from being an "escape route from a dying way of life they associated with poverty, cultural isolation, and political repression," Education, as Antoine harshly articulates, leads black men who insist upon residing in the South to these very ends (Fairclough, *Class* 305). "'You have to go away [from the South] to know about life,'" the Creole teacher tells Grant. "'There's no life here. There's nothing but ignorance here'" (Gaines, *Lesson* 65).

Grant heeds his school master's warnings when he matriculates at an unnamed black university implicitly located far from his rural Louisiana homeplace. But instead of learning lessons that inspire him to disassociate with his southern roots as Antoine instructs, Grant attains an undergraduate education that motivates him to greater understanding of his regional home and the black community in which he lives. This idea is best evinced when Grant recalls hearing an Irish scholar reference James Joyce's "Ivy Day in the Committee Room," during a visiting lecture at Grant's university (Gaines, *Lesson* 89). Intrigued by the lecturer's assertion that the story is "universal," Grant asks his literature teacher, Mr. Anderson, to secure him a copy of Joyce's *The Dubliners* (1914), in which the story is contained. On acquiring the book, Mr. Anderson tells Grant that it had been loaned on his behalf by a professor at the nearby white university who was "a pretty decent fellow": a fact, Mr. Anderson insists, Grant should "always remember" (89). Reading Joyce's narrative prompts Grant to recognize commonalities between the Irish and African Americans: both populations laud the lives and legacies of their heroes (88-89). We can infer that it is from his recollection of this lesson that Grant draws when he defines heroism for Jefferson; in fact, Grant's gradual understanding of Miss Emma's noble obsession with seeing Jefferson "walk" is linked to his memory of lessons gleaned from Joyce's tale as well.

Exposure to James Joyce's writings, coupled with his teacher's encouragement, not only sharpens Grant's awareness of African Americans' "common humanity," but also teaches Grant the power of education in igniting positive change in students' lives. Countering Matthew Antoine's example, Mr. Anderson offers Grant an alternative model of black male educators: one who supports the pursuit of knowledge, advocates open-mindedness, and creates a learning environment that encourages student success. Mr. Anderson's willingness to assist Grant in his quest for learning provides him with an example that he later emulates when he purchases a radio and journal for Jefferson and, consequently, transforms Jefferson's restrictive cell into a classroom (Gaines, *Lesson* 182, 185). The radio and journal, coupled with his discussions with Grant, incite Jefferson to levels of reflection and introspection—hallmarks of effective teaching—that leave an indelible mark on his life and the lives of all those whom he encounters. The remnant of these impressions is beautifully rendered in "Jefferson's Diary" (226-234). Bourque cogently explains:

> Jefferson's [notebook] is a freedom book. Jefferson is not unafraid, but at the end of the notebook he has freed himself from this oppressors and his freedom has everything to do with his knowledge of *manness* which cannot be taken from him even in death. […]. Surely his freedom has everything to do with his growing power with language and his belief in articulating his probe [into] his own being. Before [Jefferson] dies he has

> made something which will last longer than he lasts, and that thing that he has made is a testimony where wisdom and beauty emerge. (144, emphasis in the original)

Identifying Jefferson's diary as a "freedom book" not only connotes Robert B. Stepto's analysis of literacy as a powerful, libratory practice for African Americans historically but also suggests Pierre Nora's contention that materials—tangible items selected by communities or individuals—can operate as "lieux de mémoire."[95] Beyond memory however, the implications of both Stepto and Nora's assertions also suggest instruction and transformation. It is individual and collective memory of experience that inspires the pursuit of freedom and necessitates the need for keeping records. Jefferson's act of recording his innermost thoughts, then, is an intentional performance of remembering and reflection that lead Jefferson to realize his human worth in spite of fate. Ultimately, as one critic contends, "Jefferson's redemption is in the notebook, [and] *is* the notebook" (Bourque 143). Through his journal, Jefferson "talks back" to the public defender, the sheriff, the jury, and all those—black and white—who disregarded his humanity. Jefferson proves to all that he is somebody.

Like Jefferson, Grant Wiggins is also redeemed by the end of *A Lesson Before Dying*. The tears Grant sheds in front of his students in the novel's final lines not only register his sorrow over Jefferson's untimely death but also signal his promise as an instructor (Gaines, *Lesson* 256). With his memories of Mr. Anderson's empowering pedagogy as well as his recollections of Jefferson's transformation, Grant, we can infer, can continue as an educator duly armed with a keen understanding of the transforming potential of education. In coming to fuller knowledge of both men and their impact on his life, Grant learns that teaching and learning are exchanges—ones that require humility and courage from all. Crying initiates Grant on a path toward fully realizing this idea. His students, I submit, will lead the way.

In describing his initial frustrations in having been asked to "teach" Jefferson what it means to be a "man" and how to die with dignity, Grant Wiggins vents to his girlfriend, Vivian Baptiste, "'Do I know what a man is? Do I know how a man is supposed to die? I'm still trying to find out how a man should live'" (Gaines, *Lesson* 31). As Gaines presents in *A Lesson Before Dying*, the knowledge of which Grant seeks can be found through an examination of black men's memories of lived and witnessed experiences in specific locations. The courthouse, the jail, the home, and the church—places situated *within* the place of the American South—operate as particularly important sites for evoking gendered racial memory, providing explicit instructions for behavior, and engendering myriad transformations in African American men and boys. The experiences of Grant Wiggins, Jefferson, and other black males within the courthouse, the jail, the home, and the church of Gaines's imagined South signal the great importance of critically engaging "place" as integral to black men's gendered racial subjectivities and consciousnesses. In short, these sites "teach" African American men and boys powerful lessons on "how a (black) man should live." Lessons taught and learned.

Foundational Moments:

Gendered Racial Memory in Black Men's Literature

I would like to conclude my discussion of Ernest J. Gaines's fiction and the conceptual tenets of *"Anchored in Time"* by revisiting insights offered by Judith Butler first cited in my Introduction. If, as Butler asserts, "[the] foundational moment in which the paternal law institutes the subject seems to function as a metahistory which we not only can but ought to tell" (91), then one can read African American men's literary production as a series of "tellings": repeated articulations of "foundational moments" throughout history that have called black men into a greater understanding of their status as men in the United States. These defining "moments" proliferate throughout Gaines's corpus. In the novels I specifically examine, such instances include: the disappearance of Robert Carmier and its effects on his son, Raoul, in *Catherine Carmier* (1964); the helplessness experienced by Robert X after the brutal rape of his sister, Justine, in *In My Father's House* (1978); the countless memories expressed by the seasoned soldiers of *A Gathering of Old Men* (1983); and the inevitable conviction and death sentence of Jefferson in *A Lesson Before Dying* (1993). Each of these key moments catalyzes profound responses not only in those directly involved but also in others who bear witness to their experiences.

Indeed, Gaines's fiction is part of a larger body of work and longer literary tradition of African American male writers who explore the meaning of "foundational moments" to black men's lives. Their "tellings" of black men's particular articulation of a gendered racial consciousness has created a prevailing trope with which they frequently engage. When this self- and communal awareness is coupled with southern regionality, the result is a poignant meditation on the implications of gender, race, place, and memory. I conceptualize black men’s specific consideration of these ideas as gendered racial memory.

Gendered racial memory rests on three primary tenets. First, as “multidimensional” subjects, African American men are at times privileged by gender but oppressed by gendered racism. Secondly, black men’s understanding of their gendered racial subjectivity is informed by African Americans’ communal experiences with discrimination. And lastly, certain “lieux de memoire” or “sites of memory,” and “places [of memory],” offer points of attachment for black men’s lived and witnessed experiences with injustice. It is precisely gendered racial memory that makes black men’s recollection of “foundational moments” especially powerful in shaping their identities as raced men. This idea is best evinced not only through an analysis of Gaines’s writing but also through an examination of works written by three important authors whose novels span the twentieth and twenty-first centuries: James Weldon Johnson, Ralph Ellison, and Daniel Black.

In *The Autobiography of an Ex-Colored Man* (1912), Johnson offers a fictive representation of the gendered experiences of a biracial male who, after having varied life experiences in the United States and abroad, makes the difficult choice to “pass” as white. Johnson’s famed protagonist details a narrative of biracial identity that crosses boundaries of race, region, and nation and that brings him to a greater understanding of his precarious position as a mixed-race male in America. Though his fair skin and suggestively European features shield him from the sting of virulent white racism, Johnson’s Ex-Colored Man is forced to witness the brutality endured by African

Americans, especially black men, who are not afforded options bequeathed to him by birth. In fact, it is not until the protagonist is identified as “colored” in his youth that he begins to contemplate the pervasiveness of race in constructing one’s worldview; at a young age, he is unable to fully understand its implications (Johnson in Byrd 37).

Witnessing a lynching in adulthood, however, not only makes clear these consequences but also dispels the protagonist’s romanticized notions about the South and about southern blacks’ presumed naiveté: thoughts with which he grapples throughout the novel (Johnson in Byrd 127-128). This brutal scene—arguably the climax of Johnson’s *Autobiography*—compels the narrator to realize that the maintenance of one’s humanity and mere survival is a negotiation faced by African Americans, especially black men, daily. The blatant disregard for humanity, exemplified by the lynching, calls Johnson’s narrator into a greater understanding of the daily perils of race and place experienced by black males including his childhood classmate, Shiny (whose intelligence is disregarded on account of his dark skin), and other African American men and boys (35). This moment of consciousness—of realizing one’s gendered racial subjectivity—is narrated further in Ralph Ellison’s magnum opus, *Invisible Man* (1952).

A complex meditation on one’s recognition of his gendered racial identity, *Invisible Man* narrates one nameless black man’s troubled journey toward embracing what he asserts is his invisibility. He reaches this conclusion by recalling a series of experiences—spanning twenty years—that affirm his “indefinite status”: a psychological excursion first ignited by his memory of participating in a degrading battle royal in the novel’s opening chapter (Ellison ix). Invited to recite his valedictory oration before an audience of his hometown’s leading white men, the narrator finds himself forced to spar with other young black males in a boxing ring for the white elites' entertainment. Blindfolded, confused, and violently exploited, Ellison's protagonist struggles to maintain consciousness, despite humiliation, in hopes of delivering his address (25).

The narrator's decision to mark this traumatic experience as the foundational moment of realizing his invisibility is key. He candidly narrates not only the motivations behind his youthful desire to impress the town's white leaders but also the introspection and understanding that has resulted from reflecting on the experience. The latter observation is best evinced through the narrator's use of his grandfather's words as framing his recollection of the battle. The grandfather's dying wish for generations to "overcome," "undermine," and "agree" with whites as subversive strategies for personal and communal survival—tactics shaped by the elder's life in the U.S. South—is a lesson Ellison's protagonist only is able to fully understand through the act of memory (Ellison 16). Similarly, the grandfather's appearance and ominous message in the narrator's dream at the chapter's end leaves a lasting impression on the central character: "'Keep This Nigger-Boy Running'" (33). "It was a dream I was to remember and dream again for many years after," he admits. "But at that time I had no insight into its meaning" (33). The novel serves as the narrator's record of moments that help him grasp the meaning of the dream. Each experience grants him greater insight, which ultimately fuels his conclusion that invisibility is his only viable life option as a black male in America.

