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Jemimas, Jockeys, and Jolly Banks: The Racial Discourse of Black Collectibles

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Approval of the Dissertation Committee

This dissertation has been duly read, reviewed, and critiqued by the Committee listed below, which hereby approves the manuscript of Conrad Pruitt, Jr. as fulfilling the scope and quality requirements for meriting the degree of Doctor of Philosophy in English.

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Abstract

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Over the last thirty years, an industry in black racist memorabilia has resurged. Bolstered by online commerce, social media trade, and a robust reproduction market, racist collectibles continue to circulate despite their functional obsolescence or presumed incongruity with current views of race. Many of these objects originated in the late nineteenth century, where the emergence of black citizenship was seen as a threat to a racial caste structure that ensured white supremacy. Following the impetus for supremacy that defined the Jim Crow era, the collectibles sought to crystallize conceptions of inherent black inferiority. The presumption that these originary conditions and ideologies differ from those of the present day legitimizes the (re)circulation of the ephemera, allowing enthusiasts to equate their interest in racist memorabilia to an apolitical "preservation of history." This dissertation, however, contests the notion that the mammy jars, jolly banks, and other racist kitsch are mere defunct signifiers of past bigotry. This study asserts that black memorabilia, and the multitude of engagements with the objects, serve as vectors for discourses on race. Furthermore, the treatment, trade and production of racist collectibles follow a similar function of reinforcing beliefs in white racial hegemony. "Jemimas, Jockeys, and Jolly Banks: The Racial Discourse of Black Collectibles" explores the multiple aspects and manifestations of black collectibles—their materiality and etymology, their appearances in literary and filmic texts, their description in price guides, and their reclamation and appropriation by black artists—to uncover a larger dialogue on the fraught processes of racial formation and distinction.

This dissertation engages multiple theoretical lenses to analyze the significance of black collectibles to past and present discourses on race. My project builds on the modest volume of scholarship on black collectibles, which is characterized by a focus on the historical contexts of the objects and tracing how the stereotypical imagery became/beget tropes that refract present conceptions of black subjectivity. Using the historical methodology from these extant studies, my dissertation expands this line of inquiry by focusing on the purpose of stereotypes rather than their origins. For instance, the Mammy trope has many iterations as a kitchenware motif, a marketing trademark, a stock character, and as a construct that romanticizes Antebellum and post-Emancipation racial relations. With its ubiquity seeking to naturalize its fictiveness, the mammy image perpetuates notions of harmonious race relations that obscure a history of exploitation. From this perspective, the objects facilitate ways of critiquing (or evading) the realities of socioracial conditions—conditions produced by a process of racialization that conflates racial distinction with hegemonic dominance. These objects symbolize the hegemonic dominance that is both present (for these objects still exist), and not present (no longer socially acceptable), and simultaneously allows outrage, disavowal, and ownership.

I apply Anne Anlin Cheng's and David Eng's theory of racial melancholia as a framework to investigate the purposes behind these repressing revisions, and inspect how they buttress white hegemonic control. Moreover, the objects reveal the problematics of dialectic racialization. For the dominant white subject, the collectibles represent the paradox of enforced racial caste: while the collectibles reify a fixed black inferiority/white superiority, their materiality is a concrete reminder of the artificiality of the methods used to produce it. The melancholic loss experienced by the white subject is the recognition of the fictiveness of supremacy that the collectible both assuages and exacerbates. For the black subject, the objects

signify the permanent loss of a fully realized, individuated personhood. The collectibles and the misconceptions they embody transfix blacks in a permanent dialectic; for the raced African American, declaring subjectivity is a process of perpetual negation. On one level, the disavowals involve eschewing intra-racial differences to create what Stuart Hall calls an essential "cultural identity." Creating an essential blackness, however, paradoxically replicates the same totalizing effect that blacks are contending, and places them in what I see as a double-bind of black racial subjectivity.

This dissertation examines the complexities of establishing racial individuation within a dialectic structure. To introduce these interpretative possibilities, the opening chapters cover literary manifestations of memorabilia. The collectibles frame authorial meditations on racial subjectivity that elucidate the multivalence of the collectibles. After introducing those concepts, my dissertation studies various material manifestations of the collectibles and their originary stereotypes. The concepts introduced through their literary manifestations illuminate additional significances to the real-life encounters covered in the final chapters. Due to this capacity to signify multivalent and contradictory positions on race, my dissertation posits that black ephemera represent palimpsests of racial discourse.

Dedication

This dissertation is dedicated to Dr. Donald Kilhefner. The wisdom, compassion, and steadfastness of your guidance allowed me to attain the voice and agency this project required.

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Introduction

"Myth is a type of speech chosen by history: it cannot possibly evolve from the 'nature' of things" --Roland Barthes

In 2019, French lifestyle magazine *Les Echos Serie Limitee* featured a photo shoot of the home of former *Vogue* creative director Grace Coddington. To publicize the upcoming issue, photographer Brian Ferry shared a selection of the images on his Instagram page. The picture garnering the most views and comments included her kitchen, complete with a china cabinet, feline-themed tea accoutrement, and a collection of ceramic mammy figurines. After several outraged observers commented on the racist nonchalance of the image, Ferry apologized for the "oversight" (though the figures centered on a shelf directly above Coddington) and replaced the offensive picture with another. The combination of Coddington's proud, whimsical and/or misguided display of these objects, and the photographer's blindness, peremptory apology, and tidy dismissal of the incident uncover the ideological contradictions beneath the color neutrality that presumably constitute contemporary conceptions of race. Over the last thirty years in the United States, racist memorabilia have experienced a renaissance. Mammy themed kitchen items, ceramic figurines of black children consumed by alligators, Jolly Nigger banks and other racially-caricatured kitsch circulate at trade shows, conventions, antique shops, and eBay, both as vintage pieces and newly manufactured reproductions. The revisionist presumption that the temporal distance from their originary sociohistorical conditions renders their racist imaging innocuous, and their collecting a mere dispassionate "preservation of history" has sanctioned the recirculation of the ephemera. "Jemimas, Jockeys and Jolly Banks: The Racial Discourse of

Black Collectibles" challenges that notion, and investigates the psychological impetuses for the revisionist thought that surrounds racist memorabilia.

This dissertation contends that collecting, selling, curating, and appropriating racist collectibles are discursive acts that articulate, negate and substantiate conceptions of race. This project draws together a diverse array of engagements with ephemera, encompassing literary and filmic references, price guide descriptions, online sale posts, and examinations of the pieces of material culture. My argument interweaves several critical frameworks, merging elements of postcolonial criticism, psychoanalytic theory and historicist analysis to account for the endurance of these objects and the racial stereotypes they encase. Beneath the ongoing discussions on the "proper" role and place (debated inter- and intra-racially) of these racist artifacts lies a discourse tracing how these conceptions of blackness have entrenched themselves in the collective racial unconscious, as images needing negation, as histories needing revision, or as constructs needing perpetuation. "Jemimas, Jockeys and Jolly Banks" contends that racist memorabilia simultaneously uncover and conceal the ideological and psychic tensions racialization catalyzes, and constitute metonyms of the larger process of racialization that establishes and maintains white hegemonic supremacy.

In her seminal work *The New Jim Crow* (2010), Michelle Alexander traces the development of nominally race-neutral regulations and law enforcement practices that relegate blacks to a permanent second-class citizenship, which as a byproduct (or purpose) reconstitutes a slowly dissipating white privilege. Building on Michelle Alexander's analysis of the evolution of the Jim Crow system, I envision white supremacy not as an inevitable byproduct of social, political, and economic conditions, but rather as the impetus engendering such oppressive conditions. When Civil Rights legislation eroded Jim Crow statutes, and threatened the ballasts

of racial hierarchy, new, ostensibly "colorblind" approaches emerged to buttress these structures. As racial distinction became less enforced by law, and seemingly more socially unacceptable, maintaining the appearance of colorblindness while upholding white racial hegemony required new methods. My work argues that the banks, ceramic mammies, lawn jockeys and other ephemera constitute this new/old racial technology, not only concretizing these fleeting notions of African American subservience and objectification, but also buttressing a collapsing white supremacy. This dissertation asserts that the treatment, trade and production of racist collectibles follow a similar function of reinforcing beliefs in white racial hegemony; the stereotypical notions of black inferiority that undergird hegemonic systems of oppression find their material referents in the figurines.

To analyze the significance of the black collectible, I apply Christina Sharpe's concepts of black redaction and annotation from her foundational *In the Wake: On Blackness and Being* (2016). For Sharpe, redaction and annotation are alternative forms of reading and resisting imaginings of blackness to prevent reifying the constructs into cultural norms. Misrepresentations of blackness, a category in which the racist collectible falls, are created out of what Sharpe terms "a singularity of antiblackness" that recurs, shifts and persists like weather. These negative images, however, house parallel texts that "disrupt the dysgraphia" of antiblack sentiments and "make Black life visible" (Sharpe 123). This counternarrative approach underscores the collectibles' capacity to signify multivalent and contradictory meanings, rendering black ephemera a metaphorical palimpsest of racial discourse. "Jemimas, Jockeys, and Jolly Banks" proceeds from this central metaphor that the collectible represents the perpetually emendated "text" of racial conceptions. Contentions over the signification of and appropriate response to the racist objects are not solely interracial conflicts, but occur intraculturally as well.

When Sharpe posits that black redaction analysis can "make Black life visible," what aspects of the black lived experience or expressions of black subjectivities constitute this stereotype nullifying conception of "Black life?" Must the aspects of this authentic presentation of blackness negate the racialized constructs of memorabilia? Moreover, does the obligation to counter racial misrepresentation necessitate a singular, monolithic view of blackness? This dissertation considers these impediments to self-definition that emerge in contentions over racial representation. Moreover, my project ponders the extent to which the structure of dialectic racialization problematizes developing racial representations within a collective.

Applying the redaction/annotation perspective to the palimpsestic collectible elucidates not only the racist conceptions of Other, but also renders artifacts of white racial anxieties visible. The import and imagery of the black collectibles reveal underlying anxieties about the stability of racial distinctions that justify caste stratification. In the American program of race, the racial dialectic conflates differentiation and stratification by manufacturing a monolithic conception of blackness against which whiteness can individuate. As emblems of a fixed inferiority, racist ephemera reify an essentialized racial Other required to concretize racial stratifications. In his deconstruction of dialectic frameworks, Frantz Fanon (1952, 1967) delineates the psychical ramifications of racialization on the black subject. For Fanon, within this dialectic, "not only must the black man be black; he must be black in relation to the white man."[1] Moreover, Fanon asserts that "the Negro has been given two frames of reference within which he has to place himself,"[2] which posits the impossibility of defining black subjectivity outside of a relation to whiteness or imposed, monolithic blackness. These "two frames"—an idealized, white personhood and a totalized conception of blackness—are incongruent with the

[1] Fanon, Frantz. *Black Skin, White Masks.* 1952. Grove Press, 1967. P. 110
[2] Fanon, Frantz. *Black Skin, White Masks.* 1952. Grove Press, 1967. P. 110

individualized identity of the raced black subject, and this division within the self epitomizes the racial melancholia of the black condition. Racist collectibles analogize the repeated racial trauma of imposing stereotypical, essentialized notions onto the raced Other that simultaneous produce white hegemonic dominance and catalyze racial melancholia in the black psyche. Conversely, these objects uncover a white racial melancholia, characterized by a repressed recognition of the absence of inherent superiority. Though these objects seek to resolve this sense of loss, the collectible paradoxically enervates belief in inherent white superiority. While assuaging the white anxieties of racial indistinction, the objects are also concrete reminders of the artificiality of the contrivances used to enforce hegemonic dominance, casting the historical revisionism and declarations of color neutrality as melancholic compensations to obfuscate the fiction of inherent supremacy.

The groundbreaking work of Anne Cheng (2000) and David Eng (2000, 2019) in the psychoanalytic concepts of racial melancholia and racial grief provides a framework to excavate the individual efficacy of maintaining racial constructs for whites, and the trauma it initiates for the minoritized. I investigate the psychological compensations beneath justifications for the continued production and collection of racist objects (contrivances that simultaneously display and conceal their artificiality) and the mechanisms used to conceal and the fictiveness of the racial hierarchy from the raced self. One of the pitfalls of my use of the work of Eng and Cheng is my application of their theorizing of racial melancholia to a limited foci of white/black binarism, which ironically reenacts the very exclusions of the Asian American racial experience that inspired the theories. On one level, applying the concepts built from the psychological consequences of the complexities of a lived experience acknowledges the similarity of the minoritized experience in the United States, but may also essentialize the racialized experience,

which risks reinforcing the dialectic and other-object status of minorities. Cheng, however, expands her application of racial melancholia by considering the experiences of several minority groups. In her *The Melancholy of Race: Psychoanalysis, Assimilation and Hidden Grief* (2000), Cheng identifies the psychological ramifications of racial caste that affect both the dominant group and racialized "other." For Cheng, racialization is akin to, and oftentimes becomes a traumatic loss. Though the object of loss differs between the black and white subjects, the inability to accept the absence (a sense of self independent from the validations or degradations of racial hierarchy, for example) leads the subject to introject that lost self. For the racial other, this entails the absence of a fully recognized subjectivity that the process of racialization hinders. For the white subject, maintaining the belief of inherent racial difference and superiority that solidifies the white racial identity requires oppressive political and social acts, and psychological contrivances to disavow the artificiality of racial difference, a pressurized repression of the absence of this idealized, pure white subjectivity. The exclusion from these norms—the reiterated loss of whiteness as an ideal, notably—establishes a "melancholic framework for assimilation and racialization processes in the United States precisely as a series of failed and unresolved integrations" (Eng 35). According to Eng, the hegemonic imposition of racial characteristics is tantamount to fetishism, which encapsulates "mainstream society's disavowal and projection of otherness onto a disparaged group that is then homogenized and reduced to a stereotype" (Eng 43). This form of racialized fetishism constitutes "a psychic process by which difference is assumed and projected and then negated and denied" (Eng 43). I expand the analysis of Cheng and Eng by positing that the process of forming racially melancholic subjects occurs both inter and intra-racially. In a dialectic system, homogenizing otherness consequently totalizes both subject and object, creating two racial constructs, a subordinated blackness against

which the raced other individuates, and a dominant whiteness that the white subject must reconcile with one's own lived experience. For the dominant and subordinate groups, racial collectivity imposes an artificial, binary-driven subjectivity that bifurcates one's internal sense of selfhood with the expectations of racial identity. The use of the qualifier "racial" suggests the paradoxical nature of a selfhood based on collectivity, and within this dynamic, the sense of loss and alienation is twofold: entering the dialectic precipitates a split in subjectivity by providing the dialectically raced subject/other with an identity that must be internalized, then either embraced or negated to be included in the collective. The difference between one's autonomous sense of self and raced identity concurrently produces mourning for the loss of self-definition and a fundamental alienation from true inclusion in the raced collective, and enacts a perpetuating system of loss that I term intra-racial melancholia.