Claiming invisibility is certainly not a choice afforded to the African American men and boys of Daniel Black's novel, *The Sacred Place* (2006). Black re-imagines the unforgettable murder of Emmett Till through his character, Clement Thompson. Like Till, 14-year-old, Chicago-born Clement is brutally murdered after he is accused of disrespecting a white woman at a general store while visiting relatives in rural Mississippi. Despite the fear that initially grips his family and the larger African American community once informed of the young man's actions, Clement's murder and the threat of white racist terror inspire many blacks to bear arms in defense of themselves. Led by his grandfather, Jeremiah Johnson, Clement's family and local black men, women, and children unite and successfully avenge his death.

For Jeremiah Johnson, Clement's murder serves as a painful reminder of the death of his namesake, Jeremiah, Jr., a few years prior. We learn that the younger Jeremiah (affectionately known as Jerry) had killed two white men who had raped his wife Billie Faye, and, as a result, Jerry hanged himself as means of subverting any retaliation by the offenders' comrades (Black 20). Grief-stricken yet proud of Jerry's resolve, Jeremiah continued to honor his son's rebellious action by burning Jerry's body on an altar at the location of his suicide—the Sacred Place. Memories of his son's untimely demise and his daughter-in-law's attack, we learn, are embedded in Jeremiah's consciousness. He long questioned not only local whites' blatant disregard for blacks' lives but also African Americans' implicit acceptance of discrimination. Jerry's decision to enact justice against Billie Faye's attackers, ultimately, incited a yearning in the elder Johnson to contest the treatment blacks in his community long had endured; the murder of his grandson, Clement, afforded Jeremiah the opportunity to realize his desire.

Jerry's suicide and the motivations behind his demise, then, served as a foundational moment in the life of Jeremiah Johnson: a definitive experience which helped to guide his relentless quest to kill Clement's attackers. As it was with Jerry's death, Jeremiah's boldness creates a foundational moment and has lasting implications not only for his remaining son, Enoch, but also for his other grandsons, Ray Ray and Chop, as well as his granddaughter, Sarah Jane. By leading the entire community in avenging Clement’s murder, Jeremiah reestablishes a legacy of courage and undaunted determination that his descendants can emulate and pass on for generations to come.

African American men’s communication of a gendered, racial, and southern regional consciousness offers exciting possibilities for studying the ways in which African Americans and other communities of color use memory as a means of interpreting the past, understanding the present, and making projections about the future. As captured in the writing of Gaines, Johnson, Ellison, Black and other African American male writers, gendered racial memory is often a salient feature in articulations of one’s life experiences. For members of marginalized populations, especially, reflections on their experiences in the United States frequently show conscious and unconscious investments in identities beyond the critical categories of gender, class, and sexuality. As their writings reflect, African American men’s lived, witnessed, and remembered experiences in and of the American South demonstrate a distinct awareness of the region’s dual reputation as a place to call “home” and as a symbol of America’s sordid racial past. Their negotiation of these “twinned” concepts is often a hallmark of their discussions of the region and what they see as its enduring legacy in American history. Black men’s gendered, racial responses to and recollections of critical moments and places in American history broaden our understanding of the intricacies of human existence. Their experiences, I believe, are certainly ones they can and ought to tell.

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Notes

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[1] Valerie Melissa Babb, *Ernest Gaines* (Boston: Twayne Publishers, 1991), x; Ed. David C. Estes, *Critical Reflections on the Fiction of Ernest J. Gaines* (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 1994): 9

[2] As part of the project's limitations, I do not focus on *The Autobiography of Miss Jane Pittman* (1971), *Of Love and Dust* (1967), and *Bloodline* (1964). The omission of *Autobiography* is not to dismiss the significant meditation on black masculinity forwarded in the novel. Rather, I seek to offer an analysis not mediated by a female protagonist. The absence of *Of Love and Dust* from this inquiry is due to the existence of previous scholarship that interrogates the central male protagonist, Marcus Payne, as a "badman" and as a continuation of the protest figure made famous by Richard Wright. While these kinds of investigations are useful to an understanding of African American men's gendered racial memory of the U.S. South, an analysis of *Of Love and Dust,* exclusively, will not be offered here. References to thematic concerns addressed in omitted works are made in the chapters of this study.

[3] According to Thadious Davis, "the regionality of the black self" is a concept drawn from what she observes as a proliferation of post-Civil Rights black-authored fiction set in southern contexts as well as the return migration of African Americans to southern states (7). Davis contends that the claiming of Southern identity and the complexity of black experiences in the South are significant not only to black creative expression but also to the broad history of African Americans in the United States. "Laying claim to a culture and to a region," she insists, "though fraught with pain and difficulty, provides a major grounding for identity. [This] return to the South is a [new] form of subversion—a preconscious political activity or a subconscious counteraction to the racially and culturally homogenous 'Sunbelt'" (6). See Thadious Davis, "Expanding the Limits: The Intersection of Race and Region," *Southern Literary Journal.* 20 (Spring 1988): 3-11. Other recent studies on race, gender, and regionality include: Trent Watts, ed. *White Masculinity in the Recent South* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 2008); Lydia Plath and Sergio Lussana, eds. *Black and White Masculinity in the American South* (Newcastle, UK: Cambridge Scholars, 2009); and Craig T. Friend, ed. *Southern Masculinity: Perspectives on Manhood in the South Since Reconstruction* (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 2009).

[4] Theorists also under consideration include: Pierre Nora, Edward Casey, Maurice Halbwachs, John Gillis, and selections from St. Augustine.

[5] Nora asserts, "Memory…remains in permanent evolution, open to the dialectic of remembering and forgetting, unconscious of its successive deformations, vulnerable to manipulation and appropriation, susceptible to being long dormant and periodically revived. History, on the other hand, is the reconstruction, always problematic and incomplete, of what it is no longer. Memory is a perpetually actual phenomenon, a bond tying us to the eternal present; history is a representation of the past. Memory…only accommodates those facts that suit it […]. Memory…is blind to all but to the group it

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binds…it is by nature multiple, and yet specific; collective, plural, and yet individual; memory takes root in the concrete, in spaces, gestures, images and objects. […]. Memory is absolute, while history can only conceive the relative." See Pierre Nora, "Between Memory and History*:* Les Lieux de Memoire," *Representations* 26 (Spring 1989): 8-9.

[6] O'Meally and Fabre contend, "Identity and Memory depend on each other; the core meaning of any individual or group is sustained in large part by remembering a particular past, which helps us both locate ourselves and make sense of the world in which we live" (xix). Their essay collection, *History and Memory in African American Culture* (1994), contains selections that examine how African American writers and cultural critics interpret the uses of memory and history in black arts and letters. As a population of people "born knowing," the editors insist that African Americans possess a "tragic consciousness" that is manifested in the creative expression (3). Much of this consciousness is a direct response to their historical memory of the Middle Passage and their experiences in the U.S. South. See Genevieve Fabre and Robert O'Meally, eds. *History and Memory in African American Culture* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1994).

[7] Halbwachs asserts, "[Individual] memory is nevertheless a part of any aspect of group memory, since each impression and each fact…leaves a lasting memory only to the extent that one has thought it over—to the extent that it is connected with the thoughts that come to us from the social milieu. One cannot in fact think about the events of one's past without discoursing upon them. But to discourse upon something means to connect within a single system of ideas our opinions as well as those of our circle" (53). See Maurice Halbwachs, "The Localization of Memories," in *On Collective Memory*. Ed. and trans. Lewis A. Coser (Chicago and London: The University of Chicago Press) 52-53. Similarly, Eudora Welty's assessment of place is useful to our understanding of the ways in which African American writers engage the U.S. South in their fiction. She writes, "[Place] is where [the writer] has his roots, place is where he stands; in his experience out of which he writes, it provides the base of reference; in his work, the point view" (781). Welty's famous essay argues that place is a powerful grounding for one's identity: "[Place] has a more lasting identity than we have and we unswervingly tend to attach ourselves to identity" (783). See Eudora Welty, "Place in Fiction," in *Eudora Welty: Stories, Essays, and Memoir.* (New York: Penguin, 1998) 781-797.

[8] As a point of clarification, "Civil Rights" denotes a demand for equality in American institutions and the realization of one's rights and privileges as citizens. "Black Power" suggests a demand for civil rights while "advocating racial autonomy and self-determination." See Jeffery O.G. Ogbar, Black *Power: Radical Politics and African-American Identity* (Baltimore and London: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 2004) 2.

[9] In "African American Women's History and the Metalanguage of Race" (1992), Evelyn Brooks Higginbotham views race as a "global sign," as what she calls a Bakhtinian metalanguage (255). Citing Henry Louis Gates's formulation that race functions as the "'ultimate trope of difference,'" Higginbotham offers useful strategies for exploring the "myriad aspects of life" blacks' racial identity obscures, including gender, class, and

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sexuality (255, 253). She rightly contends that race is a "double voiced discourse" through which African American scholars and activists have boasted the necessity of black America to unite and uplift itself; however, even this call to action, necessitates African Americans' willed forgetfulness of other intraracial categories that would "otherwise fall outside [its] referential domain" (270, 255). See Evelyn Brooks Higginbotham, "African American Women's History and the Metalanguage of Race," *Signs: Journal of Women in Culture and Society.* 17.2 (1992): 251-274.

[10] An example of this idea is exemplified in Richard Yarborough's essay on Frederick Douglass included in *Haunted Bodies: Gender and Southern Texts.* Yarborough places Douglass's *Narrative* within the context of what he calls an "obsession with manhood" manifested in early African American fiction, especially in its narrativization of the slave protagonists' resistance to slavery. An examination of the significance of the South to Douglass's gendered racial memory in the re-presentation of the male slave's struggle is implied, but not explicitly stated. See Richard Yarborough, "Race, Violence, and Manhood: The Masculine Ideal in Frederick Douglass's 'The Heroic Slave'" in *Haunted Bodies: Gender and Southern Texts* (Charlottesville: University of Virginia Press, 1997) 161. Similarly, Charles Davis writes of the ways in which Jean Toomer illustrated a clear identity with the South as "home" as well as an allegiance to his black identity. Davis says Toomer credits "integrity" and "the spirit of the truly strong" as the keys to the survival of black manhood in the South (242). See Charles Davis, "Jean Toomer and the South: Region and Race as Elements within a Literary Imagination," in *Black is the Color of the Cosmos: Essays on Afro-American Literature and Culture, 1942-1981* (New York: Garland Publishing, 1982) 235-251.