While much of the critical studies in racial melancholia revolve around the fraught experience of assimilation, and the pressures of cultural retention for immigrants, several theorists in recent years have adapted the framework to theorize experiences involving any cultural Other, including those of dominant groups. Recent studies by Andrea Davis (2022), Rebecca Wanzo (2020) and Jean Cole (2020) apply the framework to the African American experience. Rebecca Wanzo analyzes the racial anxieties embedded in racial caricature, and surveys the psychic damage created by these negative figurations, as well as the reassurances the representations provide to tenuous beliefs of white supremacy. Tara McPherson (2003) also applies the framework to her study of Southern white sensibilities. One of the underexamined critical issues that McPherson's work addresses is the anxieties within whiteness that drive the melancholic compensations. In *Reconstructing Dixie*, McPherson builds on Cheng's description of white guilt, and traces how the concept drives revisionist nostalgia and facilitates evasion of

the present inequities and the legacies of slavery. Lily Cho (2011) introduces an impactful addition to studies in racial melancholia. Though her work also centers on the diasporic experience of integrating into dominant culture, Cho illuminates the materiality of racial trauma. Cho explains that the critical works in the field focus on the private, internal conflicts of racial melancholia, but neglect the material aspects and manifestations of assimilation—acts of physical violence, the adoption of Western items, the rejection of one's cultural foods—all which solidify one's difference and alienation. By viewing the collectibles, and the discourse surrounding their continued presence in the marketplace as stratagems that obfuscate the fictiveness of inherent dominance, my dissertation explores additional material aspects of racial melancholia that undergird the white racial order.

David Eng's recent development on his original framework includes theories on racial formation sets the stage for variation on the tension created in racialization. In *Racial Melancholia, Racial Dissociation: On the Social and Psychic Lives of Asian Americans* (2019), Eng suggests

> we ought to consider how race is neither pure objectification nor pure subjectification but precisely both at once: a continuous modulating relation between object and subject, a coexisting and coextensive formation, a dynamic movement of sociality and causality. In describing race as a relation, as a process rather than a thing, we treat it more as a verb than a noun. For us, race is a performance rather than an essence. Indeed, we might say that race is a historical effect of the social relations between objectification and subjectification. (12)

Eng's discussion could apply to the dialectic's role in fabricating racial alterity, which deconstructs notions that these categories are fixed by identifying their dependence upon relation

to another. Eng questions the structures of an American socioracial order that presupposes stable racial categorization; the suggestion that race is performative undercuts belief in inherent racial superiority, and racial distinction altogether. Josh Toth (2018) explores similar paradoxes of communal identification, focusing on its consequences on white subjectivities that are stabilized by conflating racial difference and dominance. Toth contends that assertions of an autonomous racial identity "are undermined by the self 's dependence upon group identification, and a group is only ever the tenuous delineation of what it refuses" (14). Rather than renovate these processes of racialization, Toth explains, the "nationalist (or racist, or sexist) melancholic refuses this paradox, insisting instead upon the possibility of the immanent self and pure communal inclusivity" (Toth 14). This paradox constitutes a cornerstone in my expanded view of interracial melancholia as it relates to hegemonic whiteness. Manthia Diawara (1999) advances a similar observation on the conflation of stereotype and racial categorization. Diawara explains that

> inherent in the blackface myth is a white fantasy that posits whiteness as the norm. What is absent in the Blackface stereotype is as important as what is present: every black face is a statement of social imperfection, inferiority, and mimicry that is placed in isolation with an absent whiteness as its ideal opposite. (Leventhal 7)

Continuing this line of reasoning, my dissertation posits that the racist collectible is the hegemonic intervention to the melancholia-inducing structures of American racialization. The racist collectible reifies the racial difference/inferiority dyad, emblemizing a notion of black inferiority against which whiteness can individuate. While intracultural differences or white guilt may problematize identifying with communal, totalizing whiteness, superiority over the raced other confirms whiteness as the sole constituent of normative selfhood. My addition to the melancholic framework treats the practices of white hegemonic dominance as both symptom and

byproduct of racial melancholia. Entering racial dialectic initiates melancholia, for it segments one's sense of subjectivity, and the act of individuation in the racial dialectic not only involves solidifying interracial difference, but reconciling intracultural ones.

Employing a melancholic framework in analysis of black memorabilia expands the discourse of this relatively underexamined field by theorizing another possibility for their continued presence. Many of the studies of black ephemera interweave brief critiques of the racist import of the objects with delineations of their history, while others focus on analyzing the embodied stereotypical tropes. Maurice Manring (1998) and Micki McElya (2007) investigate the persistence of the Mammy mythology in its several manifestations as an advertising trope and symbol of Lost Cause nostalgia, where their explorations of the material culture surrounding the stereotype buttress inquiries into racial distinction. Naa Oyo A. Kwate (2019) examines the longevity of racist imagery in restaurant branding, and Shirley Anne Tate (2019) traces the perpetuation and evolution of the Sambo construct. These works dissect the adaptations of racist mythology, and probe the psychological justifications of preserving constructs seemingly discordant in an ostensibly post-race present. The collection of racist artifacts featured in Spike Lee's *Bamboozled* (2000) garnered several critiques, notably the brilliant analysis of the Jolly Bank by Bill Brown (2006). Other films, such as Marlon Riggs' *Ethnic Notions* (1987) and Chico Calvard's docudrama *Black Memorabilia* (2018) study the persistence of these objects. My project does not confine itself to a study of kitsch or a singular trope, but includes public statues, works of arts, literary texts and other elements of visual and material culture. My project builds on this extant scholarship by combining their more specialized foci into a larger examination of the multiple manifestations of black racist memorabilia, from the use of their iconography in decorative objects and public monuments, their appearance in literary and filmic

texts, both as objects and as stereotypes, and as appropriated images by black artists. By widening this focus, I can investigate shifts in signification and justification of the objects that exemplify their function as palimpsests of racial discourse. The periodization of this project encompasses a broad sweep of historical moments, designed to trace the changing tenor of racial attitudes and conditions, of which the treatment of the collectibles reflects. David Pilgrim, curator of The Jim Crow Museum of Racist Memorabilia, explains in his recent work (2015, 2017) how the objects can leverage dialogues about the legacies of racism. As Tavia Nyong'o (2002) observes, "the United States racial imagination is structured by a wish to move beyond and forget the scapegoating of blacks" (Nyong'o 387), and David Pilgrim believes that access to concrete examples of racism obviates evasions and dismissals racial discourse evokes. Pilgrim laments that a "thick naivete about America's past permeates this country," for many "understand historical racism mainly as a general abstraction: Racism existed; it was bad, though probably not as bad as blacks and other minorities claim."[3] His museum, however, forces "confrontation with the visual evidence of racism" which prevent dismissing this past. While historical revisions may attempt alter the signification of the ephemera, they cannot efface their materiality.

"Jemimas, Jockeys and Jolly Banks" follows much of the methodological mapping employed by the two seminal works of Kenneth Goings (1994) and Patricia Turner (2002). Goings traces the proliferation of racist objects and iconography to Reconstruction era legislation and other early twentieth century measures that improved conditions of black citizenship. In his *Mammy and Uncle Mose: Black Collectibles and American Stereotyping*, Goings interprets the Jolly Nigger Banks, mammy figurines, and other collectibles as reactions to these measures that

[3] Pilgrim, David. "The Garbage Man: Why I Collect Racist Objects," *Grand Valley Review*, vol. 32, no. 1, 2007, http://scholarworks.gvsu.edu/gvr/vol32/iss1/10. Accessed 24 Oct. 2020.

seemingly eroded de jure black inferiority/white superiority. Goings posits a correlation between the passage of reforms or equalizing legislation to the shifts in iconography and popularity of the collectibles, and grounds much of his discussion in the historical context of the objects. My dissertation draws from similar historicist concerns, and uses these observations to examine the significance of contemporary manifestations of the tropes. Patricia Turner (2002) incorporates similar historical considerations, but her text expands the definition of memorabilia beyond material objects to include jokes, advertisements, and filmic representations of blacks. Her *Ceramic Uncles and Celluloid Mammies: Black Images & Their Influence on Culture* centers around the trope of the mammy, following its iterations from a minstrel convention to a romanticizing of the domestic slave experience perpetuated as a typecast in advertising, film and fiction. While her study explores the relation of the Mammy to revisionist nostalgia about past race relations, it does not view the collectibles as vectors of racial melancholia, but rather engages in this discussion of the several manifestations of the tropes to chart their persistence in the racial imaginary.

This dissertation builds on the historicism of these earlier studies, but approaches the collectibles from their relations to experiences of racial melancholia, and how the objects reflect the complexities of the process of racial individuation. My project combines the approach of studying the historical context, present treatment, and appropriations of black memorabilia to examine the utility of the objects and tropes to maintaining ongoing systems of white supremacy. Using the historicist approach of Goings, and trope tracing structure that Turner employs, my work expands this inquiry; though framed by a different historical moment, one in the midst of white hegemonic re-entrenchment signified by the Donald Trump presidency and the allure of the nostalgia for eras of unabated white supremacy. This dissertation posits that conceptions of

white supremacy are simultaneously buttressed and contradicted by expressions of postracial optimism and color neutrality, and that these evasions of the present effects of past racial conditions serve to stabilize the white racial order. While Goings analyzes the historical context surrounding the creation of the objects to posit how similar notions of white American racial anxieties and concomitant of the 1980's led to a renaissance in racist memorabilia collecting, I link the present manifestations and resurgence of black memorabilia, both as decorative objects, historical landmarks and locales, or advertising stereotypes to retrenchment of neoliberal sentimentality of racial equality that threatens white hegemonic dominance. "Jemimas, Jockeys, and Jolly Banks" views the collectible from the perspective of a historical moment full of sociopolitical contradiction. In this professed postracial atmosphere, in which charges of systemic racism, and the introduction of critical race theory into primary and secondary school curricula are deemed unnecessary based on the relative societal "gains" made in the lives of the racialized Other (the Obama presidency, for example), or met with peremptorily and sometimes violent opposition, the color-neutral, repressive practices of earlier decades have been conjoined with renewed expressions of blatant racism to defend ideological attacks against mainstream, heteropatriarchal notions of whiteness. My study takes the position that the continued commerce, and justifications of trade in black collectibles represents an aspect of this widespread fortification of the white power structure, in which the images of past racial constructs and illusory interracial interactions have become models to renovate idealized past of white dominance.

Had Roland Barthes frequented 1930s American households, black racist memorabilia could have been a subject in *Mythologies*[4]. Barthes' analysis of the proclivity to reify ideology

[4] Barthes, Roland. *Mythologies*. 1957. Translated by Annette Lavers, Hill and Wang, 1972.

through objects illuminates the initial, and as this project asserts, current impetus for their continued circulation. For Barthes, consumers of mythology take "the signification for a system of facts" (Barthes 131), however, the dissolution of statutes, and the instances of counterexamples to black inferiority, began to disrupt the stable signification of blackness that solidified dialectic racialization. Bill Brown (2006) explains that the ephemera not only reflect a stereotypical notion of blackness, but "fix a demeaning and/or romanticizing racism with the fortitude of solid form" (185). Brown posits the centrality of material, or things, in rendering culture and history metaphorically visible, and asserts how black collectibles exemplify "the historical ontology congealed within objects."[5] These objects, and the tropes they embody, signified a static counternarrative of a fixed, subordinate blackness that would bolster belief in inherent white superiority. With the production of such popular collectibles as the Jolly Nigger Bank, Tombo Alabama Coon Jigger, and ceramic mammies beginning in the late nineteenth to early twentieth century, their proliferation correlates to eras in which de jure white supremacy faced opposition. By 1900, according to Henry Louis Gates, "it was possible for a middle-class white American to see Sambo images everywhere he or she looked--from toaster and teapot covers on breakfast tables, to advertisements in magazines, to popular postcards and drug stores" (McElroy xliv). Elizabeth Abel (2010) intimates the historical fragility of this sense of dominance, noting that while an "industry in black-themed mass-produced souvenirs, novelties, toys, kitchen items, dolls, and ceramic figurines, all characterized by the literal and figurative diminishment of African Americans" began in the nineteenth century, the market "was driven by a white middle class eager to fill its homes with iconographic evidence of its own superiority" (Abel 48). Doris Wilkinson (1980) posits how toys and objects perpetuate stereotypical images

[5] Brown, Bill. "Reification, Reanimation, and the American Uncanny." *Critical Inquiry*, vol. 32, no. 2, 2006, pp. 175–207., doi:10.1086/500700.

of blackness. The strict, designated functions of many of the caricatured mechanical toys naturalize social relegation of the blacks. This saturation of images, tropes and objects, however reveals the underlying anxieties surrounding the stability of these racial taxonomies.