[11] In her discussion of southern modernist writers (including Zora Neale Hurston, William Faulkner, and Ralph Ellison) and their narrative engagements with a "shifting U.S. nationalism" resulting from the Great Depression and extending into the early Civil Rights era, Leigh Anne Duck argues that the novelists were forced to contend with the South as "the nation's region": a site that "facilitated both the nation-state's liberal triumphalism and its racism" (10). Situating the region as the figurative battleground for these competing ideals is a position frequently undertaken throughout the African American literary tradition, especially by post-Civil Rights novelists like Ernest Gaines. See Leigh Anne Duck, *The Nation's Region: Southern Modernism, Segregation, and U.S. Nationalism* (Athens and London: University of Georgia Press, 2007).

[12] The "paternal law" to which Butler refers suggests proscriptions for masculine and feminine identity.

[13] As more explicitly defined in the Introduction, I conceptualize gendered racial memory as African American men's specific memories of their experiences as black and male subjects in the United States. Ernest J. Gaines imagines black men's "multidimensional" experiences in the U.S. South in general, and rural Louisiana more specifically as important to their formation of a gendered racial consciousness. Multidimensionality "suggests that given the interconnectedness of patriarchy/sexism and racism, among other oppressive systems, black men, as a single multidimensional positionality, are in some

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contexts privileged by gender and sometimes oppressed by gendered racism." See Ed. Athena Mutua, *Progressive Black Masculinities,* (New York: Routlege, 2006): 6.

[14] Green and Abney contend, "As a part of the deep South [consisting also of South Carolina, Alabama, Georgia, Mississippi], and an area that is romanticized because of its plantation homes, lush green landscapes and generous hospitality, Louisiana has developed a 'peculiar brand of southernness' that is 'singularly romantic even among southern states'" due to its unique French and Spanish heritage, elaborate festivals, "'devotion to the culinary arts, and its general tolerance of liquor, langor, and lewdness—within limits'" (xviii). See Eds. Suzanne Disheroon Green and Lisa Abney, "Introduction: A New Generation of Louisiana Writers," *Songs of the New South: Writing Contemporary Louisiana,* (Westport, CT: Greenwood Press, 2001): xvii-xxviii.

[15] Homer Plessy was a member of the Comité des Citoyens (Citizen's Committee), an organization of black Creole "radicals" who sought to challenge Louisiana's segregation laws. Plessy (with the support of his fellow radicals) attempted to challenge Louisiana's 1890 law requiring segregated streetcars. His attorney, Albion Tourgee, "argued the case on the grounds that the government did not have the right to determine the racial identities of its citizens" in Louisiana courts (23). When the case was argued before the U.S. Supreme Court in 1896, the Court upheld the original ruling, and found the use of "separate but equal" facilities as a permissible action under the Constitution. This landmark decision further institutionalized racism in the United States and made segregation on the basis of race an acceptable practice throughout the entire country. Hale writes, "The law, the Court decided, could only reflect the sense of racial difference that was a part of human nature itself. Plessy could not be both black and white. He could follow law and custom, the 'one drop rule,' and despite his predominantly white ancestry choose 'For Colored.' Or, in an option the Court in no way promoted, he could deny his African American heritage and by 'passing' choose 'For White.' […]. The *Plessy* decision fully denied what the African American writer Albert Murray later called the 'incontestably mulatto' nature of American culture and set this lie at the very center of modern society" (23). See Grace Elizabeth Hale, "No Easy Place or Time: The Black Side of Segregation," *Making Whiteness: The Culture of Segregation in the South, 1890-1940,* (New York: Vintage Books, 1998): 13-41. On *Plessy v. Ferguson* (1896), see Joseph Logsdon and Caryn Cossé Bell, "The Americanization of Black New Orleans, 1850-1900"; Harvey Fireside, *Separate and Unequal: Homer Plessy and the Supreme Court Decision that Legalized Racism,* (New York: Carroll and Graf, 2004); David W. Bishop, "Plessy v. Ferguson: A Reinterpretation," *The Journal of Negro History* 62.2 (April 1977): 125-133.

[16] Gaines initially refers to "the house that slavery built" in his 1967 novel, *Of Love and Dust*. Marcus Payne, the novel's "badman" protagonist, is observed pushing his foot through the door of Marshall Hebert's house. Hebert is a white plantation owner who bonds Marcus out of jail where he had been awaiting trial for killing another black man in a roadhouse fight. Though much of the conflict Marcus encounters with whites on Hebert's plantation is primarily between him and Sidney Bonbon, the plantation's Cajun

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overseer, Hebert remains the mastermind not only behind Marcus's demise but also behind Bonbon's decline. Bishop, the black man who observes Marcus's daring act, is particularly disturbed by his action because Bishop believes, "any black person who would stick his foot in a door [to the house] that slavery built would do almost anything," including, as Marcus does, pursuing Bonbon's wife, Louise, and accepting Hebert's proposition to help destroy the Cajun overseer (216). Marcus's boldness eventually leads him to a violent, inevitable death. See Ernest J. Gaines, *Of Love and Dust*, (New York and London: W.W. Norton and Company, 1979): 215-216.

[17] Hale argues that Faulkner and his work seem to suggest that, "the best way to rebel against the South [and to both external and internal imperatives for change] was to refuse to ignore its segregated culture" (161). See Grace Elizabeth Hale, "Invisible Men: William Faulkner, His Contemporaries, and the Politics of Loving and Hating the South in the Civil Rights Era; or, How Does a Rebel Rebel?," in *Faulkner and His Contemporaries: Faulkner and Yoknapatawpha, 2002*, Eds. Joseph R. Urgo and Ann J. Abadie (Jackson: University of Mississippi Press, 2004): 155-172.

[18] Critics including Erskine Peters, Eric Sundquist, Judith Berzon, and Thadious Davis have recognized Faulkner's use of mixed raced figures, especially Joe Christmas. Peters insists, "In the Yoknapatawpha word, the mulatto symbolizes the fear of black being touching white being, that is, a fear of defilement of a presumed European of white purity" (113). Joe Christmas, particularly, "is an example of how human beings can become pathetically attached to memories of the past. Even when memories become destructive, humans are often reluctant to relinquish them owing to the tragic human dilemma that identity is bound up with memories: to relinquish memories is to relinquish identity, to relinquish identity is to plunge into a void" (126). Sundquist argues that the assumed blackness in Joe functions as "blood, as enslaving memory, as the simultaneously feared and needed other," and he finds the character "as the formal and psychological embodiment of a crisis that became even more acute in the life of Jim Crow than it had been in the second generation of slaves and master" (79). Berzon describes Joe's "deep psychological pain" as directly linked to his "warring bloods" (82). Thadious Davis says African American figures in Faulkner's work, in general, function as both concepts and characters, in what she contends is his use of "Negro" as symbol (4). Joe Christmas, she asserts, is Faulkner's manner of presenting the Negro as "a behavioral pattern," "a social construct," and a "subjective projection"; the character, in many ways, becomes an allegory for the South in black and white (Davis 130, 135). Davis also points out that in its original manuscript form, *Light in August* was entitled "Dark House" (128). See Erskine Peters, "Minds in Collusion: Miscegenation and Mulatto Crises," *William Faulkner: The Yoknapatawpha World and Black Being* (Darby, PA: Norwood Editions, 1983): 111-134; Eric Sundquist, "The Strange Career of Joe Christmas," *Faulkner: The House Divided* (Baltimore and London: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1983): 63-95; Judith Berzon, *Neither White nor Black*; Thadious M. Davis, *Faulkner's "Negro": Art and the Southern Context* (Baton Rouge and London: Louisiana State University Press, 1983)

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[19] To these ends, Leigh Anne Duck says, "[Faulkner's work]…raises the possibilities that certain pasts can overwhelm individual subjects and that collectivities can become so invested in a given interpretation of historic events that they provide little opportunity or support for persons who need to work through their traumatic relationships to these events" (98). See Leigh Anne Duck, "Haunting Yoknapatawpha: Faulkner and Traumatic Memory," in *Faulkner in the Twenty-First Century: Faulkner and Yoknapatawpha, 2000,* Eds. Robert W. Hamblin and Ann J. Abadie (Jackson: University of Mississippi Press, 2003): 89-106. In an 1959 interview, Faulkner even contends, "[Joe Christmas] didn't know what he was…which to me is the most tragic condition a man could find himself in—not to know what he is and to know that he will never know. [Joe] deliberately evicted himself from the human race because he didn't know which he was." See Fredrick L. Gwynn and Joseph L. Blotner, eds., *Faulkner and the University: Class Conferences at the University of Virginia, 1957-1958* (1959; reprinted ed., New York: Vintage-Random, 1965): 72.

[20] Gaines's recognition of black intra-racial distinctions, his narrative engagement with the internal conflicts that can arise from such, and his commitment to dispelling certain myths about the history and nature of racial cohesion places his work in contrast to that of the southern literary giant: a creative position akin to other African American writers. "[For] Gaines, the past not only is not past, it is not even merely present. It takes its meaning from the future. […]. This difference in temporal movement…reflects a deep difference of sensibility, involving perception of the past, between Faulkner and Afro-American writers." See Craig Werner, *Playing the Changes*, 40-41.

[21] According to St. Augustine, there are three features to the private character of memory: 1) "Memory is radically singular: My memories are not yours"; 2) "It is in memory that the original tie of consciousness to the past apparently resides"; and 3) "It is to memory that the sense of orientation in the passage of time is linked (from past to future and future to past)." Halbwachs notes how these features inform the "tradition of inwardness" in personal and collective memory. See Maurice Halbwachs, *On Collective Memory*. Ed. and trans. Lewis A. Coser (Chicago and London: The University of Chicago Press) 96.

[22] Cable first published *The Grandissimes: A Story of Creole Life* in 1880, and produced *The Creoles of Louisiana*, a narrative study of the group in 1910. Literary critic Gavin Jones is an example of one scholar who has critically engaged Cable's work, specifically "the linguistic, aesthetic, and political aspects of the interactions of African American and French-Creole culture" in his writings (244). According to Jones, Cable's decision to overtly comment on much of the racial and socioeconomic issues of his time and his allusions to cultural hybridity among African Americans and French Creoles afforded Cable the controversial label of being a "'miscegenationist'" (260). Yet, as Jones cogently notes, Cable's technique of exposing class, color, and racial dynamics in his Louisiana sets Cable apart from other writers whose works did not investigate such social tensions. See George Washington Cable, *The Grandissimes: A Story of Creole Life* (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1880); Cable, *The Creoles of Louisiana* (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1910); Gavin Jones, "'Signifying Songs': The Double Meaning

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of Black Dialect in the Work of George Washington Cable," *American Literary History* 9.2 (1997): 244-267.

[23] "[Race-ness]," Kenneth Mostern asserts, "has remained an ever-present lens by which the world is viewed and has continued to be a primary force in social struggle. That something as biologically insignificant as skin-color has, in becoming raced, maintained such a role is precisely what should provide the impetus for an inquiry into the historical interrelations between the socioeconomic and psychological meanings of identity as it structures and determines politics" (6). See Kenneth Mostern, "What is Identity Politics?: Race and the Autobiographical," *Autobiography and Black Identity Politics: Racialization in Twentieth-Century America*, (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 1999): 3-27.

[24] Riggs calls for the importance of interrogating and celebrating intraracial distinctions (including culture) in his compelling documentary, *Black Is, Black Ain't* (1995). See Marlon Riggs, dir. *Black Is, Black Ain't: A Personal Journey Through Black Identity*. California Newsreel, 1995.

[25] Reference interpretive readings of *Catherine Carmier* by Alvin Aubert, Michel Fabre, Thadious Davis, Joseph Griffin, Keith Byerman, and Mary Ellen Doyle found in the bibliography of this chapter. In addition to the works cited by Aubert, Fabre, Davis, and Byerman, see Joseph Griffin, "Creole and Singaleese: Disruptive Caste in *Catherine Carmier* and *A Gathering of Old Men*," in *Critical Reflections on the Fiction of Ernest J. Gaines*, Ed. David C. Estes (Athens, GA: University of Georgia Press, 1994): 30-45; Mary Ellen Doyle, "The Trauma of Choice: *Catherine Carmier*," *Voices from the Quarters: The Fiction of Ernest J. Gaines* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 2002): 78-106.

[26] In 1729, members of the Natchez nation rebelled and massacred 237 French soldiers and settlers after their lands were unfairly confiscated. "Panicked and angered, the French launched a series of bloody massacres that within three years had annihilated the entire Natchez Nation" (Johnson 37). Those African slaves who had fought alongside the French in this endeavor were rewarded with their freedom (Brasseaux 105). See Jerah Johnson "Colonial New Orleans: A Fragment of the Eighteenth-Century French Ethos," in *Creole New Orleans: Race and Americanization*, Eds. Arnold R. Hirsh and Joseph Logsdon (Baton Rouge and London: Louisiana State University Press, 1992): 12-57; Carl A. Brasseaux, "Creoles: A Family Portrait in Black and White," *French, Cajun, Creole, Houma: A Primer on Francophone Louisiana* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 2005): 85-115.

[27] Creoles of Color often self-referred as "colored," which complicates modern conceptions of the term's previous usage as implying all African Americans. For a discussion of the evolution of African Americans' self-naming, see Philip Brian Harper, "What's My Name??: Designation, Identification, and Cultural 'Authenticity,'" *Are We*

Not Men?: Masculine Anxiety and the Problem of African American Identity (New York: Oxford University Press, 1996): 54-56

[28] E. Francis White defines the "politics of respectability" as the strategic use of bourgeois customs and ideas in African American women's church and club movements to promote racial uplift and to counter racist stereotypes unique to black women. See E. Frances White, *Dark Continent of Our Bodies: Black Feminism and the Politics of Respectability* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 2001): 35-36.

[29] For specific examples of African American men's gendered racial experiences during the Jim Crow era, see Leon F. Litwack, *Trouble in Mind: Black Southerners in the Age of Jim Crow* (New York: Knopf, 1998)

[30] In an endnote to his essay on Creole identity in *Catherine Carmier*, Alvin Aubert perceives Raoul's inheritance of the house "as a 'house' in the classical Greek sense." He says the circumstances surround the dwelling's original acquisition by Robert "indicates the extent of Raoul's inheritance of traits of character from his father" and contends that "the house's acquisition…says a great deal about the complexity of the human relationships in Gaines's milieu" (74). Despite these cogent observations, Aubert does not elaborate upon his ideas. See Aubert, "Truly Tragic Mulatto," 74.

[31] In her interpretation of Freud's conception of melancholia, Judith Butler contends that when an individual experiences the loss of a loved one, "the ego is said to incorporate that other into the very structure of the ego, taking on attributes of the other and 'sustaining' the other through magical acts of imitation." Identification with the other "becomes a new structure of identity" (78). See Judith Butler, "Prohibition, Psychoanalysis, and the Production of the Heterosexual Matrix," in *Gender Trouble* (New York: Routledge, 1990): 47-106.

[32] Bertram Wyatt-Brown offers three primary characteristics of "honor" prevalent in Old South culture: "the inner conviction of self-worth," the "claim of that self-assessment before the public," and lastly, the "self-regarding" nature of a man's reputation (14). For white southern men, especially, "the determination of men to have power, prestige, and self-esteem and to immortalize these acquisitions through their progeny" was emblematic of one's demonstration of "honor" (16). Though Raoul Carmier is a black Creole man, we may assume that the emphasis on landownership and the great importance of progeny passed throughout his patriarchal line is in many ways informed by his ancestors' manner of emulating the behaviors and values of their white counterparts. See Bertram Wyatt-Brown, *Southern Honor: Ethics and Behaviors in the Old South* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1982)

[33] In 1982, Susie Guillory Phipps "sued the state of Louisiana to have the racial classification on her birth certificate changed from 'colored' to 'white.'" Phipps's desire to be "certified white"—to have the state legally recognize her whiteness—is a sensational example of the lengths some Creoles would undertake in order to dissociate

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from blackness. Unfortunately, she was denied this privilege due to the fact that one of her maternal ancestors was black. "The case of Susie Guillory [Phipps]," Barthelemy insists, "represents the ultimate paradox of American racist culture, a recognition by African Americans of the subtext of all racial classification laws and a disdain by African Americans of those who seek to avoid the circumscription of hope and opportunity that results from being black in a racist society." See Barthlemy, "Light, Bright, and Damn *Near* White," 253, 258.

[34] My historicizing of the Civil Rights and Black Power eras of the Black Freedom Struggle will appear with more elaboration in subsequent chapters.

[35] Core assumptions associated with "the new blackness" or "black consciousness" include: consciousness of one's blackness was "a healthy psychosocial" element of realizing one's worth as a person; Black self-actualization "was accompanied by a corresponding questioning and rejection of man normative values forwarded by the majoritarian society"; once at ease about critiquing white values, an individual who embraces his/her racial consciousness must "work toward a reorientation of black life"; and the development of racial conscious was deemed "an essential element of Black Power" (51-52). See Van de Burg, "Precursors and Preconditions: Why Was There a Black Power Movement," *New Day in Babylon: The Black Power Movement in American Culture, 1965-1975* (Chicago and London: University of Chicago Press, 1992): 29-62.

[36] Recent trends in the historiography of the period not only identify "Civil Rights" and "Black Power" as interconnected sociopolitical movements in American history (with interregional origins and activities) but also contest the fixedness of dates distinguishing the era. Adam Fairclough, Martha Biondi, Timothy Tyson, and Jacqueline Dowd Hall are among the historians who call for challenging dominant narratives that seek to capture the period in specified places and times. See Adam Fairclough, *Race and Democracy: The Civil Rights Struggle in Louisiana, 1915-1972* (Athens, GA and London: University of Georgia Press, 1995), Martha Biondi, *To Stand and Fight: The Struggle for Civil Rights in Postwar New York City* (Cambridge, MA and London: Harvard University Press, 2003), Timothy Tyson, *Radio Free Dixie: Robert F. Williams and the Roots of Black Power* (Chapel Hill and London: The University of North Carolina Press, 1999), Jacqueline Dowd Hall, "The Long Civil Rights Movement and the Political Uses of the Past," *The Journal of American History* 91 (March 2005): 1233-1263.

[37] Strong argues, "The difficulty of Hemingway's male characters, once they have learned the performative qualities of masculine and racial identity, is that they are immediately vulnerable to external challenges; if identity is constructed on acts rather than inherent physical traits, a man can never rest in his self-assertion" (46). It is during a moment of truth that a man's demonstration of what Hemingway has conceptualized as "grace under pressure" is undermined by the demand for action or heroism. As does literary critic Thomas Strychacz, Ernest Gaines interprets Hemingway's brand of "heroism" as "manhood," but Gaines redefines Hemingway's concept on his own terms. Gaines defines manhood as "that moment in life when [you] stand," it is the moment

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when “dignity demands that you act” (Saeta and Skinner in Lowe 242). In this scene, Raoul’s attempt to protect his dignity and that of his family prompts him to action. See Amy L. Strong, *Race and Identity in Hemingway’s Fiction* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2008); Thomas Strychacz, *Hemingway’s Theaters of Masculinity* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 2003); Elsa Saeta and Izora Skinner, “Interview with Ernest Gaines,” in *Conversations with Ernest Gaines* Ed. John Lowe (Jackson: University of Mississippi Press, 1995): 241-252.

[38] Ogbar defines black power as combining the advocacy of civil rights while insisting upon “racial autonomy and self-determination.” See Jeffery O. G. Ogbar, *Black Power: Radical Politics and African-American Identity* (Baltimore and London: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 2004): 2. Furthermore, Recent trends in the historiography of the period not only identify “Civil Rights” and “Black Power” as interconnected sociopolitical movements in American history (with interregional origins and activities) but also contest the fixedness of dates distinguishing the era. Adam Fairclough, Martha Biondi, Timothy Tyson, and Jacqueline Dowd Hall are among the historians who call for challenging dominant narratives that seek to capture the period in specified places and times. See Adam Fairclough, *Race and Democracy: The Civil Rights Struggle in Louisiana, 1915-1972* (Athens, GA and London: University of Georgia Press, 1995), Martha Biondi, *To Stand and Fight: The Struggle for Civil Rights in Postwar New York City* (Cambridge, MA and London: Harvard University Press, 2003), Timothy Tyson, *Radio Free Dixie: Robert F. Williams and the Roots of Black Power* (Chapel Hill and London: The University of North Carolina Press, 1999), Jacqueline Dowd Hall, “The Long Civil Rights Movement and the Political Uses of the Past,” *The Journal of American History* 91 (March 2005): 1233-1263.

[39] Upon completing the Muslim pilgrimage to Mecca in April 1964, Malcolm X changed his name to El-Hajj Malik El-Shabazz in order to reflect this journey. In this chapter, I will refer to him as Malcolm X in order to remain consistent with contemporary studies on his life as well as those of the burgeoning field of Black Power Studies, in which his legacy and influence remains prominent.