During the 2008 Presidential election, a sparse website with the URL jollyobama.com featured the following advertisement for its lone product:

> It seems like everybody was talking about CHANGE, BANKS, JOBS and LIPSTICK ON PIGS during the campaign. A Jolly Obama Bank, or J.O.B., is the ultimate satirical solution for combining ALL these themes in a unique political souvenir from the 2008 election. Just what makes jolly obama so jolly- Is it because all he's got in his head is a mechanism to get your money? And... this nostalgic black americana replica is a shade more politically correct than the 1892 originals. PUT YOUR MONEY WHERE YOUR MOUTH IS! They say good jobs are hard to find, and are being shipped overseas... but you can get a J.O.B. shipped to you here in the USA for only $100! Your office cubicle is not complete... without a Jolly Obama Bank sitting right on top. Jolly Obama is sure to heat up your conversations with liberal associates. Jolly Obama Bank has many uses... Use your J.O.B. as a paperweight, as a prop for your blog, or in a video like Spike Lee did with "Bamboozled" a few years ago. (jollyobama.com)

Though the website is now defunct, the Jolly Obama Bank can still be found on eBay, occasionally emerging in searches for its antecedent, the Jolly Nigger Bank. More than an algorithmic error, the interchangeability of these adjunct nouns punctuates a larger statement about American attitudes towards race. The appearance of such objects in a presumed post-race atmosphere, one which the election of the nation's first black president seemingly crystallizes, is less incongruous than contiguous with the historical responses to the dissolution of elements of

socioracial caste. The reactionary resurrecting of a nineteenth century racist artifact undercuts notions of progress that an Obama presidency would signify, demonstrating not only the endurance of these objects and other manifestations of tropes they embody, but the extent to which these imaginings refract our conceptions of race. The advertisement's telescoping of the complexities of a political platform and ideological position into the simplified racial schema of a Reconstruction era racial construct reveals the depth of sedimentation of these stereotypes in the American racial imaginary. Beyond its caricatured, phenotypical excesses, and its mechanized animation of black stereotype, the Obama bank demonstrates the historical expedience of reducing the African American to the perpetual "Other" who substantiates black inferiority. Moreover, in the current political climate, one set in the aftermath of the tenure of the nation's first black president, the uncanny return of Jolly Bank signifies a movement towards racist re-entrenchment. Ensconced within the nostalgic objects like the 1777 Flag Act (or Betsy Ross) versions of the American flag, and rhetoric of "Making America Great Again" is a history of black subordination and de jure and de facto white supremacy. The return of this familiar contrivance, coupled with the ontological instability of object/human epitomizes the uncanniness surrounding black ephemera. These collectibles revolve around several levels of Freud's concept of the uncanny. In addition to its inanimate/animate ambiguities, the bank signals the return of repressed impulses within the American racial imaginary.

Created in a moment that signaled the end of slavery and dissolution of legalized white supremacy, the Jolly Bank would fix a conception of inferior blackness that events around its creation would threaten. This uncanny object, though intended to reaffirm white superiority, illustrates my intervention into the critical study of black collectibles; the expedience of incarnating black inferiority reflects white racial anxiety regarding the artificiality of white

supremacy. For whites, these images reveal/conceal recognition of one's lack of intrinsic or natural superiority, balancing both a repressed sense of one's own dominance, and the shame of the methods used to ensure that domination. Though many of the objects capture blacks in positions of perpetual subservience, in which the chattel objects lack independent agency or autonomy, according to Bill Brown, they supply more than "the longing for slavery's persistence" providing instead the "simplicity and stability most conveniently achieved through the 'synchronic essentialism' that arrests history" (Brown 254). David Marriott (2010) asserts fixing these notions of blackness in solid form prevents "the stereotype returning to haunt self-identity" that stands in for a "fear of disintegration that is the originary trace of the other within us" (Marriott 218). Simply desiring to perpetuate racial stereotypes, however, does not account for the infixation of the constructs, for as Nahum Chandler (1996) notes "the question of the status of the Negro is quite indissolubly linked to a presupposition of the homogeneity and purity of the European subject" (80). Though maintaining the exclusivity of whiteness necessitates fixed, sedimented, essentialized view of blackness, the engagement the artists and writers covered in "Jemimas, Jockeys and Jolly Banks" have with racial binarism and presupposition of black collectivity uncover ambivalent relations to the inter and intra cultural conceptions of races. For Ralph Ellison and others, racial collectivity, despite the solidarity and communalism that accompanies it, can stifle individuality.

The ambivalence around the unifying but limiting concept of racial collectivity is most apparent in the intergenerational and intraracial conflicts between artists Kara Walker and Betye Saar. While both artists challenge imposed definitions of blackness, Saar, as a foundational member of the Black Arts Movement, prioritizes the vindication of blackness and emphasizes collective unity which has the effect of restricting self-criticality, and to a degree, maintains the

boundaries of racial distinction. Walker, however, explores alternative conceptualizations of the black image that contain intracultural critiques and ambiguous appropriations of stereotypes. While her art expands racial discourse, it eschews a definitive negation of dominant, hegemonic imaginings of blackness. Though the work of both artists confronts romanticized conceptions of Antebellum race relations, their appropriations of racist tropes explore different nuances of racial discourse. The critical attention to this generational conflict, however, may present a wider ideological fissure between the two artists than exists, which may be the result of distilling political statements from Walker that her elusive, ambiguous work may or may not constitute. While critiques of the Black Arts Movement contend that the artists privileged heteronormativity and deemphasized the subjectivities born from other black lived experiences, wholescale repudiation of its mission raises the risk of implying that the originary racial conditions that precipitated their polemical concerns do not have continuing effects on black lived experiences of the present. My discussion explores the possibility of negotiating a balance between these positions.

From this vantage point, the socioracial conditions facing minoritized subjects lend validity to viewing the United States as a postcolonial space. The abolition of slavery signaled the legal and ontological shift of the African American from object to subject, and from 3/5ths a person to a full citizen, which like many of the nations in the diaspora that dissolved colonial control, complicated the de jure superiority of whites that stabilized racial caste. To account for the rationale of enforcing racial caste, I refer to Fanon's postcolonial critique of the Hegelian master/slave dialectic as a model that paradoxically ensures the persistence of the stereotypes and apply this theoretical structure to literary explorations of black ephemera. Rather than presuppose that racial caste damages only the subaltern (which would reinforce the

subject/object relation created by racial othering), the book considers the psychological effects of defining the self through negation for both black and white subjects, which opens additional nuances to the dynamics of intra-racial melancholia.

Furthermore, this dissertation investigates the originary racist constructs, tropes and ideological imperatives that lead to the production of black ephemera. Similar to the itinerancy of Jim Crow, the stereotypes encased in the objects migrated from the nineteenth-century minstrel stage into ephemera and past and present filmic manifestations[6]. Jermaine Singleton's (2015) analysis of the psychological utility of minstrelsy raises another similarity to the collectibles, characterizing the minstrel show as "a melancholic strategy through which 'normal' white working-class identity is stabilized" (Singleton 34). Though the genesis of these tropes center around the minstrel stage, and reflect the same psychological compensations, this book does not explore minstrelsy, but rather proceeds from the stereotypes' manifestations in material and visual culture as caricatured collectibles and fungible objects. Eric Lott (1994) masterfully explicates the minstrel origins of these stereotypes, and rather than proceed from that context, my dissertation views the racist kitsch from the moment and expedience of their manufacture in the late nineteenth, early twentieth century to consider their proliferation as objects that reify the conceptions of black inferiority that buttress enervated sense of white supremacy. Though "Jemimas, Jockeys and Jolly Banks" charts the historical context and past expedience of these racial effigies, it does not conceptualize the objects as static signifiers of past racial conceptions, but rather treats black memorabilia and the textual, filmic manifestations of the stereotypes as an active project of racial imaginings that continue retrofitting white supremacy in the face of a shifting racial landscape and postracial climate.

[6] Marlon Riggs's seminal documentary *Ethnic Notions* (1986) examines the historical continuum of the stereotypes.

One of the problems with the study of racist objects is the terminology used to characterize the pieces, with appellations of "memorabilia" or "collectibles" or "Americana" functioning to euphemize their grotesque and racist import. The expansiveness of the term "black collectible" has become a point of contention, problematically encompassing objects created by or about blacks, as a conflation the racist schlock and the work of black artisans. This tendency consequently totalizes the black experience, and has been well discussed by Patricia Turner, and for the purposes of this text, the earnest work of black artisans will not be categorized as a collectible: any reference to collectibles or ephemera will refer exclusively to the racist and grotesquely caricatured objects. Turner calls this selection of items "contemptible collectibles" to negate the sanitizing efforts of race-neutral, revisionist rhetoric that shifted their marketplace reception from revulsion to a palatable ambiguity. The renewal of commerce in these "contemptible collectibles" has spawned a lucrative reproduction and counterfeit market, decried by some purists for lack of authenticity, but accepted by others for their occasional fidelity to the antiques. The concept of authenticity, however, is complicated by the renewed manufacturing of objects that presumably signify past, outmoded notions of race. If these conceptions of blackness still linger in the racial imaginary, and the ephemera still encapsulates these ideas, then designating these (re)productions counterfeit or replica would be misnomers, since the concepts they articulate are from a past that has not yet passed.

The objects reveal the centrality of stereotype to a system of dialectic racialization that ensures a perpetual Othering of the raced subject. Although circumstances differ, much of Franz Fanon's exploration of the colonial experience illuminates conditions of Black Americans. In his *Black Skin White Masks* (1952), Fanon exposes the inextricable links between colonial subjugation of indigenous peoples and the formation of racial hierarchies. Fanon uncovers an

inherent Hegelian structure in the colonial dynamic in which the black colonial subject, relegated to the position of the "other," confirms, validates and stabilizes the colonizer's view of self. For Fanon, the black subject experiences himself "in triplicate," where the self, his conception of his own identity, and the perception of whites fracture his identity. The black identity, "steeped in the essentiality of servitude," functions as a Being-for-Other without any means of "ontological resistance" to the imposition of characteristics in the colonial Hegelian struggle. For the individual black, stereotype subsumes subjectivity, and the *raison d'etre* of blackness is simply to differentiate whiteness. Simultaneously, however, the latent realization of a lack of racial difference haunts the dynamic and engenders the promotion of stereotypes. David Marriott (2015) categorizes this process as "racial fetishism," used to concretize (and conceal) the fictions of racial demarcations. Racial fetishism identifies the "illusion at work in social reality itself" (Marriott 223). The memorabilia follow a similar dynamic, and embody what Brown sees as "a specific type of fetishism," one of a "memorializing disavowal of the sameness effected by universal male suffrage" (Brown 252-53). Moreover, the fixity of the racial constructs "rendered in ceramic or iron or aluminum, compensates for the new heterogeneity of black America" (Brown 252) that could disrupt the stability of racial caste. Paradoxically, such generalizations tacitly acknowledge the artificiality and inadequacy of the practice itself, producing the very racial melancholia the constructs sought to assuage, and perpetuating its psychical circuit.

Historically, these racial anxieties found their compensations not in iron and ceramic effigies, but imposed upon the bodies of slaves. With the institution of slavery obviating a racial dialectic, practices in slavery, according to Saidiya Hartman (2010) would render "the captive body the vehicle of the master's power and truth" (Hartman 8). The forced expression of jollity and amusement served as counternarratives to the reality of slavery in the master's

consciousness. In performances Hartman calls "scenes of subjection," the dancing and frivolity attempted to naturalizing such performances as inherent proclivities. These tableau function melancholically, in both their mitigation of cruelties of slavery, and the attempt to efface their own artificiality. Many of the images in black memorabilia—the gator bait figurines, for example—turn on this dyad of pain/pleasure. For Hartman, these scenes marked the introduction of stereotypical constructs to blackness. As "the synecdoche of a haunted universality" (Marriott 219), the stereotype retains the paradoxical recognition of its own artifice. Furthermore, in its simplifications, the stereotype, from Homi Bhabha's position, denies "the play of difference" (Bhabha 298), that form of negation that could "liberate the signifier of *skin/culture* from the fixations of racial typology" (Bhabha 299). Dialectic racialization depends on a technology that conceals the inaccuracy of stereotype and substantiates the stability of white subjectivity.

This project argues that the black collectibles, and the misconceptions they embody, transfix blacks in a permanent dialectic in which declaring subjectivity is a process of perpetual negation. On one level, the disavowals involve eschewing intra-racial differences to create what Stuart Hall calls an essential "cultural identity." Creating an essential blackness, however, paradoxically replicates the same totalizing effect that blacks are contending, and places them in what I see as the double-bind of black racial subjectivity. Like DuBois' image of the double consciousness, the black subject is aware of the discrepancy between an external, imposed, racialized "self" that reinforced by economic, legal and social structures and one's own internal view of self that can disavow the misconceptions assigned by dialectic racialization. Beneath DuBois' concept however is a problematic dynamic—to what extent does double consciousness presuppose cultural collectivity? In other words, does deeming an internal sense of racial subjectivity tacitly acquiesce to racial differentiation? I explore this tension in readings of the

key texts my dissertation analyzes. This creates a conundrum for the black artist, in which the negation or appropriation of stereotypical conceptions effectively acquiesces to essentialist racial categorization. Using their depictions and inclusions of black collectibles as a point of departure, I explore how several writers negotiate defining black subjectivity within spaces of white hegemonic dominance. For many of these writers, transcending one's status as the racial "Other" through the Hegelian dialectic falls short, since stereotypical concepts of blackness are the very ballasts stabilizing racial distinction and hierarchy. Moreover, intra-racial expectations can impose limitations on self-definition, aesthetic expression and thematic interests. Emilie Townes (2007) describes this ideological tightrope, where "the assertion of an exclusive essentialism is a strategy to undercut and destabilize hegemonic forces" but can result in "creating a monolithic identity that fails to represent the true heterogeneity of Black life" (Townes 53). To an extent, these concerns circumscribe black art by assigning it polemic significances. Ralph Ellison engages this problem, and Chapters 1 and 2 analyze his exploration of this double bind. The allusions to black collectibles in his texts frame his meditation on the development of racial subjectivities within the closed circuit of dialectic racialization.

The occasional appearance of racist collectibles in literature, however brief, contain a symbolic utility beyond mere expressions of local color. For example, Toni Morrison's *Beloved* (1988) contains a brief but freighted encounter involving a racist collectible. With Sethe struggling with the resurrected Beloved, Denver visits the home of the Bodwin family for work. After being admonished for needing to know on "what door to knock" (Morrison 253), Janey agrees to help Denver secure a job with the Bodwins. Upon leaving with these "assurances," Denver notices a grotesquely caricatured coin holder in the shape of a black child. Kneeling on a pedestal with the words "At Yo Service" painted across it (Morrison 255), the ceramic black boy

had a head "thrown back farther than a head could go" and two eyes "bulging like moons…above the gaping red mouth" full of money. The location of the collectible at the proper black entrance in a white home intimates its dual declarative and functional purposes. Though the Bodwins are known as "good whitefolks", their coin tray nevertheless articulates the proper position for the black presence in the home, an ambiguity mirrored in Janey's own comments. The juxtapositions of this object with Janey's own yearnings communicate her fears of personifying the image, stating that she does not "want to quit this people, but they can't have all my days and nights too" (Morrison 254). Morrison's imagining of the collectible emphasizes the inseparability of the black body from objects of exchange and labor. The figure, contorted beyond nature, kneels on a pedestal, suggesting that this manifestation of subservient blackness functions as a model of expected comportment. Even its components—nails for hair, for example—emphasize the inextricability of utility and blackness.

Centered around literary references to black collectibles, Chapters 1 and 2 approach the appearances of the objects not as incidental demonstrations of local color, but as symbols that encapsulate author musings on race. In these scenes, black ephemera are juxtaposed with depictions of racial anxieties, where racial subjectivities collide with perceived shifts in socioracial conditions. The objects simultaneously perform diegetic and non-diegetic functions of reaffirming (or re-imposing) racial caste through the hierarchical positionalities of the characters while providing authors with symbols to critique the tenuousness of these constructs. The inclusion of these allusions works to identify the dramatic ironies of race relations. The objects triangulate discourse on race, in which white perceptions of race are recognized and upheld by the objects, and unchallenged by blacks publicly, but privately blacks identify the fiction of these constructs and as a corollary, negate them. This view is problematic, for

assigning the black subject this perspective presumes the raced "Other" has a pure, essential subjectivity that racial constructs bifurcate into a being-for-self and being-for-other, making racialization appear to be legerdemain that hegemonic whiteness performs solely upon and for itself. In fact, reflecting on the dependance of dialectic racialization, and melancholic attachment to the totalizations (and collectivity promotions) of American racialization could desediment the unresolved and underexplored dyadic white/subject, black/object dynamic that much of the racial discourse falls under. For the Ellison texts, though his historical moment predates the postracial, his ambivalence surrounding collectivity does prevent the racial discourse from becoming a closed system that inevitably perpetuates the same dynamic.

Contrasting the texts based on the symbolic function of the allusions to ephemera encapsulates differing analyses of lived racial experience. Though the imports and conclusion diverge, the textual allusions to lawn jockeys frame collisions between individual subjectivities and the expected or imposed identities of one's communal racial identity—a discrepancy that remains unacknowledged by the Fanonian racial dialectic, which presupposed and enforced essentialized racial identities. For Flannery O'Connor and Raymond Chandler, the lawn ornaments extend the artificial constructions that buttress belief in white supremacy, and critique the illogical conceptions that presumably solidify hegemonic dominance. For the black authors in this dissertation, however, the fictionalized encounters with the jolly banks, slavery artifacts and iron groomsmen frame their meditations on the uncanny attachment to a racialized self or racial subjectivity, and examine the centrality of hegemonic conceptions in forming black selfhood. The potential pitfall of the methodology of these chapters lies in refracting the individual works through this interpretive lens, and attributing polemical concerns to texts based on a singular allusion. Considering the origins and social contexts of the collectibles, however, as

well as the thematic concerns of the authors, discourses on race appear inextricability tied to allusions to black ephemera. Treating the objects as inconsequential illustrations of local color would ignore the complexities of a fraught history of representations of blackness, and to a degree could demonstrate the fixity of these images in the racial imaginary. Moreover, the malleability of these objects in literature uncovers the potential for the shifting signification of racist memorabilia in real life, illuminating a possible source for the longevity (or virulence) of these racist collectibles in the American marketplace.

Chapter One offers an entry into the expansive field of criticism of Ralph Ellison's *Invisible Man* (1952) and focuses on the allusions to black collectibles. Throughout the novel, interactions with black memorabilia articulate Ellison's complex vision of racial subjectivity; these encounters depict the inextricability of imposed conceptions of blackness from the raced identity, and assess the extent to which stereotypes, and the reactions to them, form the foundation of a racial consciousness. I draw on readings from Scott Thomas Gibson (2010), Wahneema Lubiano (1997), Randal Doane (2004), and Casey Hayman (2015) to assess the protagonist's complex relationship with racial subjectivity, but the central claim is indebted to Cheng's insightful application of her framework. I proceed from Cheng's analysis of the protagonist's racial melancholia, and expand the characterization of his struggles as a form of intra-racial melancholia. Viewing the ephemera as vectors of his fraught process of racial individuation, I trace the narrator's attempts at reconciling his own definitions of racial subjectivity with those imposed on him both inter and intra culturally. The characters' relationships with such items as the leg links of Brother Tarp and Dr. Bledsoe, Clifton's Sambo Dolls, and Mary Rambo's Jolly Nigger Bank portray the complexities and contentions surrounding the creation of black subjectivity. For Tarp, Bledsoe, Mary Rambo, and ultimately

the unnamed protagonist, these material objects ground their respective definitions of blackness, but rather than embracing a multiplicity that would seemingly complicate the totalizing maneuvers of racial stereotype, the protagonist, Clifton and Dr. Bledsoe all assert the validity of their definitions of blackness through their engagement with black ephemera. For Clifton, his selling of Sambo dolls represents his own critique of the failures of the Brotherhood color-neutrality, which denied the material conditions of racism and lived experiences of blackness. For the protagonist, his concept of race shifts throughout the novel, from an idealized Washingtonian, separate-but-equal ethos, to an illusory color-neutrality, to his eventual acceptance of his own invisibility, or awareness that his blackness, despite the contention over its signification, is merely an empty signifier. This is a complex negotiation that Ellison conducts, in which negating stereotyped conceptions of blackness involves attesting other essential notions, leading Ellison to posit the centrality of performativity, as opposed to inherence, in expressions of racial identity.

Chapter Two continues the previous chapter's concerns with the psychic consequences of defining a racial self through contradistinctions. This chapter directs its analysis towards literary references to lawn jockeys, whose functional obsolescence within the settings of their individual texts suggests a utility beyond the pictorial. Each of the texts investigates the ways racial boundaries and stratifications are reinforced, and this chapter examines the moments where characters metaphorically collide with racial perimeters which (prominently or coincidentally) involve images of lawn jockeys or other outdoor racist ornaments. This chapter explores how organizing physical space—segregated neighborhoods, for example--merge the racial and spatial imaginaries to naturalize racial distinction. Adrienne Brown's *The Black Skyscraper* (2017) investigates how architectural design and spatial organization both aid and problematize the

optics of racial differentiation. For Brown, the vantage points these multistoried edifices provide expose the problematics of establishing racial difference through the visual. My chapter similarly explores the ramifications of the merger of the spatial and racial, and posits that racist lawn ornaments like the iron groomsmen assuage hegemonic anxieties over the dissolution of racial distinction.

The constellation of texts creates an expansive periodization, spanning the 1940's to the early 2000's. Though the inclusion of images of racist lawn ornaments determined this eclectic grouping, the sustained symbolic utility of this object as an articulator of racial anxieties opens an aperture of insight into the continued presence of iron groomsmen on American lawns. In the two earliest texts, Raymond Chandler's *The High Window* (1942) and Flannery O'Connor's "The Artificial Nigger" (1957) interactions with lawn ornaments intervene in separate crises of white intracultural melancholia. In both texts, the authors probe the interweaving of racial and class structures that stabilizes white hegemonic control. For Chandler, Marlowe's identifying with the Murdocks' lawn jockey signifies Marlowe's recognition of his own lower status. In O'Connor's text, Mr. Head struggles to maintain his sense of superiority, and his chance encounter with a lawn ornament rejuvenates his wilting assurance of supremacy. In both works, blackness symbolizes lower caste in the consciousnesses of the protagonists, and the fact that the validations the characters experience revolve around a mere ornament exposes the artificialities of these hierarchies. Ralph Ellison's posthumous *Three Days Before the Shooting* (published in 2011, but written and published in other drafts) also deals with the struggle of racial individuation of his protagonist, white Northern journalist Welborn McIntyre. In *Sag Harbor* (2009), Colson Whitehead's protagonist also struggles to correlate his racial subjectivity along the confines of socioeconomic and racial/spatial demarcations of blackness.

In O'Connor and Whitehead's texts, these moments initiate a racial bildungsroman, where the encounters with racial barriers signify a Lacanian mirror that splits subjectivity into self /racial self. This fracturing, or divide between an individual subjectivity and a racialized self develops into a version of the lost self mourned by the racial melancholic. For the other works, the groomsmen frame moments of recognizing the artificiality and fictiveness of racial differentiation. For example, Welborn McIntyre's dreamt interaction with the lawn jockey in Ellison's novel critiques the fraught navigation of white racial guilt. In the scene, McIntyre is confronted by his own white hegemonic viewpoints signified by an imagined, sentient lawn jockey. The resulting confrontation represents the psychic tensions between a desire for racial predominance, but a disavowal of the actions that would guarantee such positionality. Despite his purported liberalism and objectivity in his views on race, McIntyre nonetheless represents another buttress in racial oppression: McIntyre's idealism and naivete are merely facets of ethnocentric entitlement which fail to acknowledge the pervasiveness of racism. Colson Whitehead's narrator meditates on his racial identity and the performative aspects of it. Whitehead explores the (im)possibility of an intrinsic sense of a racial identity through his narrator's summer vacation in Sag Harbor. Whitehead's narrative portrays one of the central positions of postblackness, a conceptualization of blackness that stems from the gradual intergenerational discrepancies between the lived experiences of different segments of the black population. The protagonist's affluent upbringing distinguishes him from not only other African Americans his age, but from the African American experience of the past, calling into question the applicability of the values of past generations to his present experience.

Chapters 3 through 5 study the material objects themselves, exploring how the figurines and other objects examine and intervene with the racial ontologies that substantiate hegemonic

dominance. The arguments in these chapters synthesize theories from several disciplines to account for paradoxical presence of a racist paraphernalia market in the purported post-race, color neutral zeitgeist of 21st century America. Bill Brown's concept of thing theory provides a framework for conceptualizing the shift in use value and signification of black memorabilia. Combining Brown's thing theory with Cheng's racial melancholia allows me to illuminate the motivations behind the historical revisioning and re-signifying that justify collecting racist memorabilia. Chapter 3 looks into the arbitrary interpretation and assumptions that can be inferred from the race of the individual collectors. This chapter considers the extent that the objects' signification can be altered by the intention of the individual seller or purchaser. The final two chapters, 4 and 5, look at the various manifestations of two of the most enduring racial tropes, the mammy and loyal darky, and the psychological utility these constructs have in maintaining hegemonic whiteness. The multiple manifestations of these images, from their use in advertisement, to their appropriation by black artists, reveal how mythologies have become ingrained in the American imaginary.

Chapter 3 approaches black collectibles price guides as sites of ideological tension and contradiction. In the guides and online collector forums, one finds blithe advice on distinguishing authentic pieces or involving one's family in this pastime frequently juxtaposed with images of ceramic tableaus of black children devoured by alligators. At best, such instances could reflect the belief that in this purported post racial era, such objects are mere artifacts of a distant past. On the other hand, the continued commerce in collectibles could perpetuate the stereotypical definitions of blackness and structures of white supremacy with which the objects were infused. In these texts, the descriptions and presentations of the items seek to depoliticize the act of collecting through nominal, superficial acknowledgments of a racist past, followed by

declarations of the importance of preserving that history. These attempts to frame collecting within a discourse of color-neutrality merely de-prioritize the perspective of the raced Other. This chapter grapples with these, and several other contradictions that undergird racist memorabilia collection. With the resumption of trade and popularity of black memorabilia, the purported rationale for the respite (discordance with modern ideas of cultural sensitivity), coupled with the justifications for their return (the need to study history) appear to equivocate the meaning of the objects. My analysis of the Black Americana collecting practices (advertisements for memorabilia sales, item descriptions) draws on Toni Morrison's (1992) assessment of American literature's predisposition to imagine a white readerly perspective, and asserts that the collecting experience presupposes and constructs a white audience. Many black collectors of memorabilia, however, challenge this tendency, but their works nevertheless include obligatory explanations of their fascination for the objects. With the possibility that collecting the items perpetuates the racist conceptions, African American collectors and consumers, perhaps from ingrained sense of racial solidarity, believe that an intellectual rationale must be offered that eliminates the possibility of intentionally sustaining the racist import. As the owner of a small collection of ephemera, I find myself qualifying my items, excusing their presence in my home as a necessity for this dissertation. Dr. David Pilgrim, the founder of the Jim Crow Museum of Racist Memorabilia at Ferris State University, which houses the largest collection of black ephemera in the world, explores the ambivalence he feels in this enterprise. On the website for the Museum, Pilgrim includes an essay entitled "The Garbage Man: Why I Collect Racist Objects" (2012) that outlines the museum's mission to "use intolerance to teach tolerance." When I visited the museum last year, the sheer volume of the objects somehow was more startling than the grotesque figurations of African Americans. When Henry Louis Gates,

another avid collector, visited the museum, he had a similar reaction to the superfluity of the figurines, and began questioning the expedience of mass producing the items. While these inquiries could lead to other studies on their own, I characterize this response of intellectualizing the objects (one which I commit throughout my dissertation) to the melancholic acts of anticipating and insulating the self from racial trauma. African Americans ownership of black ephemera paradoxically articulates a distance between the racial subjectivity and stereotypes. The presence of black collectors and curators of these objects raises the possibility of a shift in the signification of these objects, and this chapter contemplates whether African American collectors tacitly support the arguments made by white collectors about the change in meaning of the items. Characterizing the collectibles as palimpsests facilitates their resignification, but runs the risk of reifying the constructs. For many white collectors, these figurines are merely objects, defunct signifiers of past conceptions, but such seemingly colorblind interpretations actually reveal the presence of the same white privilege that engendered the creation of such items. The rationalizations employed by white collectors involve an interest in "preserving history," though the aspects of the past commemorated in Jim Crow signs and Gator bait figurines portray a history of hegemonic dominance and racial trauma. This chapter examines the possibilities of resignification, and considers the ramifications of appropriations that can challenge racial misrepresentation, or merely reconfigure it to match the prevailing political climate. In addition, this chapter interrogates the notion that the positionality and/or race of the consumer of black ephemera determines the signified content of the objects.