[40] In his comparative study of Martin Luther King, Jr. and Malcolm X, James H. Cone explains the context of the leaders’ encounter. The famed photograph was taken March 26, 1964 while the men attended the U.S. Senate’s debate of the Civil Rights Bill. Cone writes, “Although the media portrayed them as adversaries, Martin and Malcolm were actually fond of each other. There was no animosity between them. They saw each other as a fellow justice fighter, struggling against the same evil—racism—and for the same goal—freedom for African Americans” (2). Cone argues that their meeting represented the coming together of integrationism and nationalism: two “different but interdependent streams of black thought” and resistance traditions (3). “Together,” he writes, “Martin, a Christian integrationist, and Malcolm, a Muslim nationalist, would have been a powerful force against racial injustice. When they were separated, their enemies were successful in pitting them against each other and thereby diluting the effectiveness of the black freedom movement. Both Martin and Malcolm were acutely aware of the dangers of

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disunity among African Americans. They frequently spoke out against it and urged African Americans to forget their differences and to write in a common struggle for justice and freedom" (3). See James H. Cone, *Martin and Malcolm and America: A Dream or a Nightmare* (New York: Orbis Books, 1993)

[41] Cone describes Martin Luther King, Jr. and Malcolm X as "complement[s]" and "correct[ions]" of one another; he says "each spoke a truth about America that cannot be fully comprehended without the insights of the other" (245). Similarly, Charles Payne and Fredrik Sunnemark cite the importance of acknowledging the evolving discourses of both leaders. In the latter stages of both of their lives, King and Malcolm X espoused rhetoric closely associated with ideologies seen as divergent from their primarily integrationist and black nationalist platforms. Building upon Charles Payne's insistence that the "memory of [Martin Luther King, Jr.] obscures the message of his life" (147), Sunnemark contends, "[The] King who speaks of racial pride was not just a new persona who has been created by the demands and accusations of the young radicals and nationalists. Throughout King's career…he stressed the uniqueness of black Americans in relation to other ethnic groups. Even if he closely related that uniqueness to the position of moral agency, he focused on what concrete existence as 'Negro' in American history and society means" (145). Though championed as the exemplar of a black nationalist rhetoric, Malcolm X personally noted the difficulty in having others acknowledge the complexity of his message in his *Autobiography*. He expressed concern in his inability to move past his "earlier public image" (associated with his affiliation with the Nation of Islam) and "turn a corner" to a more inclusive racial politics (Malcolm X 375). See Cone, *Martin and Malcolm and America*; Payne, "Debating the Civil Rights Movement: Voices from the Trenches"; Fredrik Sunnemark, *Ring Out Freedom! The Voice of Martin Luther King, Jr. and the Making of the Civil Rights Movement* (Bloomington and Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 2004); Malcolm X and Alex Haley, *The Autobiography of Malcolm X* (New York: Ballentine Books, 1964)

[42] Raiford and Romano define the "consensus memory" of the civil rights movement as "a dominant narrative of the movement's goals, practices, victories, and…its most lasting legacies" (xiv). Such memory "offers that *the* 'Civil Rights Movement' began in 1954 with the Supreme Court's *Brown v. Board of Education* decision to desegregate southern schools 'with all deliberate speed' and ended in 1968 with the death of Martin Luther King Jr. and the rise of Black Power in the country's northern and western cities" (xiv). See Leigh Raiford and Renee C. Romano, eds., "Introduction: The Struggle over Memory," *The Civil Rights Movement in American Memory* (Athens and London: University of Georgia Press, 2006): xi-xxiv.

[43] The collective concerns of this era centered on the following ideas: a push to place African Americans' experiences within a transnational black struggle and a continued interest in the wartime cries of "double victory" at home and abroad; a concerted effort to dispel the myths of the North as a land of promise where their qualms with racism could be voiced without threat of white backlash; a reliance on the Supreme Court in dismantling institutional discriminatory practices and blacks' continued interest in foreign affairs and public policy; the emergence of a community-organizing and

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community-mobilizing tradition built on the grassroots efforts of "ordinary folk," youth, and prominent race leaders; the use of non-violence as a defense strategy; a rise in activism that blended the non-violent tradition with a belief in the necessity of armed self-assertion, and an accompanying response in black arts and letters; and a continued tradition of women's involvement in realizing a free and just society for all blacks regardless of difference. For a thorough summary of the concerns of the period (1945-1980), see chapters 8, 9, and 10 of Robin D. G. Kelley and Earl Lewis, (eds.), *To Make Our World Anew: A History of African-Americans* (Oxford: Oxford UP, 2000) and Darlene Clark Hine, William C. Hine, and Stanley Harold, *The African-American Odyssey*, vol. 2, 3rd. ed. (Upper Saddle River, NJ: Prentice Hall, 2006). For further discussion of actions associated with "civil rights" and "black power," see Fairclough, *Race and Democracy*; Charles Payne, *I've Got the Light of Freedom: The Organizing Tradition and the Mississippi Freedom Struggle* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1995); David Garrow, *Bearing the Cross: Martin Luther King, Jr. and the Southern Christian Leadership Conference* (New York: William Morrow and Company, 1986); Tyson, *Radio Free Dixie*; Ed. Peniel Joseph, *The Black Power Movement: Rethinking the Civil Rights-Black Power Era* (New York: Routledge, 2006).

[44] Hayden White argues that historical narratives are, in fact, "verbal fictions," ones in which "the contents are as much *invented* as *found*," and he insists "the forms of which have more in common with their counterparts in literature" (82). White says both historians and fiction writers participate in acts of "emplotment" where the "details" of a given set of historical facts are narrativized through the prerogatives of the author. The license to use imagination (historical memory) afforded to novelists is assumed to be what separates fiction writers from their counterparts in history; White sees the theoretical lines between practitioners of both genres to be much more blurred. See Hayden White, "The Historical Text as Literary Artifact," in *Topics of Discourse: Essays in Cultural Criticism* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins Press, 1978): 81-100.

[45] See Valerie Melissa Babb, *Ernest Gaines* (Boston: Twayne Publishers, 1991), x; Ed. David C. Estes, *Critical Reflections on the Fiction of Ernest J. Gaines* (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 1994): 9. Though I do not discuss her criticism of the novel in my reading, Karla F. C. Holloway's essay on *In My Father's House* is another example of a contemporary analysis of Gaines's work. In her essay, Holloway identifies "symbolic parallels" between Kenyan writer Ngugi wa Thiong'o's decision to "abandon the language of colonialism and to write in his own language of Gikuyu" and the "thematic activity" of *In My Father's House* (180). See Karla F. C. Holloway, "Image, Act, and Identity in *In My Father's House*," in *Critical Reflections on the Fiction of Ernest J. Gaines*, Ed. David C. Estes (Athens and London: University of Georgia Press, 1994): 180-194.

[46] According to Nash, "Like another famous religious hypocrite in the African American tradition, Gabriel Grimes, of James Baldwin's *Go Tell It on the Mountain* [1952], Martin is apparently a pillar of the community but once was indolent, irreverent, and irresponsible, fathering children and leaving their mothers to pay the consequences." See

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William R. Nash, "'You Think a Man Can't Kneel and Stand'?: Ernest J. Gaines's Reassessment of Religion as Positive Communal Influence in *A Lesson Before Dying.*" *Callaloo* 24.1 (Winter 2001): 346-362.

[47] Echoing Gaines's critique of white liberal involvement in African American liberation efforts, David L. Chappell argues, "Liberals treated racism's occasional, and by all accounts decreasing, outbreaks of violence as crimes that could in principle be contained or treated while America went about its business of economic growth and cultural improvement. Liberals did not see these outbreaks […] as reminders of the brute force on which the southern racial system rested—a system in which terror was so ingrained that, once established, it required only occasional reminders. […]. [They] never put racism or civil rights at the center of their analysis of American society or their proposals for reform" (36-37). See David L. Chappell, *A Stone of Hope: Prophetic Religion and the Death of Jim Crow* (Chapel Hill and London: University of North Carolina Press, 2004).

[48] Scholars such as Bettye Collier-Thomas, V.P. Franklin, Vicki Crawford, Jacqueline Rouse, Barbara Woods, and Belinda Robnett have identified the importance of interrogating how the gendered experiences of African American women, in particular, impacted their participation in and responses to the broad concerns of the era. See Eds. Bettye Collier-Thomas and V.P. Franklin, *Sisters in the Struggle: African American Women in the Civil Rights-Black Power Movement* (New York: New York University Press, 2001); Eds. Vicki Crawford, Jacqueline Rouse, and Barbara Woods, *Women in the Civil Rights Movement: Trailblazers and Torchbearers* (Brooklyn: Carlson Publishing, 1990); Belinda Robnett, *How Long? How Long?: African American Women in the Struggle for Civil Rights* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1997). *Sisters in the Struggle* and *Women in the Civil Rights Movement* contain essays written by a number of scholars who have produced book-length manuscripts of individual women's participation in the Civil Rights-Black Power movement.

[49] According to Hugh Pearson, black militancy increased after 1964 in response to the "pronounced fragmentation of the civil rights movement" in that year (60). While the passing of the Civil Rights Act outlawed segregation in "public facilities," African Americans knew that "the sole remaining theater of war for the civil rights movement in the South was the effort to secure voting rights" (61). Pearson continues, "From that point on, former direct-action activists would divide into different philosophical camps […] while the voting rights activists would raise the ante of risk involved in methods for bringing down the final legal barrier to [African Americans] advancement" (61). These philosophical divisions and strategy changes were reflected in and exacerbated by: the treatment of the Mississippi Freedom Democratic Party at the 1964 Democratic National Convention, Mississippi Freedom Summer, a "need" expressed by young activists to separate from the example of Dr. King and the SCLC, and the outright injustice and senseless deaths of blacks in urban centers (65-67). Pearson cites the Black Panther Party, founded in 1966, as the first group to "organize" young black anger, "put it in uniform," and "give it a gun" (129). See Hugh Pearson, *The Shadow of the Panther: Huey Newton*

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and the Price of Black Power in America (Reading, MA: Addison-Wesley Publishing Company, 1994).

[50] James Cone insists that Martin Luther King's religious faith in his civil rights activities have been "overlooked" and "misunderstood." Similarly, David L. Lewis writes, "Martin's deep Christian concern with the brotherhood of man and his abiding faith (until late in his career at least) in the fundamental decency of his fellow man directed his philosophical speculations far more than cold realism could have." See Cone, *Martin and Malcolm and America*, 250; David L. Lewis, *King: A Critical Biography* (New York and Washington: Praeger Publishers, 1970): 86.

[51] Timothy Tyson argues that the idea of "armed self-reliance" advocated by Robert F. Williams draws upon the belief held by black southerners that defending themselves was necessary for individual survival and for collective race progress (153). As SNCC leader Bob Moses explained in 1964, "'Self-defense is so deeply engrained in rural Southern America that [we] as a group can't effect it. It's not contradictory for a farmer to say he's nonviolent and also pledge to shoot a marauder's head off'" (212). See Tyson, *Radio Free Dixie.* Simon Wendt makes similar arguments in *Spirit and the Shotgun*

[52] See Payne, "Debating the Civil Rights Movement: Voices from the Trenches," 150

[53] Timothy Tyson insists that "civil rights" and "black power" "grew out of the same [Southern] soil, confronted the same predicaments, and reflected the same quest for African-American freedom" despite narratives that set them as movements grounded in competing ideologies. See Tyson, *Radio Free Dixie,* 308.