Chapter 4 continues its coverage of the romanticization of these images, but moves into a study of public displays of the tropes in the form of statues and monuments. Presented as commemorations of black contributions to the South, tributes such as the Good Darky statue in

Natchitoches, Louisiana naturalize the mythology of the subservient African American. Folded within this revision of historical race relations is a paternalistic recasting of the white position as one of a gentle benefactor. These representations uncover mechanisms of white hegemonic thought that simultaneously assuage white guilt while reinforcing white supremacy. The chapter then moves from the material monuments of Southern mythologies to textual ones, focusing on Kathryn Stockett's novel *The Help* (2009). The acclaimed novel and its commercially successful film adaptation have spawned a market of fetishized collectibles that commemorate characters who themselves were romanticized portraits of 1950's interracial relations. This material afterlife uncovers the motivations, processes and historical myopia that activates the creation of racialized collectibles. These objects celebrate not only a refigured, palatable version of the Mammy, but also represent white disavowals of racism. *The Help* problematically celebrates racial trope that advocates black docility, and suggests the racial strife of its historical moment can be alleviated through the model of the relationship between black domestic workers and their white employers. The South of the 1920s saw increased lynchings and racial violence, so when Jack Bryan dedicated the statue of a stooping, deferential, stereotypical black "Uncle" to his Louisiana hometown in 1927, the image appeared a prescript for appropriate black behavior. Set in 1960's Mississippi, *The Help*'s the racial tensions appear almost inconsequential when juxtaposed with the stratified relations of domestics and employers. Stockett's work metatextually explores (and perhaps exemplifies) the trope of expiating white racial grief through prejudicial treatment of blacks. Although the text exposes the hypocrisies of southern values in the Jim Crow south, it nonetheless positions the black image as the Other, literally and figuratively trapping the African American in a position of servitude. These revisionist conceptions of past and present racial relations reveal the cyclical nature of racial anxieties that

require the results of oppression to be visible, but the contrivances effecting it to be hidden beneath beliefs of naturalness of the white racial order.

Issues of collectivity, racial representation, and black engagement with items collide in the culminating chapter of this dissertation. In Chapter 5, the appropriation of stereotypical constructs collides with this double bind of a limiting expectations of racial subjectivity and communal blackness. Ellison's documented skepticism on communal identification, and the restrictions it places on one's subjectivity and aesthetic aims finds a parallel in the controversies surrounding the art of Kara Walker. Like several black artists before her, Walker appropriates stereotypical tropes, but rather than reverse their imaging to negate racial misconceptions and promote black pride, Walker problematizes the conventional polemic stances taken up by black arts. Walker's pieces, and the debates they provoke, frame a larger, intergenerational conflict between the ethos of the 1970's Black Arts Movement epitomized by artists like Betye Saar, and new artists, whose philosophical leanings, political sensibilities and views on appropriate racial representation diverge from their antecedents. Chapter 5 is about the appropriation and reclamation of the collectibles, and the tropes they embody, conducted by black artists. This chapter traces the circuit of these inferiority-enforcing tropes from their manifestation as consumer items into signifiers of abject blackness that African Americans uncannily recognize and disavow. One of the main lines of inquiry this book addresses is re-significatory potential of the collectibles, and this chapter presents attempts by artists to reclaim these racist emblems of black inferiority. Like the previous chapter, Chapter 5 continues the focus on the mammy construct, with the Aunt Jemima version constituting the focal point of the artists' revisions. Engaging the Aunt Jemima construct specifically confronts the intersection of racialization, objectification and commodification that Antebellum conceptions of blackness encompass.

Though the Jemima archetype has its origins in minstrel songs, the Pearl Milling company solidified its mythos with the Jemima trademark that would symbolize the Lost Cause nostalgia of an imagined past of racial harmony in which African Americans were content with white hegemonic domination. In addition to its associations with marketing, the mammy stereotype was used to solidify white womanhood and neutralize the threats of miscegenation that the black presence in the domestic sphere could raise. Several late twentieth century artists would reverse the mythos of the masculinized, asexual mammy, and take up the construct as a subversive figure that challenged gender normativity and intraracial sexual discrimination. The chapter views the works of these artists using perspectives from Hortense Spillers' seminal "Mama's Baby, Papa's Maybe: An American Grammar Book" (1987), and takes up her observation that the structural practices of slavery excluded African Americans from heteropatriarchal gender constructs. This positioning however houses subversive and liberatory possibilities. Many of the works that revise Aunt Jemima recast her as a revolutionary figure, challenging both racial and sexual oppression imposed on black female domestic workforce, and intraculturally in the black resistance movements. The divergent appropriations of this image by black artists frame a generational and philosophical conflict between the elder black artists of the Black Arts Movement, and the younger, emerging class of black artisans. The art of Kara Walker, like those of her predecessors, reconfigures racist tropes and imagery, but rather than articulating the ethos of this post-Civil Rights collective that prioritizes respectability politics, racial pride, and fidelity to black solidarity, Walker's pieces investigate these notions as well. Though her pieces articulate ambivalence towards racial collectivity, they advocate a sense of self-criticality that can conflict with the more proscriptive notions of racial representation and aesthetics associated with the Black Arts Movement. The intraracial policing and hostility towards Walker's series of

silhouettes reflects Ralph Ellison's conflicts with the liberal intelligentsia of his period[7]. Walker intimates a similar skepticism on the restrictions of collectivity that Ellison held, and like her predecessor, questioned the expected centrality of polemic in African American art. In my review of this conflict, I consider the possibility that foreclosing avenues of racial dialogue further sediments racial misconceptions within the American imaginary.

"Jemimas, Jockeys and Jolly Banks" questions the traditional assignation of contrasting motives of black and white collectors alike, and considers arbitrary ways in which the items in possession of an African American become political and counter hegemonic, while for non-blacks, the items could be interpreted as perpetuating the same notions that went in their (re)production. While it is tempting to attribute a shift in signification to the use and collection of the artifacts (though fictive) by African Americans, black collecting could be a discursive statement in itself—an attempt to contend the definition or simply to remove the items from circulation. Bill Brown explains that the act of collecting could attempt "to keep the past proximate, to incorporate the past into our daily lives, or in order to make the past distant, to objectify it (as an idea in a thing) in the effort to arrest its spectral power" (Brown 12). Rather than attempt to resolve the possibility of resignification of the objects, I assert that the black collectible functions as a palimpsest of racial discourse in which imbricated meanings reflect the complexities and problematics of defining racial identity. The objects function as metonyms for the larger struggles against the architecture of white supremacy, where the objects represent ballasts of hegemonic ideologies—features which can be sites of buttress or collapse of the white power structure. My dissertation seeks to uncover the expedience of the creation, proliferation and defense of racist representation, and posits that the misrepresentations retrofit an attenuated

[7] see Ellison, Ralph. "The World and the Jug," *Shadow and Act*, Random House, 1964, pp. 107-142.

belief in inherent white supremacy. This counternarrativity extends beyond negating or appropriating racist images, but provides a method of interpretation that reveals racial anxieties undergirding white supremacy—the multiplicity and potentialities of blackness that provoke grotesque misrepresentations and systemic oppression.

Chapter 1: Collectible Blackness: Racial Metonymy as Melancholia in Ralph Ellison's *Invisible Man*

A real subjection is born mechanically from a fictitious relation.

Michel Foucault, *Discipline and Punish*

When learning to prepare the color "Optic White" at Liberty Paints, the narrator of Ralph Ellison's *Invisible Man* (1952) watched questioningly as his supervisor Kimbro opened "one of the buckets, stirring a milky brown substance…vigorously until it became glossy white" (199). Instructed to add ten drops of liquid into each can, the narrator hesitated, for "the liquid inside was dead black" (Ellison 200), but after stirring, produced a paint Kimbro exclaimed was "the purest white that can be found" (Ellison 202). The narrator, however, notices that "a gray tinge flowed through the whiteness, and Kimbro had failed to detect it" (Ellison 205) leaving him with the "feeling that something had gone wrong, something far more important than the paint; that either I had played a trick on Kimbro or he like the trustees and Bledsoe was playing one on me" (Ellison 205-06). This "trick," or Kimbro's purported imperception of the black impression on the paint, reveals the narrator's belated discovery of his own Du Boisian double consciousness. Discomfort emerges from the collision of his teetering accommodationist idealism and stark racial reality, betraying his dilatory progress in this racial bildungsroman, and displaying one of the many paradoxes about race which Ellison excavates. Although this scene symbolizes the indispensability of blackness in the manufacture of a white racial category, the juxtapositions suggest that these categories are mutually dependent. The double consciousness that the narrator experiences, and to which Bledsoe and the Grandfather allude, is less an essential characteristic of blackness and more a byproduct of the Hegelian dynamics of the American racial imaginary.

Double consciousness identifies the schism between a subjectivity defined from within and one imposed from without, challenging the concept of essential characteristics and disrupting the ostensible foundation of stable racial identity. Ellison does not simply examine the stereotypes about blackness but assesses the extent to which stereotypes create blackness. Eschewing a reductio ad absurdum negation of racial difference, or counterrepresentations which merely replicate racial essentialism, Ellison targets the rationale undergirding consciously perpetuated false representations.

The ubiquity and historical longevity of stereotypical conceptions of blackness ironically reveal the tenuousness of beliefs in white supremacy. The discrepancy between the characteristics of the individual raced Other and the imposed racial stereotypes uncovers the paradox of their perpetuation. Homi Bhabha (1983) explains that the stereotype "must always be *in excess* of what can be empirically proved or logically construed" (Bhabha 293), and this discordance which acknowledges its own fictiveness seemingly precludes their use. It is their utility, however, and not their fidelity to the lived raced experience, that perpetuates their use. For Bhabha, the stereotype, this "metaphoric 'masking' is inscribed on a lack which must then be concealed" (Bhabha 300) to maintain the construct of white supremacy. Furthermore, a stereotype requires "for its successful signification, a continual and repetitive chain of other stereotypes" (Bhabha 300), reflected in their pervasiveness across film, literature, theater, advertising, and other cultural productions, all which attempt to naturalize black inferiority. Despite the enforcement of racial caste that slavery and Jim Crow ensured, cultural products, such as minstrel shows, black collectibles and coon songs nevertheless promulgated images of black inferiority in a superfluity that reveal more fractures and contradictions in the hegemonic

edifice than they seemingly concretize. For Ellison, the "simple racial clichés"[11] predominating twentieth-century fictive representations of blacks arise from a white "an inner need to believe."[12] In "Change the Joke and Slip the Yoke" (1958), Ellison observes that "out of the counterfeiting of the black American's identity there arises a profound doubt in the white man's mind as to the authenticity of his own image of himself" ("Change the Joke" 53). The collected stereotypes aggregate a fixed, black "other" against which whites, in a quasi-Hegelian gambit, can assuage or obfuscate doubts about their superiority. The Hegelian Master/Slave dialectic, however, suggests that authentic self-awareness necessitates recognition of one's own dependence on the Other; although the dialectic presupposes the difference between the two positions, it implies a discordance between self-recognition and enforced caste. In the American racial imaginary, the contentions over characteristics distinguishing black and white preclude the mutual recognition the dialectic ostensibly creates, keeping the black "other" relegated and ontologically indeterminate. Rather than spur recognition of the racial other, the "profound doubt" that both engenders and stems from white supremacy requires black misrepresentation for its simultaneous abeyance and abetment.

Reifying white superiority requires cultural practices and productions that manufacture racial distinctions which appear "fixed in nature"[13] and inconspicuous in their ubiquity. Despite this natural veneer, Stuart Hall (1989) asserts that the "ways in which black people, black experiences, were positioned and subject-ed in the dominant regimes of representation were the effects of a critical exercise of cultural power and normalization" (Hall 225). Projecting a stable

[11] Ellison, Ralph. "Twentieth-Century Fiction and the Black Mask of Humanity," *Shadow and Act*. Random House, 1964.
[12] Ellison, Ralph. "Twentieth-Century Fiction and the Black Mask of Humanity," *Shadow and Act*. Random House, 1964.
[13] Jefferson, Thomas. *Notes on the State of Virginia*. London, 1787.

edifice of innate supremacy necessitates concealing its surrounding scaffolding; according to Ellison, whites justified oppression by subjecting blacks to a "process of institutionalized dehumanization" that reconciled the "sacred democratic belief that all men are created equal," with the "treatment of every tenth man as though he were not" ("Change the Joke" 28). Establishing an African American identity, even as Jim Crow and other inferiority-substantiating practices would dissipate, required neutralizing those insoluble, foundational stereotypes. Counterdefinition, however, upholds the arbitrary racial categorizations that facilitate hegemonic dominance by ensuring the racialized other "be caught up in a power situation of which they are themselves the bearers."[14] Throughout *Invisible Man*, several African American characters declare their own identities by disavowing characters (and oftentimes objects) that embody attributes they identify as stereotypical and abject. Ellison frames many of the disputes about subjectivity around interactions with black collectibles. As fossils of racial stereotype and historical hegemony, the collectibles elucidate the schema of the American program of race: an eliding of race signifiers into the signification of race that composes a fixed, objectified "Other" against which "white men could become human" ("Change the Joke" 29). For the African American, such elision sutures subjectivity to imposed conceptions of blackness, which Hall attests makes "us see and experience *ourselves* as 'Other'" (Hall 225) and complicates the intersection of individuation and collective cultural identity. Ellison uncovers this double bind of African American subjectivity, where the plasticity of the black identity both invalidates

[14] Foucault, Michel. *Discipline and Punish: The Birth of the Prison*. Second Vintage books ed., Vintage Books, 1995.

essentialist notions of blackness while demonstrating their indispensability to, and inextricability from selfhood.

Invisible Man evaluates counterrepresentations, appropriations and other discursive attempts at reconstituting blackness for both their unifying possibilities, and complicity in circumscribing identity. Ellison investigates the inherent paradoxes of declaring a racial sense of self, in which individuation may necessitate repudiating not only black stereotypes, but blackness itself. Ellison's meditations further an extensive discourse on the ambivalent relations African Americans have with their own racialized identities rooted in the phenomenon of passing. Writers such as Nella Larsen (1929), James Weldon Johnson (1912), Charles Chesnutt (1899) have all explored the psychological tensions and ramifications of resigning the imposed "raced" identity to obtain the social and material advantages of whiteness. Passing critiques the arbitrary and contradictory logic of dialectic racialization; the "passing" subject manipulates the dialectic's intolerance of ambiguity, becoming both the perpetrator and victim of racial miscasting of which whites are complicit. Ellison's concept of invisibility expands the nuances of passing and moves beyond deconstructing the illogic of the "color line" to examine the multiple significances of racialization. The renunciation of collective blackness, and the psychological pressure of concealing one's associative relations to blackness (history, locale, family) in the absence of visual markers of race constitute the same psychic conditions theorized in racial melancholia, and Ellison's explorations of the internal and social problematics of racial identity make *Invisible* Man a seminal text in theorizations on racial melancholia. Anne Cheng (2001) includes readings of the novel that widen her framework of racial melancholia to include the racialized black experience. Cheng notes that the text "undermines the integrity of group ideology and of communal possibilities, whether hegemonic or subaltern" (Cheng 137), and the

tensions between the individual and the collective that Cheng observes initiates this expansion. Despite the ambivalence surrounding the concept of racial essence, this oft-examined notion constitutes the basis of a collective cultural identity. For Ellison, the elision of collectivity and individuality disrupts the development of subjectivity, in which the adoption of communal blackness metonymizes the formation of identity. The text portrays racial collectivity as a construct that simultaneously restricts and connects the African American subject to racial selfhood. This ambivalent relationship uncovers another dynamic in Cheng's model, in which the introjected loss of full recognition occurs intraculturally, where the black subject must adopt the imposed racial identity to take part in the collective. The cultural and behavioral norms associated with black collectivity, however, may diverge from an internal sense of selfhood, precipitating a bipartite alienation in the black subject. The black subject not only introjects the loss of fully-recognized citizenship within the American racial dialectic, but also internalizes a set of expected African American behaviors and perspectives that circumscribe individuation. For Ellison, this collectivity is a trap, where acknowledging black communal identity may perpetuate the dialectical divisions that ensure racial stratification.

Although racial collectivity implies homogeneity amongst its adherents, ironically, ambivalence and desires for distinction are amongst the commonalities. The narrator's sojourn at Mary Rambo's boarding house uncovers these ambiguities of communal racial identification, in which the parallels between the processes of inter- and intra- racial individuation complicate notions of an essential black self. While Stuart Hall asserts that the complexity of black essence "exceeds this binary structure of representation" (Hall 228), the apparatus of racial distinction nevertheless functions on contrasting totalized polarities. Scott Thomas Gibson (2010) notes that defining a racial identity involves "articulating one's relationship in reference to the broadly

oppositional categories of 'black' and 'white' and in terms of the individual's relationship to a racial collective" (Gibson 355-56). In several of the narrator's Harlem encounters, characters assert definitions of communal blackness by repudiating diverging expressions and the "others" who ostensibly embody them. This replication of American racial contrivances neutralizes the self-determining potential of collectives: the synecdochic compression that the term "self-determination" imposes on a group reifies expectations of monolithic blackness. Wahneema Lubiano (1997) traces how these conflicting, potentially counterproductive dynamics are at play even in collective resistance against hegemonic dominance. Lubiano observes the struggle with individuated racial subjectivities embedded within the concept of black nationalism, arguing that the movement acts "both as a bulwark against racism and as a disciplinary activity within the group" (232). Ellison sees the potential of communal blackness to be both a means of political liberation, and a stabilizer of Hegelian racialization. As Gibson observes, "*Invisible Man* can be read as both black resistance against white hegemony and the individual against the social collective *within* a specific racial category" (Gibson 356). The narrator's interactions with other black characters illustrate the pervasiveness and inescapability of this framework, for the very negations and classifications instrumenting his individuation also catalyze racialization. Randal Doane describes this paradoxical dependence on the play of differences, observing that the narrator's "consciousness in being, moves through a dialectic of appropriation and refusal" (Doane 166) to negotiate his subjectivity, even if it involves denying that of another. Folding her into a collective type, the narrator explains that "people like Mary…seldom know where their personalities end and yours begins; they usually think in terms of 'we' while I have always tended to think in terms of 'me'" (Ellison 316). The use of the objective case over the reflexive underscores his internalization of Otherness and designates his own perspective as an object—a

contingent receiver, not producer, of action. Throughout the text, Ellison disrupts the dialectic and other racialization ballasts to demonstrate their untenability as constructs of subjectivity.

Though the narrator subsumes Mary into a homogenizing black collective, her dialogue reveals an ambivalence imbricated beneath her assumed communal piety. After helping the Invisible Man recuperate from his post-accident procedure, she asks what he plans to "make" out of himself, hoping he pursue "something that's a credit to the race" (Ellison 255). Her statements reflect the complexity of reconciling collective and individual identity; Mary encourages the Invisible Man's volition, but the use of the verb "make" associates him with an object, materially divergent from the self and representative of communal attributes. Ellison, however, tempers the suggestion that "crediting the race" can alter conceptions of blackness: proffering the exceptional, "Talented tenth" African Americans as counterepresentatives replicates the structure of stereotype and privileges collective image over individuated selfhood. Moreover, while transmuting individuals into exemplars may refute notions of innate black inferiority, they simultaneously mitigate the pervasiveness of hegemonic dominance. While presenting figures who circumvent racial oppression illustrates the individuals' substantial abilities and resolve, it could admit suppositions that these conditions are both surmountable and less virulent than decried, and undercut the urgency of dismantling such systems of oppression. Much like the Invisible Man's post Battle Royale speech, where he must substitute the term social "responsibility" for "equality," the exemplary African-American can be used to dismiss the potency of hegemonic structures and buttress presumptions that indolence, and not oppression, precipitate racial inequities. Within her prompting the narrator to work to "move us all on up a little higher" (Ellison 255), Mary also expresses her own ambivalence about collective representation. Ellison juxtaposes her communal concerns with her injunction to avoid letting

"Harlem git you. I'm in New York, but New York ain't in me" (Ellison 255). By metonymizing undesirable expressions of blackness as locales, Mary can uphold her abstracted communalism while distinguishing herself. Mary attempts to parse her expression of the black identity through the metaphor of location: she figuratively and grammatically reverses the attribution of racial characteristics from imposition to personal volition, becoming a subject occupying, as opposed to an object occupied by significations of blackness. Her chiasmatic definition, however, nullifies her attempt to distinguish herself from the dynamic. Despite the conjunction, subject and object remain syntactically equivalent, interchangeable, and inseparable, paralleling the identificatory snare of dialectic thinking. The contrast of this amalgamated figure of speech (a combination of metonymy, chiasmus, and metaphor) with its own signified content (dividing the self from a collective) exemplifies the intrinsic ambivalence of the raced identity, one that cannot be resolved through means which ultimately perpetuate the racial dialectic.

The interactions with black ephemera signify struggles to reclaim and recast racial definitions. With their shifting, contested import and ironic juxtapositions, black collectibles serve as points of entry into the ambivalences and psychic consequences of racial classification. Ellison analogizes the collectibles to blackness, casting both as floating signifiers whose potential for ambiguous signification jeopardizes a sense of racial selfhood, but also disrupts the racial dialectic. His concept of invisibility is a recognition that blackness is a signifier, one capable of multivalent signification, but subjected to singular essentialism. Ellison juxtaposes the narrator's problematic responses to the ephemera with a gradual illumination of the conceptual distance between blackness as phenotype and blackness-for-others. His reaction to these objects uncovers his internalization of the logic of dialectic racialization; his misconception of racial signifiers as allegorical figures is most apparent on his last day at Mary Rambo's apartment. On

the morning of his move to a Brotherhood apartment, the narrator embroils himself in a conflict with his neighbors over the hitting of a steam line at Mary Rambo's apartment. Accusing the unknown assailants of having "cottonpatch ways," "no respect for the individual" and needing to "act civilized" (Ellison 321), the Invisible Man redoubles the din by kicking the pipe as well. Seeing the "figure of a very black, red-lipped and wide-mouthed Negro" (Ellison 319) coin bank, the narrator hits the pipe with the bank until the figurine shatters. The narrator compresses stereotypical, collective and antiquated notions of blackness (characteristics which his new Brotherhood identity would ostensibly eradicate) and projects them onto an object of whose signification he is uncannily certain and unsure. His questioning of Mary's motives, and his breaking of the bank seek to restore its singular meaning, which ironically undermines the subversive potential of its ambiguity. Bill Brown notes that since black characters own or control the collectibles in the text, ownership can be interpreted as an attempt "to arrest the stereotype, to render it in three-dimensional stasis, to fix a demeaning and/or romanticizing racism with the fortitude of solid form" (Brown 186). According to Henry Louis Gates, Jr., however, "a signifier is never, ultimately, able to escape its received meanings, or concepts, no matter how dramatically such concepts might change through time" (Gates 48). Marc Conner (2004) suggests the objects are "phenomenological," emphasizing "the revelatory power contained within the present moment of being" (174). In other words, the interplay between originary meaning and present context provides another lens through which to view the present historical moment. Rather than reconcile and reduce them to univocality, Ellison signifies on the ephemera, freighting these signifiers with layers of import that threaten to disjoint fixed notions of blackness, and as a corollary, destabilize whiteness. By intimating the possibility of ambiguity of objects such as Mary Rambo's Jolly Nigger bank, Ellison complicates the

redefinition (and totalization) of blackness that the negation or destruction of the objects presumably advances.

With its originary and didactic functions, hegemonic connotations, and (presumed) material durability, the Jolly Nigger bank encapsulates the fraught, unremitting reifying of black inferiority. Patented in 1882, the figurine occasioned "over 600 different varieties and 280 mechanical variants produced between 1875 and 1910" (Barton and Somerville 51) making it one of the most recognizable pieces of black ephemera. Obscuring the line between topical and antique, their continued presence undermines of notions of progress in time or racial conditions, and perpetuates conceptions of race that, unlike other quaint collectibles, cannot be dismissed as obsolete relics of a racist past. Christopher Barton and Kyle Somerville (2012) posit the complicity of these objects in naturalizing racial caste. As both children's toy and adult novelty, the bank constituted "an avenue of racial socialization" (Barton and Somerville 48) used to naturalize the merger of race and class. In the program of investing whiteness with social and economic privilege, blackness was as much identity as expedient, and while "phenotypic differences" would play a major role in racialization, so would cultural stereotypes. Doris Wilkinson (1980) sees the toy bank inculcating hegemonic beliefs, where "the collectively shared psychology of the toymakers is inevitably transferred to the play objects they create" and "ingrained myths of a society are part of the meaning assigned to a toy" (Wilkinson 3). Barton and Somerville explain that using these objects reinforced notions of black subservience/white dominance. The toy design

> ensured that there could be no room for alternative forms of play facilitated by the child's imagination. The mechanism of these toys was such that the mechanical parts create a rigidity of function, as each part of the mechanism fit together in a precise and specific

> way to produce a desired action, and no other action or output besides that intended by the manufacturer was possible…The mechanical toy, therefore, was a contradictory object: it arrested the stereotype which it depicted, while simultaneously bringing it to life in a mechanical form, and served a utilitarian purpose (conveying stereotypes about "outsiders"). (Barton and Somerville 53)

The bank actualizes the quintessential racial other—a fixed, materialized manifestation of stereotype and subjugation. Paradoxically, the bank's fulfillment of this psychic need elucidates the human other's incapability to fill it. Thus, the bank identifies its own fictiveness and melancholic compensatory function. According to Bill Brown, the "uncanniness of the mechanical bank itself" simultaneously uncovers and conceals the inefficacies and contradictions of dialectic racialization:

> the very ontological instability expressed by the artifact itself, the oscillation between animate and inanimate, subject and object, human and thing…has no doubt made it such an iconic emblem of racism. (Brown 199)

The mechanics of racist collectibles serve as metaphors for the permanent othering and white racial myopia perpetuated by dialectic racialization. Attempting to alter white perceptions of blackness by negating stereotypes sustains the positionalities of a dialectic that purposely yields stasis and misrecognition; the African American "must be black in relation to the white man," for the black subject "has no ontological resistance in the eyes of the white man."[15] Ellison's concept of invisibility, both consequence and solution in racialization, emerges as an alternative definition of selfhood when contrasted with the narrator's misperceptions of the collectibles.