[54] James Cone writes, "Like most men of their time, Martin and Malcolm were not only sexist but seemed unduly insensitive to an emerging feminist consciousness in society." "Martin and Malcolm," he continues, "shared the view that racism was the primary cause of black oppression and that black men should be the leaders of the movements working to eliminate it." See Cone, *Martin and Malcolm and America*, 276. Charles Payne further contends, "Late in his life, Malcolm claimed that he had learned from his travels to the Middle East and Africa that societies could not be liberated if women were not. Over the objections of some of his more traditional comrades, he insisted that women were going to hold positions of real power in his Organization of African American Unity. He told one colleague that one of the things he most regretted in his life was having taught the brothers to 'spit fire' at the sisters." See Payne, "Debating the Civil Rights Movement," 150.

[55] Drawing from Malcolm's speeches as well as arguments forwarded by noted black women cultural critics, Farah Jasmine Griffin contends that Malcolm's calls for protection necessitated possession of black women by black men: the strange "twinning" of these concepts prompted black women to praise the former while ignoring the latter (216). Ever mindful of the ways in which Malcolm's philosophies inspired black men to respect their "sistas" and revolutionized black women's self-confidence, Griffin offers a

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critique not only of Malcolm's words but also of black feminists whom she asserts have elevated the black nationalist icon beyond reproach. See Farah Jasmine Griffin, "'Ironies of the Saint': Malcolm X, Black Women, and the Price of Protection," *Sisters in the Struggle: African-American Women in the Civil Rights—Black Power Movement.* Eds. Bettye Collier-Thomas and V.P. Franklin (New York: New York University Press, 2001): 214-229

[56] Autobiographies and other narratives by men and women Black Panther Party members provide invaluable insights on these differing perspectives. See Elaine Brown, *A Taste of Power: A Black Woman's Story* (New York: Pantheon Books, 1992); David Hilliard, *The Side of Glory: The Autobiography of David Hilliard and the Story of the Black Panther Party* (Boston: Little, Brown, 1993); Assata Shakur, *Assata: An Autobiography* (Westport, CT: L. Hill, 1987); Huey P. Newton, *Revolutionary Suicide* (New York: Harcourt, Brace, Jovanovich, 1973); Eldridge Cleaver, *Soul on Ice* (New York: McGraw-Hill, 1967)

[57] Judith Newton offers an excellent comparative view of Eldridge Cleaver and Huey P. Newton's visions for the Black Panther Party, and how their contrasting opinions shaped their attitudes about black masculinity. Cleaver, she argues, was drawn to the organization's masculine performance of "courage, power, and implied virility"; the combination of these ideals represented a "recovery" from black men's prior "impotence" and "conquered manhood," and it consequently promoted women's appreciation and respect (62). Huey Newton, she contends, "found elements of this warrior masculinity harder to embrace" and rejected many of Cleaver's pronouncements about the Party, in general, and about him, in particular (63). As reflected in his collected essays, *To Die for the People* (1972) and in his autobiography, *Revolutionary Suicide*, published in the following year, Newton expressed a masculine ideal that was "deep invested in familial, brotherly, and communal ties" (63). See Newton, "Revolutionary Men" and David Hilliard, "Introduction," *The Huey P. Newton Reader*, Eds. David Hilliard and Donald Weise (New York: Seven Stories Press, 2002): 9-19.

[58] Ling argues that while Bevel, Walker, and Williams advocated nonviolent direct action, the leaders "competed for influence" in the SCLC. He says Wyatt Tee Walker "clashed" with his colleagues due to his "vain desire for a strict, authoritarian, hierarchical structure" and his "hyper-rationalism of military-style planning" of demonstrations (117). Bevel, Ling contends, championed his ability to recruit young activists (118). Bevel rejected Walker's strict military style, but was able to win the allegiance of young crowds with "his argument and his presence" (118). Bevel's advocacy of youth participation was not well received by his colleagues who expressed "misgivings about the practicality" of a children's march (119). Ling says Bevel and Williams's military experience united them in their staunch support of civil rights protest as well as the scrutiny they often faced from their constituents in the SCLC (118). While Williams's "aggressiveness" may have been preferred by Martin Luther King, his efforts were not well received by others, including Andrew Young. "For men like Williams," Ling writes, "movement activities provided excitement, fame and power" (120). Veteran activists such as Young viewed

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Williams's participation in the St. Augustine campaign, for example, as a disingenuous attempt to align his efforts with the established achievements of preexisting SCLC members (121). See Ling, "Gender and Generation"

[59] See Ling, "Gender and Generation," 108-110.

[60] The principle to "love thy neighbor as thyself" is considered the second "greatest commandment" in biblical teachings. It is first referenced in Leviticus 19:18. See Matthew 22: 36-40 (King James Version).

[61]David L. Chappell and Allison Calhoun Brown argue that black religious culture, in general, and in the South, more specifically, had an incredible influence on black civil rights protest. "[The] culture of the black church," Calhoun-Brown contends, "helped leaders to frame the meaning of the nonviolent message and encouraged churchgoers to respond to it positively. […]. In the case of the Civil Rights Movement, the receptivity of African American religious culture to the message of non-violence…linked the church to the movement" (170). In a more pointed reference to black "regionality," Chappell contends, "[Black] southern activists got strength from old-time religion […]" (8). See Allison Calhoun-Brown, "Upon This Rock: The Black Church, Nonviolence, and the Civil Rights Movement," *PS: Political Science and Politics* (June 2000):169-174; Chappell, *A Stone of Hope: Prophetic Religion and the Death of Jim Crow*

[62] Morgan insists that civil rights activists, especially those practitioners of non-violence, realized that media spotlight "reinforced the principle of effective protest politics." Such politics rested on "making one's audience feel psychologically closer to the protester than to the target of the protest." "From the activists' perspective," he argues, "media coverage of early sit-ins and the violence of Bull Connor's police in Birmingham taught powerful lessons about the importance of mass media and its dichotomous treatment of 'good' and 'evil.'" See Edward P. Morgan, "The Good, the Bad, and the Forgotten," 148.

[63] "King's rejection of the phrase," Fredrik Sunnemark writes, "is to a large degree pragmatic. He foresees that the offensiveness of Black Power will make the dialogue with the white America of political power impossible and therefore considers that the nature of the appeal in the phrase is overshadowed by the fact that it will be counterproductive in the attempt to achieve power. […]. His criticism is in one sense a fear that Black Power will be understood by white America as precisely the rejection of the hegemonic perception of race that was one of its meanings." See Sunnemark, *Ring Out Freedom*, 144-145.

[64] Ogbar discusses the gender performances of the Nation of Islam (NOI) and the Black Panther Party (BPP) in his analysis of the influence of black power on African American identity politics. Ogbar discusses the NOI's particularly strong endorsement of patriarchy and its persistent "affirmation of male domination" of women (29-32). "Resistance" and "manhood," he asserts, were equated terms in the BPP (101). See Ogbar, *Black Power*. Also see Judith Newton's discussion of gender performance in the Black Panther Party.

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[65] When he arrives to St. Adrienne, Robert claims that he is a Chicago native (Gaines 5).

[66] Bigger reveals that the Thomases are southern migrants. The family moved from Mississippi to Chicago in the aftermath of his father's death in a race riot (Wright 64). Bigger's disclosure provides a context for his mother's chastising and for Bigger's own feelings of inferiority in realizing normative male gender roles (as the consummate protector and provider for his family). Mr. Thomas's noble death—fighting for the protection of his family and for the black community at large in an environment predicated on African Americans' subordination—creates a standard to which Bigger feels he is forced to ascribe. Though Robert X does not suffer the literal death of a father, he, too, feels inadequate in demonstrating certain gendered responsibilities. He believes that his response to Justine's rape best exemplifies his insufficiency. See Richard Wright, *Native Son* (New York and London: Harper and Brothers Publishers, 1940.

[67] In his autobiography, Malcolm X writes: "The Muslim's 'X' symbolized the true African family name that he never could know. For me, my 'X' replaced the white slave-master name of 'Little' which some blue-eyed devil named Little had imposed upon my paternal forbearers" (199). Though Gaines insists that Robert (and other characters) is not representative of certain historical figures, his assigning the sullen protagonist with surname "X" is telling. If we consider Robert's rejection of his birth name in the context of the more famous "X," we can see how Robert's denunciation also replaces a name that has been "imposed" upon him. Because Johanna and Martin were never married and Robert ("Etienne"), consequently, was given his mother's surname, Robert's new name marks a separation from both his mother and his father. Robert's adoption of "X" is his way of responding to the isolation he experiences from Martin, initially, and Johanna and his siblings as a consequence of Justine's attack. Unlike Malcolm X, Robert does not experience a sense of community on account of his new name. Instead, Robert becomes, as Martin describes, "just another X"—a person without an identity (Gaines 70). See Malcolm X and Alex Haley, *The Autobiography of Malcolm X.* 1964. (New York: Ballentine Books, 1992).

[68] Payne insists that community-mobilizing "focused on large-scale, relatively short-term public events," like the demonstrations held in Birmingham, Selma, and the March on Washington (3). Community-organizing aligns with the efforts of "smaller-scale movements" and emphasize "the long-term development of leadership in ordinary men and women" (3). In *I've Got the Light of Freedom*, Payne examines the ways in which "ordinary" black southerners such as Medgar Evers, Ella Baker, and Septima Clark employed "home-grown" leadership to change the political culture of the rural South, in general, and of Greenwood, Mississippi, in particular by motivating black masses to demand civil rights (119). Drawing heavily from their familial legacies as well as southern folk culture and religion, Evers, Baker, Clark and others were instrumental in organizing cross-generational coalitions, establishing citizenship and freedom schools, and forming branches of noted civil rights organizations such as the Student Non-violent Coordinating Committee (SNCC) and the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP) throughout the Deep South. See Charles Payne, *I've Got the Light of Freedom*

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[69] Carmichael changed his name to Kwame Touré after formally denouncing his affiliation with the Black Panther Party in 1969. The name honors the profound influence of Ghanaian President Kwame Nkrumah and Guinean Prime Minister Ahmed Sékou Touré upon his life and ideological positions.