[15] Fanon, Frantz. *Black Skin, White Masks*. 1952. Penguin Classics, 2020.

Casey Hayman (2015) categorizes Ellison's fluid conception of African American subjectivity as "meta-blackness," which articulates the relativity, and self-referentiality of blackness, where individuation involves a negotiation with the imposition of characteristics from hegemonic whiteness and black collectivity. Ellison's ambiguous treatment of black collectibles and other "fragments of mass-mediated, popular cultural iconography of blackness" constitute "the very material with which to build an eclectic subjectivity" (Hayman 129). Moreover, Ellison's concept of invisibility becomes apt metaphor for this perception of blackness. Invisibility, however, surpasses a mere representation of white misconceptions of blackness, and instead signifies the function of blackness in the ways by which African Americans and whites define their subjectivities. It is this self-referentiality and consciousness that supports Hayman's positing of "meta" conceptualization of one's racial identity. In his description of his invisibility, the narrator states that "people" see "only my surroundings, themselves, or figments of their imagination" (Ellison 1), making invisibility a representation of "being-for-another" positionality against which racial individuation can occur.

Ellison amplifies the details of the initial coin bank scene through iterations and reversals which reveal the uncanniness of racial individuation and function as precursors to his later recognition of his invisibility. After gathering the fragments, he hurriedly conceals the broken bank, concluding "If she opens the door, I'm lost" (Ellison 320). Mary's discovery of the missing bank (an item representing racial characteristics which define and distinguish her from the Invisible Man) would eliminate their dissimilarity. Without this intra-racial othering, the "I," or discrete, pseudo-post-racial Brotherhood identity of the narrator, would indeed be lost in collective blackness. As he glances at his new name on the small slip of paper, but feels the weight of the broken bank contents, the narrator reflects "I needed nothing like this to remind me

of my last morning at Mary's" (Ellison 327). When he throws the package in a trashcan in front of a house, the occupant demands that he retrieve it because "we keep our place clean and respectable and we don't want you field niggers coming up from the South and ruining things" (Ellison 328). Referring to herself as "we," the woman distinguishes, and by default defines, a collective group identity contradistinctive to the narrator. Her adoption of a historical, hegemonic stratification of African American replicates the dialectic structure, and like the presence of the bank, perpetuates the past. On his second attempt, when he simply drops it in the street, a Southern migrant African American returns it to the narrator. When the narrator disclaims the package, the Samaritan deems the narrator a "confidence man or dope peddler" working "pigeon drops" (Ellison 330) and returns it after declaring that "you young New York Negroes is a blip" (Ellison 330). In both instances, the identical act of discarding the broken bank links the narrator with two conflicting notions of collective blackness, suggesting that such designations are more self-affirming than descriptive of the Other. The combination of this reversal of positionalities, where the narrator becomes the object upon which subjects assign contrary traits, and his reluctance to abandon the bank reflect a racial melancholia in which "the invisible man is both a melancholic object and a melancholic subject, both the one lost and the one losing" (Cheng 17). In this scene, the abject racial self that he tries to disavow is thrust back upon him in the form of the bank that he cannot discard.

As a figure of Ellison's signifying, the bank reconfigures other elements and motifs of the story, that furthers the narrator's myopic reading of the object. When examining the bank, the narrator notices that the bank's "expression seemed more of a strangulation than a grin. It was choking, filled to the throat with coins" (Ellison 319). This image of choking relates to the grandfather's entreaty to cause whites to choke on the counterfeit image of blacks. Although it

inverts the ingestion image, the bank can depict the investment in hegemonic definitions of blackness. It also "busts open" when assaulted by the narrator, but like the advice itself, remains attached to the Invisible Man. In addition, the parallels to segments of the Battle Royal scene further solidify the bank's connection to white perceptions. In both cases, the coins animate black stereotypes, rendering such characteristics fungible and palpably distinct from whiteness. By forcing the young African Americans to watch the nude dancer, and then observe the youths' reluctant arousal, the whites reenact a melancholic tableau of the assumed and feared hypersexuality of black men. Kyla Tompkins notes that "nonwhite bodies here enact extremes of pleasure and pain; bodies exploding with affect encode the imagined hyperphysicality of nonwhiteness but also integrate the white consumer's felt experience of an increasingly interracial public sphere with the sensory experience of commodity consumption" (Tompkins 180). Structured to assuage white melancholic anxieties, the Battle Royal ritualistically reenacts control over the black physicality previously mastered and presently feared by whites. The blindfolded fighting, combined with the competition for coins, signify a diverting of frustration with interracial inequities into intraracial conflict. Saidiya Hartman suggests these spectacles were designed to obfuscate the existence of racialized oppression from oppressive whites. Naturalizing racialization requires

> an extremity of force and violence to maintain this seeming 'givenness'. The 'givenness' of blackness results from the brutal corporealization of the body and the fixation of his constituent parts as indexes of truth and racial meaning. The construction of black bodies as phobogenic objects estranged in a corporeal malediction and the apparent biological certainty of this malediction attest to the power of the performative to produce the very subject which it appears to express. (Hartman 57)

For the spectators, the juxtaposition of these mastery rites with bestowing a scholarship neutralizes a counterexample to their conception of monolithic, inferior blackness. By obscuring the distinction between the narrator and his peers, and correcting his statement of "social equality," the group retraces the "proper paths" of the racial other. The staging of these manifestations reveals the potency of white racial anxieties, raising the question of whether the white supremacy is not the construct needing validation, but merely another contrivance to assuage white fears.

Ellison reconfigures this trope of enforced blindness through the narrator's problematic membership in the Brotherhood. In this thinly veiled critique of Marxist historicism, Ellison uncovers the hegemonic framework beneath the promises of post-race collectivity. The historical determinism of the Brotherhood blindly dismisses a fraught present, and its disavowals of caste qua race place the onus of oppression on the raced instead of the racist. For Ellison, the Brotherhood's avoidance of racial difference denies present oppression and perpetuates the very racial hierarchization enforced by the Battle Royale audience. Cheng furthers this criticism of the Brotherhood, noting that the collective "provides a quintessential example of group ideology: its membership requires the forsaking of other identities" (Cheng 137). By characterizing the repudiation of racial difference as an evolutionary end, the Brotherhood reduces racial caste oppression to individuated racial identity. In contrast to a Hegelian dialectic that promises mutual recognition of individuals, the Brotherhood ideology forsakes the "other," which fortifies, rather than neutralizes hegemony. Moreover, these "assimilative fantasies" of the group entail

> mutual counter-incorporation, where the white man and the black man mime each other, both trying to approximate the certitude of their identity through the other,

> supported by their fantasmatic staging of the other, although of course power comes to nuance the implications of such mimicry for both parties. (Cheng 128)

These nominal disavowals of race reinforce the abject status of blackness, in which collectivity and race neutrality depend on the sublimation of racial subjectivity (a precursor to the invisibility that the narrator will uncannily come to embrace). Ironically, the Brotherhood seems to mirror, not counter, the program of American racialization, which in its renunciation of otherness upholds a "standard, white national ideal…sustained by the exclusion-yet-retention of racialized others" (Cheng 10).

In his portrayal of Brotherhood notions of race neutrality, Ellison subtly alludes to the inescapability of the structures of the racial imaginary. When Brother Jack asked about the narrator's relationship to the evicted couple, the narrator flippantly describes their racial commonalities, prompting an outraged Jack to exclaim "'Why do you fellows always talk in terms of race!'" to which narrator responds, "What other terms do you know?" (Ellison 292). Though Jack ostensibly eschews race, he refers to the narrator as "you fellows," ironically distinguishing the narrator, and classifying him in a totalized category. The narrator's question, as it turns out, becomes more prescient than he realizes. Though he had misgivings about joining, the narrator felt that Jack spoke for a "different, bigger 'we'," and saw the Brotherhood as a way to avoid "disintegration" (Ellison 353). Though the narrator fears falling into insignificance, his fear of disintegrating, or no longer being assimilated into this racially-neutral collective, intimates a fear of losing himself in totalizing blackness. For David Eng, the impetus and anxieties surrounding assimilation produce melancholia. Eng explains assimilation still involves adopting norms foreclosed to them, which renders the process of racialization a "series of failed and unresolved integrations" (Eng 670). Hence, Brotherhood membership holds melancholic

implications for both whites and raced others, exemplifying the intracultural nuance of racial melancholia; for the black member, this color neutrality prompts internalization of an unraced ideality that remains unattainable even with relinquishing one's identity. For the white subject, rejecting race palliates the melancholic guilt undergirding privileges of white dominance that they simultaneously assume and deny.

The eviction speech which garners the attention of the Brotherhood, and the yam eating scene preceding it, trace the narrator's connection to a black collective identity which he will imminently abnegate. Temporarily, at least, the narrator recognizes a forgotten aspect of his identity when eating a yam from a street vendor. The first bite overwhelms the Invisible Man "with such a surge of homesickness that I turned away to keep control. I walked along, munching the yam, just as suddenly overcome by an intense feeling of freedom" (264). Randall Doane describes the yam as a representation of the narrator's connection to his past, and by extension, racial collectivity. In this scene, the concepts of food, the past, and identity formation intersect. By consuming the yams, the narrator projects his past/collective blackness into an object which he re-incorporates into his sense of self. Although he quips yams are his "birthmark," the narrator articulates his desire for agency in a process of racial individuation, which, in the American racial imaginary, marks the Other. The eviction speech furthers his reinvestment into black collectivity; when describing his impetus to defend the elderly couple, the narrator avers that "it's taken me a long time to feel it, but they're folks just like me" (Ellison 291). Jack, however, contradicts the realization, asserting that both the evicted couple, and the narrator's "past" self are dead, Brother Jack explains that "history" will create a new self for the narrator. Rather than resolve his ambivalence towards black collective identity, Brotherhood doctrine connects his renunciation of his collective blackness with what Cheng suggests is "the idea of a

healthy, progressive history, in which events can be successfully mourned and left behind" (Cheng 130). There is an additional element to the Brotherhood's historicism, and Ellison aligns its revisionism with the similar sanitizations of the American racial past. Though the focus of Cheng's melancholic analysis of *Invisible Man* is the narrator's ambivalence with his racial identity, the juxtaposition of the Brotherhood's attempt to reconfigure the narrator's interpretation of history and selfhood exemplify elements of a white racial melancholia that expands Cheng's theorization of "white guilt" that haunts the white power structure. The desire to revise historical awareness and its influence on the narrator's view of the self and present race relations seeks to efface Brother Jack's repressed acknowledgment of his own complicity in perpetuating a systemic racial hierarchy.

The need to revise history and reconstitute the black identities it engenders function as a melancholic compensation to insulate the white psyche from recognizing its role in racial oppression, rendering the racialized African American as the object against which concepts of whiteness can emerge. Ellison undermines the efficacy of erasure in eliminating ambivalences through the novel's uncanny return of symbols of collective and personal racial past. emblemized by such material referents as the bank or shackles, and as Hortense Spillers (1977) notes, personified by the presence of Trueblood and Brockway the yam seller[16] which would allow the narrator to dismiss his own melancholic ambivalence and repression as expiring remnants, not revenants, of the past.

In addition to intimating elements of white racial melancholia, the depiction of the Brotherhood reveals Ellison's complex relations with Communism, though the caricatured

[16] Spillers, Hortense. "Ellison's 'Usable Past': Toward a Theory of Myth." *Interpretations*, vol. 9, no. 1, 1977, pp. 53–69. *JSTOR*, http://www.jstor.org/stable/23240431.

portrayal reduces the party to another metaphoric ballast of white hegemonic domination. Barbara Foley (1997) reestablishes the historicism of Ellison's problematic Brotherhood portrayal, and reads the characterization as embittered but ahistorical imaging of the Communist party. Her analysis, however, does not suggest that Ellison's rejection come from the possibilities of racial inequalities within the party, but from Cold War perspectives of Marxism. In addition to aligning Jack's feigned color neutrality to another form racial paternalism, and presenting other aspects of the novel that function almost allegorically as Marxist critiques, Foley bridges common rhetorical positions (and misrepresentations of the Party) from anticommunist writings of the period to Ellison's characterizations in the novel. Though Ellison's own nebulous history with the party complicates attributing his Marxist dismissals to anticommunist writings, according to Foley, Ellison uncharacteristically forecloses the possibility of "leftist criticism" of the Communist party. From this perspective, Ellison reduces a fraught historical relation to a metaphor for white exploitation of African Americans, constituting one of the few unequivocal positions Ellison would advocate in the text. Larry Neal (1970) however situates Ellison's struggle with Marxism in the literary context of the expectations facing African American writers in the 1930's and 1940's. With social realism constituting the expected genre of African American writing of the period, Ellison's rejection of the aesthetic conventions and polemical stances led to conflicts with the intelligentsia of the period[17]. According to Neal, Ellison had not truly internalized the Marxist ideology, but party affiliation provided "one of the main means by which a young Black writer could get published" (64). Though Ellison engages the political, his work is not solely polemic, for Ellison explored instead "areas of Black life style that exist below

[17] See Howe, Irving. "Black Boys and Native Sons," *A World More Attractive: A View of Modern Literature and Politics*, Horizon Press, 1963. pp. 98-122, and Ellison's rebuttal in "The World and the Jug" from *Shadow and Act*, Random House, 1964, pp. 107-142.

the mere depiction of external oppression" (Neal 60). In other words, the portraits of blackness that Ellison creates are not contingent upon interracial strife or dialectic opposition to hegemonic oppression.