[70] Carson notes that Congressman Adam Clayton Powell considered himself the originator of the "black power" phrase (223). Martin Luther King, Jr. also notes the preexistence of the term in his 1967 meditation on the mantra, and specifically acknowledges Richard Wright's interpretation (34). See Carson, *In Struggle*; M. King, "Black Power;" Richard Wright, *Black Power: A Record of Reactions in a Land of Pathos* (New York: Harper, 1954)

[71] On May 2, 1967, members of the Black Panther Party entered the California State Capitol to protest state legislator Donald Mulford's proposition that would "prohibit the carrying of loaded fire arms in public areas" (Pearson 129). Such legislation, Party members argued, was a direct response to their gun activity and their maverick insubordination to white supremacist authority. The Party issued an executive mandate—an order "dictated" by Huey P. Newton and "written and perfected" by Cleaver—that was read by Bobby Seale before an audience news reporters after Party members were escorted from the Assembly floor (131). The mandate states:

> The Black Panther Party for Self Defense calls upon the American people in general and the black people in particular to take careful note of the racist California Legislature which is now considering legislation aimed at keeping the black people disarmed and powerless at the very same time that racist police agencies throughout the country are intensifying the terror, brutality, murder, and repression of black people.
>
> At the same time that the American government is waging a racist war of genocide in Vietnam, the concentration camps in which the Japanese Americans were interned during World War II are being renovated and expanded. Since America has historically reserved the most barbaric treatment for nonwhite people we are forced to conclude that the concentration camps are being prepared for black people who are determined to gain their freedom by any means necessary. The enslavement of black people from the very beginning of this country, the genocide practiced on the American Indians and the confining of the survivors on reservations, the savage lynching of thousands of black men and women, the dropping of atomic bombs on Hiroshima and Nagasaki, and now the cowardly massacre in Vietnam all testify to the fact that towards people of color, the racist power structure of America has but one policy: repression, genocide, terror, and the big stick.
>
> Black people have begged, prayed, petitioned, demonstrated, and everything else to get the racist power structure of America to right the wrongs which have historically been perpetuated against black people. All of these efforts have been answered by more repression, deceit, and hypocrisy. As the aggression of the racist American government escalates in Vietnam, the police agencies of

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> America escalate the repression of black people throughout the ghettoes of America. Vicious police dogs, cattle prods, and increased patrols have become familiar sights in black communities. City Hall turns a deaf ear to the pleas of black people for relief from this increasing terror.
>
> The Black Panther Party for Self-Defense believes that the time has come for black people to arm themselves against this terror before it is too late. The pending Mulford Act brings the hour of doom one step nearer. A people who have suffered so much for so long at the hands of a racist society, must draw the line somewhere. We believe that the black communities of America must rise up as one man to halt the progression of a trend that leads inevitably to their total destruction. (Pearson 131-132)

Later that year, Cleaver initiated the "Free Huey" Campaign in response to Newton's arrest for the murder of Oakland police officer, John Frey, on October 28, 1967. Though investigations and accounts of the incident reveal conflicting evidence as to Newton's guilt or innocence, Newton's arrest fueled deep-seated racial tensions: "With memories of Bloody Tuesday fresh in the minds of white radicals, and the black community long seething with animosity toward the police, Huey Newton became a national icon" (147). Hugh Pearson not only cites Cleaver as the mastermind behind the campaign but also argues that Cleaver used violence as strategy for getting leaders of other black militant groups to support the cause (148). See Hugh Pearson, *The Shadow of the Panther*.

[72] In his essay, "The Death of Martin Luther King: Requiem for Nonviolence," written two days after Dr. King's assassination, Cleaver insists, "The violent phase of the black liberation struggle is here and it will spread. From that shot, from that blood. America will be painted red. Dead bodies will litter the streets and the scenes will be reminiscent of the disgusting, terrifying, nightmarish news reports coming out of Algeria during the height of the general violence right before the final breakdown of the French colonial regime. […]. [Now] all black people in America have become Black Panthers in spirit. There will, of course, be those who stand up before the masses and echo the eloquent pleas of Dr. King for a continuation of the nonviolent tactic. They will be listened to by many, but from another perspective: people will look back upon Dr. King and upon his successors with something of the emotions one feels when one looks upon the corpse of a loved one. But it is all dead now. It's all dead now. Now there is the gun and the bomb, dynamite and the knife, and they will be used liberally in America. America will bleed. America will suffer" (75-76). See Eldridge Cleaver, *Post-Prison Writings and Speeches,* Ed. Robert Scheer (New York: Random House, 1968): 73-79.

[73] Newton explains: "When Eldridge joined the Party it was after the police confrontation, which left him fixated with the 'either-or' attitude. This was that either the community picked up the gun with the Party or else they were cowards and there was no place for them. He did not realize that if the people did not relate to the Party then there was no way that the Black Panther Party could make any revolution, for the record shows that the people are the makers of the revolution and of world history" (205). Newton says that in the original conceptualization of the Party (as outlined in its ten-point strategy) "the gun" was only to be used as a tool to symbolize revolution and not as an instrument to initiate

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violence (203). “Under the influence of Eldridge Cleaver,” Newton argues, “the Party gave the community no alternative for dealing with us except by picking up the gun. […]. Eldridge Cleaver influenced us to isolate ourselves from the Black community so that it was war between the oppressor and the Black Panther Party, not war between the oppressor and the oppressed community” (206). See Huey P. Newton, “On the Defection of Eldridge Cleaver from the Black Panther Party and the Defection of the Black Panther Party from the Black Community: April 17, 1971,” in *The Huey P. Newton Reader,* Eds. David Hilliard and Donald Weise (New York: Seven Stories Press, 2002): 200-208.

[74] Kirkland recalls executing a plan of stealing “old money” from the U.S. Treasury Department to distribute to African Americans “in need” on December 23, 1969. He describes how he and two men (Robert Johnson and Calvin Jones) stole $320,000, and used the money to “buy a whole lot of food, a whole lot of clothes, and a whole lot of toys for people” living around a “cultural” center Kirkland established known as the Africa Hut (Terry 108). When he and the others were arrested for the act in January 1970, Kirkland says he told the judge that they stole the money “because the community was in need” and “people [were] hungry” (109). The judge deemed his rationale “irrelevant” and sentenced Kirkland to serve ten to thirty years in federal prison for the crime. Kirkland used his time in prison for “self-study,” “self-development,” and he helped to establish two organizations: the Association Library Educational Research Team for Survival (ALERTS) and the Incarcerated Veterans Assistance Organization (110-111). Kirkland was released from prison for good behavior on August 25, 1975. See Wallace Terry, “Specialist 4 Haywood T. ‘The Kid’ Kirkland (Ari Sesu Merretazon), Washington, D.C.,” *Bloods: An Oral History of the Vietnam War by Black Veterans* (New York: Random House, 1984): 93-122.

[75] See note 70.

[76] Written during the time of the Chicago race riots of 1919, Claude McKay’s “signature” poem, as some critics insist, is as follows:
“If We Must Die”
If we must die, let it not be like hogs
Hunted and penned in an inglorious spot,
While round us bark the mad and hungry dogs,
Making their mock at our accursed lot,
If we must die, O let us nobly die,
So that our precious blood may not be shed
In vain; then even the monsters we defy
Shall be constrained to honor us though dead!
O kinsmen! we must meet the common foe!
Though far outnumbered let us show us brave,
And for their thousand blows deal one deathblow!
What though before us lies the open grave?
Like men we’ll face the murderous, cowardly pack,
Pressed to the wall, dying, but fighting back!

See Claude McKay, “If We Must Die,” in *Call and Response: The Riverside Anthology of the African American Literary Tradition*, Ed. Patricia Liggins Hill (Boston and New York: Houghton Mifflin Company, 1998): 883.

[77] James Meredith’s attempt to register at the University of Mississippi precipitated what is known as “the Battle of Oxford.” According to C. Vann Woodward, this event “proved the most serious clash of federal and state troops since the Civil War.” He contends, “Causalities included two killed and 375 injured, 166 of them federal marshals, 29 by gunshot wounds. Of the 30,000 Union troops committed, 300 remained ten months after Meredith was registered [at the University]” (219). See C. Vann Woodward, “Post-Reconstruction Periods Compared: 1890s and 1990s,” *The Southern State of Mind*, Ed. Jan Nordby Gretlund (Columbia: University of South Carolina Press, 1999): 212-223.

[78] In June 1966, James Meredith initiated a “March Against Fear” from Memphis, Tennessee to Jackson, Mississippi as a “display of defiance against white oppression” (Strain 28). David Goldfield writes, “[Meredith] lived with fear; it gnawed at him, alternately weakening and strengthening his determination, but always there, like Banquo’s ghost, to remind him, if such reminders were necessary, of the dark evil that encircled him for his ambition. Yet, Meredith proclaimed to all who would hear him: ‘I am Mississippian in all respects—even the bad ones.’ To claim his birthright and to dissolve the fear within, he proposed to walk through Mississippi. His objective was not only personal; he also hoped to give courage and resolve to black Mississippians gripped by that same fear, too paralyzed to cast a ballot, claim a job, and demand housing and services” (165). Meredith’s journey, however, nearly ended when he was shot after having traveled only 28 miles. Outraged by Meredith’s injury, several black leaders resolved to take up Meredith’s cause, among them, Stokely Carmichael and Floyd McKissick. Historians contend that this moment served as a catalyst for what is known as the Black Power Movement in the United States. Floyd McKissick further declared 1966 as the year “Negroes” became “Black Men” (Goldfield 167). See Christopher B. Strain, “The Deacons for Defense and Justice,” *Black Power in the Belly of the Beast*, Ed. Judson L. Jeffries (Urbana and Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 2006): 13-42; David R. Goldfield, *Promised Land: The South Since 1945* (Arlington Heights, IL: Harland Davidson, Inc, 1987)

[79] While the passage of the Voting Rights Act of 1965 marks what most historians contend as the culmination of the civil rights movement, scholars also contend that the death of Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr., in 1968, “officially” ended the era of civil rights protest. Judson L. Jeffries contends that the disbanding of the Revolutionary Action Movement, in 1976, similarly “ended” the black power movement. He writes, “By 1976, African Americans had begun to concentrate their efforts on getting Blacks and progressive whites elected to public office. A number of African Americans became mayors of cities that had previously been under white rule, and Democrat Jimmy Carter rode into the White House on a wave of Black support. Suffice it to say, radical Black activity waned significantly. Although a few of the organizations…operated beyond 1976, the Black Power movement was for all intents and purposes over” (10). Historians such as Jacquelyn Dowd Hall, however, contend that both movements, in various forms,

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continue to persist into the contemporary moment. See Judson L. Jeffries, “Introduction,” *Black Power in the Belly of the Beast*, Ed. Judson L. Jeffries (Urbana and Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 2006): 1-10; Jacqueline Dowd Hall, “The Long Civil Rights Movement and the Political Uses of the Past,” *The Journal of American History* 91 (March 2005): 1233-1263.

[80] Petersen offers a fine analysis of the ways in which women writers of color, especially, use their works to engage historical memories of “people who have been rendered invisible or silent in the frames and documents of official history” (16). Using selected works by Toni Morrison, Irena Klepfisz, Joy Kogawa, and Louise Erdich to support her claims, Petersen examines the ways in which women writers use memory as a way of “facing the past, identifying gaps and silences, and coming to terms with a deeply painful legacy” carried by minority persons that is often left unspoken in “official” narratives (169). See Nancy J. Petersen, *Against Amnesia: Contemporary Women Writers and the Crises of Historical Memory* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2001)

[81] In *XY: On Masculine Identity* (1995), Badinter insists that masculinity is an identity that men “acquire,” it is an accomplishment a male achieves through “trials” (67). She identifies three common points of convergence in cross-cultural “pedagogies of manhood”: “the idea of a critical threshold to be crossed” mostly demonstrated through the forced separation from one’s mother, “the necessity for tests” involving physical or psychic pain that inevitably produces stoicism, and “the father’s nonexistence or unobtrusive role” resulting in the increased importance of male peer relationships (Badinter 67-68). See Elisabeth Badinter, *XY: On Masculine Identity*, trans. Lydia Davis (New York: Columbia University Press, 1995)

[82] Timothy Tyson argues that the idea of “armed self-reliance” advocated by Robert F. Williams draws upon the belief held by black southerners that defending themselves was necessary for individual survival and for collective race progress (153). As SNCC leader Bob Moses explained in 1964, “‘Self-defense is so deeply engrained in rural Southern America that [we] as a group can’t effect it. It’s not contradictory for a farmer to say he’s nonviolent and also pledge to shoot a marauder’s head off’” (212). See Tyson, *Radio Free Dixie.* Simon Wendt makes similar arguments in *Spirit and the Shotgun*

[83] Similarly, Gaines refers to the area of which his African American characters inhabit as “The Quarters” (a direct reference to the living area designated for enslaved blacks on plantations throughout the South)

[84] McKivigan and Harrold insist, “[There] is near universal agreement that slavery was oppressive and often led black people to acts of violent self-defense […]. When slave did act, it was not for the cause of challenging the system of slavery but an action of protecting one’s self or loved ones; such were not *conscious* acts of antislavery violence” (4). In the early- to mid-nineteenth century, the “spirit of the Declaration of Independence” and the “legend” of Toussaint L’Ouverture “provided the intellectual foundations for true antislavery violence” among enslaved African Americans (5). Prior

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to these examples, the authors contend, African American Christianity and folk beliefs rather than political consciousness motivated slave rebels (5). See John R. McKivigan and Stanley Harrold, eds., “Introduction,” *Antislavery Violence: Sectional, Racial, and Cultural Conflict in Antebellum America* (Knoxville: University of Tennessee Press, 1999): 1-37.

[85] See Note 72.

[86] Bertram Wyatt-Brown offers three primary characteristics of “honor” prevalent in Old South culture: “the inner conviction of self-worth,” the “claim of that self-assessment before the public,” and lastly, the “self-regarding” nature of a man’s reputation (14). Building upon this apt formulation, Friend and Glover insist that honor is a term that “[captures] the expectations of community for public consumption” and is complemented by “mastery.” Mastery is “more of a consequence of a white man’s self-identity for personal fulfillment,” a reflection of southern white men’s desire not to be “mastered” by others (x). The writers further contend that southern black men’s participation in this “honor-mastery paradigm” was “compromised” by slavery. Black men sought to define themselves as men through education, financial autonomy, and physical escape from slavery. Friend and Glover also insist that “womanhood” (concern for being associated as unmanly) was the “greatest antithesis” for men of both groups. In her specific analysis of *A Gathering of Old Men*, Vernetta K. Williams similarly argues that the manhood quests presented in the text illustrate what sociologists have identified as the “culture of honor.” The eight components of this idea are: “1) Men who perceive their reputations for being strong and tough as their most valued possessions; 2) The larger society who agrees that a reputation for being tough is a man’s greatest asset; 3) Men who adhere to the ‘rule of retaliation,’ a rule dictating that men must protect their reputations against insults, affronts and any other perceived form of disrespect; 4) Men who are strong and unwilling to tolerate an insult; 5) A society that classifies, recognizes, and rewards this tough reputation as honorable; 6) Men who believe their honorable reputations are connected to their ability to protect what belongs to them; 7) Men who believe it is their duty and obligation to protect the women in their lives; and 8) An intolerance for insults to women, especially those compromising or questioning a woman’s chastity” (5). See Bertram Wyatt-Brown, *Southern Honor: Ethics and Behaviors in the Old South* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1982); Eds. Craig Friend and Lorri Glover, *Southern Manhood: Perspectives on Masculinity in the Old South* (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 2004); and Vernetta K. Williams, “Honor – A Double-Edged Sword. An Examination of the South’s ‘Culture of Honor’: Wounding of Two Races,” Diss. University of South Florida, 2007.

[87] Oates historicizes Gaines’s observations in his powerful commentary on the meaning of the slave auction block: “The auction block was the actual site of harrowing family break-ups. […]. Slave auctions were ceremonies of degradation, symbolic reenactments of the violence of original enslavement, potent reminders of the slave’s powerlessness and dishonor. Auctions brutally represented the legal irrelevance of the slave’s kinfolk, the totality of the slave’s subordination, the violence of enslavement, and the hard,

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practical reality of social death. Even more than the whip, the auction block was a symbol of the slave's dishonor" (24). See James Oates, *Slavery and Freedom: An Interpretation of the Old South* (New York: Knopf, 1990). For further critical studies on African American novelists' exploring the implications of slavery on black identity politics, see Elizabeth Ann Beaulieu, *Black Women Writers and the American Neo-Slave Narrative* (Westport, CT: Greenwood Press, 1999); Ashraf H.A. Rushdy, *Remembering Generations: Race and Family in Contemporary African American Fiction* (Chapel Hill and London: University of North Carolina Press, 2001); Angelyn Mitchell, *The Freedom to Remember: Narrative, Slavery, and Gender in Contemporary Black Women's Fiction* (New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 2002); Arlene R. Keizer, *Black Subjects: Identity Formation in the Contemporary Narrative of Slavery* (Ithaca and London: Cornell University Press, 2004); and Tim A. Ryan, *Calls and Responses: The American Novel of Slavery Since Gone with the Wind* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 2008).

[88] For further reading of the critical treatments of the U.S. South as "place," See Eds. Evans Harrington and Ann J. Abadie, *The South and Faulkner's Yoknapatawpha: The Actual and the Apocryphal* (Jackson: University of Mississippi, 1977); Lucinda Hardwick MacKethan, *The Dream of Arcady: Place and Time in Southern Literature* (Baton Rouge and London: Louisiana State University Press, 1980); Ed. J. Bill Berry, *Located Lives: Place and Idea in Southern Autobiography* (Athens, GA: University of Georgia Press, 1990); Ed. Joyce Dyer, *Bloodroot: Reflections on Place by Appalachian Woman Writers* (Lexington: University of Kentucky Press, 1998); and Martyn Bone, *The Postsouthern Sense of Place in Contemporary Fiction* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 2005).

[89] Wallace defines "spectragraphia" as the "central problem of modern black male subjectivity" (6). African American men's bodies, he contends, are made "doubly spectral and spectacle" in the public eye (6). In response to such "reckless eyeballing," Wallace cites black men's civic involvement, artistic expressions, personal narratives, and critical writings as evidence of their efforts to "settle [their] spectragraphic predicament" and testify to their humanity (10). See Maurice Wallace, *Constructing the Black Masculine*.

[90] In his groundbreaking, cross-cultural study slavery and its origins, Orlando Patterson cites dishonor (involving isolation from family, community, civic participation) as the essential element of one's "social death" (44). The process of imprisonment yields parallel results. Leak makes a similar observation in chapter three of his study on constructions of black masculinity in African American literature (64-65). See Orlando Patterson, *Slavery and Social Death: A Comparative Study* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1982); Jeffrey B. Leak, "I Want Him to Be a Man: Incarceration and the Myth of Black Criminality in Ernest J. Gaines's *A Lesson Before Dying* and Richard Wright's *Native Son*" in *Racial Myths and Masculinity in African American Literature.*

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[91] In 1931, eight African American males—Andy Wright, Eugene Williams, Heywood Patterson, Ozie Powell, Clarence Norris, Olen Montgomery, Charlie Weems, and Willie Roberson—were wrongfully accused, found guilty, and sentenced to death by all-white juries after being charged with raping two white women (Ruby Bates and Victoria Price) on a southern freight train. Along with thirteen-year-old Roy Wright (who was spared the harsh sentence on account of his youth), the nine males became forever known as the "Scottsboro Boys." Despite recanted statements from Bates and Price, the accused black males remained in ongoing legal battles resulting from the incident. Their initial trial garnered national and international attention, "providing a vocabulary and constellation of images not only for their time but for subsequent generations" who continue to use their dilemma as a way of discussing the politics of race, in general, and black men's gendered racial experiences, specifically (Miller et al. 388). See James A. Miller, Susan D. Pennybacker, and Eve Rosencraft, "Mother Ada Wright and the International Campaign to Free the Scottsboro Boys, 1931-1934," *The American Historical Review* 106.2: 387-430. For further reading, see Dan T. Carter, *Scottsboro: A Tragedy of the American South* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1969) and James Goodman, *Stories of Scottsboro* (New York: Pantheon Books, 1994).

[92] Here, I am specifically referring to the uses of literacy tests, poll taxes, and other intimidation strategies used to curtail black voting.

[93] "Furniture and equipment were almost as scarce in the 1930s as in the 1880s," Fairclough insists. "Church pews, homemade benches or even wooden boxes still substituted for desks, compelling children to write on their laps. Most teachers had a chair, but many did not. Some did not even have a table. Most blackboards were of the homemade variety, perhaps a rough pine board that was stained and restrained, and may were too small to be effective. […]. Teachers often had to teach children who had no books or only tattered and mismatched volumes that had been handed down from one family member to the next. For a class to possess a complete set of textbooks, let alone up-to-date ones, was all but unknown in rural schools" (298). In addition to limited resources, rural black teachers also dealt with attendance fluctuations (due to students' participation in their families' sharecropping tasks) (299). See Adam Fairclough, *A Class of Their Own.*

[94] In their 2007 study of black public school students, Wood, Kaplan, and McLoyd report that African American boys (ages 9-16) not only have "lower expectations for future educational attainment [i.e. college attendance]" as compared to their female counterparts, but the boys' parents and teachers share their views (424). See Dana Wood, Rachel Kaplan, and Vonnie C. McLoyd, "Gender Differences in the Educational Expectations of Urban, Low-Income African American Youth: The Role of Parents and Teachers," *Journal of Youth and Adolescence* 36.4 (May 2007): 417-427.

[95] See Roberto B. Stepto, *From Behind the Veil: A Study of Afro-American Narrative* (Urbana: University of Illinois, 1979) and Pierre Nora, "Between Memory and History: Les Lieux de Memoire." *Representations* 26 (1989): 7-24.