For Ellison, following the tradition of social realism authorized and championed by the literary left of the 1930's and 1940's constitutes another method of restricting self-determination of black authors. This telescoping of historical and literary influences represents another iteration of revisionism used to shape blackness, and parallels the same problematic historicism employed by the Brotherhood. Hortense Spillers notes how Ellison's aesthetics at once reject these restrictions while embodying a set of seemingly contradictory influences. Though "Ellison would be the last to deny that his own literary procedure has been influenced by the dogmatizers of European modernism," Spillers explains, "he would also insist that his American experience, his Negroness, has mandated a literary form virtually unique in its portrayal of pluralistic issues" (Spillers 54). Ellison's literary eclecticism signifies "an attempt at ideological reconciliation between two contending trends in Afro-American thought, i.e. the will toward self-definition, exclusive of the overall white society, and at the same time the desire not to be counted out of the processes of so-called American democracy" (Neal 66). The complex amalgam of thematic interests and aesthetic influences that define Ellison's art resemble a framework for managing many of the same tensions that define racial melancholia. By leaving conflicting the ideological concerns and expectations unresolved, Ellison resists the traps within compulsory collectivity.

Ellison continues his indictment of the Brotherhood through his depiction of Tod Clifton's sale of the Sambo dolls. The incident functions as a critique of the contradictions in Brotherhood doctrine that necessitated his own, and as a corollary, the narrator's active repression of racial subjectivity. Under the guidance of Brother Jack and the group's doctrine,

the Invisible Man believes he has transcended racial categorization and his own past to become "more human." When he encounters the missing Tod Clifton, whose sales pitch appropriates prejudiced racial notions, the promises of the Brotherhood ideology and the realities of present social conditions collide. Claiming that the illusion of Sambo's autonomy is "a twentieth-century miracle," Clifton not only challenges Brotherhood historicity, but critiques black membership in the Brotherhood, in which these renamed black spokesmen merely repeat the ideologies of the organization. Many of the readings of this scene view Clifton's performance as an indictment of a Brotherhood doctrine that perpetuates racial caste, but renders racial self-definition obsolete. Anne Cheng sees Clifton's performance "as acting out what the Brotherhood has made him" (Cheng 130) where Clifton recreates his own exploitation through his presentation of the dolls. Kimberly Lamm observes that the scene "visually interrupts the Brotherhood's, and Invisible Man's, illusions of control, progress, and rationality" (Lamm 831). In this scene, theory and praxis intersect when Clifton creates a tangible manifestation of conceptions of race that were supposedly discordant with Brotherhood progressive history.

In its combination of antebellum minstrel tropes, revisionist conceptions of slavery, and allusions to twentieth century black collectibles, Clifton's Sambo doll undercuts Brotherhood notions of progressivist history. The doll seems to be patterned after both eighteenth-century jumping jacks, simple figures whose joints move when a string is pulled, and the popular twentieth-century mechanical Tombo the Alabama Coon Jigger toy. Patented in 1910 by Ferdinand Strauss, Tombo sold over 8 million units (Cross 1997) and would inspire several imitations during its run as the "Toy King" of the early twentieth century (Wilkinson 8). The toy itself is a mixture of anachronism and progress: drawing from the "Zip Coon" trope of a sharp-dressed, flamboyant black, and its etymological similarity with Tambo, a stock minstrel

character, the mechanized toy, according to its advertisements, "jigs like a real 'Coon'" with "an old-fashioned plantation break down" (Strauss). With child-directed marketing still years away, Barton and Somerville suggest that "racialized toys are much more reflective of adult views and values, and were made to appeal to adults who would purchase them" (Barton and Somerville 52). Wilkinson however explains that "play items not only mirror ethnographic contexts, but as socializing tools they also reinforce institutionalized customs and attitudes and help to structure the conceptions of self and others" (Wilkinson 2). Although Brotherhood historicism suggests that these notions of racial inferiority simply vanish with the passage of time, these concrete objects incarnate such conceptions. "In making African Americans appear as dancing fools with over-exaggerated physical features," Barton and Somerville posit "a semiotic connection between the middle-class white children, the toy and African Americans was created" (62). As emblems of socialization, toys can inculcate cultural values, and the sale and use of Clifton's material doll directly contradict Brotherhood interpretations of progress, and represent routes for the past uncannily returning in the present.

The "plantation jig" or "Boogie Woogie" that Tambo and the Sambo dolls reenact are fraught with past and present racial dynamics. Dating back from slavery, dancing served as multivalent form of expression, at once an action fulfilling the master's desire of mirth and gaiety that obscures (his recognition of) slavery's cruelties, and communicating underlying anger and protest towards those cruelties. This form of dancing, inextricable from revisionist conceptions of idyllic antebellum plantation, was known as the juba. Saidiya Hartman (2010) describes its movements as a "coded text of protest" encapsulating a commentary on the complexities of captivity. Because much of slave resistance depended on "masquerade, subterfuge and misdirection," distinguishing "the simulation of compliance for covert aims"

from “the grins and gesticulations of Sambo indicating the repressive construction of contented subjection” (Hartman 8) posed interpretative challenges. While one expression may reproduce the structure of domination, another can manipulate the appearances to create new spaces for action (Hartman 8). This intra-racially coded expression, indicative of nascent double consciousness, depended on tacitly shared understanding and values. By appropriating this past mode of protest, Clifton articulates the failures of the Brotherhood doctrines on history and race relations to advance the roles of blacks beyond these Antebellum constructs. According to Myka Abramson (2015), the Brotherhood promises a new racial order, but “Clifton’s dance enacts the much broader process through which seemingly independent and oppositional forms of black style, culture, and politics have been violently captured and commodified for this new urban and racial order” (Abramson 15). Clifton recognizes how the Brotherhood historicity and doctrine merely replicates dialectical imposition of characteristics on the black subject as opposed to recognizing black self-definition. Once Clifton sees the narrator, he interweaves references to the eviction speech, triangulating a connection between Sambo, the narrator and himself, in which a stereotype-laden puppet feigning autonomy emblemizes their positions in the Brotherhood. Julia Sun-Joo Lee suggests that the thread signifies the Invisible Man’s “unresolved ‘in-between’ status” (Lee 471), where the narrator must navigate disparate expressions of blackness. Building on this observation, I view the narrator’s relegation of his racial subjectivity to the imagined past as surrendering his double consciousness and ignoring the parallels between Clifton’s performance and his grandfather’s injunction. The repetition of this messaging not only signifies an uncanny return of the narrator’s ambivalence towards collective racial identity, but also suggests that the social conditions that necessitate such communication have not yet passed.

Clifton's performance introduces the bipartite nature of Ellison's concept of invisibility. The Sambo doll reflects the dramatic ironies of racialization, in which the narrator believes that his Brotherhood constructed projection of a racial self is the one seen by the outside world. What remains invisible, or unsubstantial, is the raced other's definition of self. Deploring Clifton for what he termed a plunge "outside of history," the narrator opines "only in the Brotherhood could we make ourselves known, could we avoid being empty Sambo dolls" (Ellison 434). Clifton's actions however demonstrate that the dolls are far from empty emblems, and as Lamm explains

> Clifton's performance unhinges Sambo's place from the invisibility of the black male ego, with all its perverse hostility and conflict, and exposes its role in the construction of the black male identity. It is when Invisible Man sees the constructedness of Clifton's performance and the unsynchronized distance between himself and his production that he become truly horrified (Lamm 830).

By abdicating self-definition to the collective identity of the Brotherhood, the raced other simply receives another set of imposed signification, in which blackness, the abject category relegated to the past, is a collection of stereotypes. Ironically, emptiness suggests the potential for self-definition, and the narrator misapprehends the subversive potential of the signifier. The doll reflects his uncanny relation to an undifferentiated blackness. Viewing the doll, the narrator "felt a hatred as for something alive" (Ellison 446) and "was held by the inanimate, boneless bouncing of the grinning doll and struggled between the desire to join In the laughter and to leap upon it with both feet" (Ellison 432). Bill Brown posits that the anachronism of the performance, the uncanny return (and applicability) of this stereotype informs "his perception of the history he's a part of" (Brown 266). As opposed to Clifton and Mary, who can psychically distance themselves from such representations (and in Clifton's case, control them with a black thread), the Invisible

Man lacks such self-awareness; for him, racial subjectivity is not a complex mixture of imposed traits and formative commonalities within a collective, but a fixed signifier of stereotype that must be relegated to the past.

By destroying but retaining both the bank and the Sambo doll, the narrator discloses the melancholic ambivalence lingering beneath his Brotherhood discipline—a repressed but persistent acknowledgment of his inability to change perceptions of his racial identity. When he initially sees the coin bank, he becomes "as enraged by the tolerance or lack of discrimination, or whatever, that allowed Mary to keep such a self-mocking image around, as by the knocking" (Ellison 319). The coin bank serves a locus of the narrator's melancholic anxieties: his resistance to the circumscribing force of racial collectivity collides with his own delimiting of multivalences of black expression, or "signifying." The potential for multiplicity in meaning, identity and expression, the hallmarks of black signifying, is folded within a black cultural identification that the narrator views as monolithic. In both encounters with the figurines, the narrator misreads the multivalences of the objects, "fixing" their signification in ways that perpetuate a racial dialectic that Brotherhood posits as defunct. The violence towards both objects, however, could be as much a reaction to (or reifying of) their original import, as a displaced resistance to Brotherhood hegemony. David Eng explains that this response reflects frustrations with unattainability of acceptance:

> while the ambivalence, anger, and rage that characterizes this preservation of the lost object threaten the ego's stability, we do not imagine that this threat is the result of some ontological tendency on the part of the melancholic; it is a social threat. Ambivalence, rage, and anger are the internalized refractions of an ecology of whiteness bent on the obliteration of cherished minoritarian subjectivities. (Eng 695)

The narrator's retaining of the bank pieces and Sambo Doll articulate ambivalence with the Brotherhood doctrines that would dismiss their original import and cultural re-significations as equally obsolete expressions. Ellison, however, portrays the malleability of their signification. For Mary and Clifton, their engagement with these racist objects are not only attempts to redefine signifiers, but also to suspend the signified; these re-assignations or manipulations of meaning embody the act of signifying. Syntactically, Ellison conflates Mary's signifying on the figurine with its original signification, intimating that either or both possibilities provoke the narrator. Henry Louis Gates notes the tensions between the homonymic discursive registers of standard American signification, and African American signifying, expressions that "have everything to do with each other and, then again, absolutely nothing" (Gates 45). In this instance, the maintenance of a single signifier that holds these interpretative possibilities "argues strongly that the most poignant level of black-white differences is that of meaning" (Gates 49). The narrator's destruction of the bank attempts to eliminate this distinction; ironically, the act of breaking the bank contributes to its resignification, and perpetuates the very distinctions that he sought to efface, an act redoubled in the narrator's ruining of one, and keeping of another Sambo doll.

Preceding the Clifton performance, the encounter with Brother Tarp's leg shackle forecasts the counterproductivity of Brotherhood ideology to black social conditions. For Ellison, the Brotherhood dismissals of racial oppression as concomitants of racial distinction underestimate the investment in caste stratifications of the American racial imaginary. Brother Tarp's shackle is a material referent of a racialized past which Brotherhood doctrines cannot theorize into obsolescence. By presenting the narrator with the link, Tarp appropriates Brotherhood logic by conflating the past with racial identification. The leg shackle functions as a

locus of signification and intertextuality: this object reflects the complex negotiation of social expressions of blackness in relation to white hegemonic dominance, and its multiple refiguring foreshadows and forewarns impending disillusionment about his own positionality in the Brotherhood. As an isolated chain link, the object comments on the paradoxical nature of racial signification: an open link fettering African Americans to racialized, stereotypical notions of blackness against which individuated subjectivities can be defined. Unlike the Sambo doll or bank, items created to reify notions of black inferiority which Emancipation dislodged from black body, the leg shackle sought to maintain the stable connection of blackness to subjugation. With their contrasting messaging, and susceptibility to signifying, the shackles ironically illustrate the mutability of blackness. Both appearances reflect a double consciousness of their owners—an awareness of the discrepancies between socio-racial constructs and individuated racial subjectivities. According to Henry Louis Gates, the practice of signifying functions as "linguistic masking," representing "the verbal sign of the mask of blackness that demarcates the boundary between the white linguistic realm and the black, two domains that exist side by side in a homonymic relation" (Gates 75). Tarp's shackle is a reminder of this practice, and the double consciousness needed to interpret it, that the Brotherhood doctrines threaten to eradicate in the narrator. Signifying encapsulates a relation to the past, both as a cultural tradition, and in its revising of pre-existing material. The narrator's interaction with the link, fraught with associations of his own past, reflects the melancholic tensions between the introjected Brotherhood disavowal of racial identity and elements of his own history that bind him to collective blackness.

His encounter with Brother Tarp sought to reinstate the narrator's dormant double consciousness by invoking elements of a collective African American past. Beginning with a

letter of caution (ostensibly written by Brother Tarp), the scene displays the narrator's (mis)interpretations of signifying, black history, and his own past as refracted through Brotherhood consciousness. In the anonymously penned letter, the writer implores the Invisible Man to "remember that you are one of *us*" and "go easy so that you can keep on helping the colored people" (Ellison 383). The letter presupposes a shared knowledge of the methods of interacting with whites, and implies skepticism of the race neutral doctrine of the Brotherhood. The use of pronoun "us" includes the narrator in a black collective, suggesting that the adherence to Brotherhood doctrine for the black members is merely a means to an end, a feigned allegiance that reflects historical social dynamics between blacks and whites. Even his name, Tarp, connotes a cover, a concealing fabric protecting something hidden from view. His observation that the narrator looks as if he had seen a "ghost" encapsulates this uncanny return of a manifestation of a suppressed black experience. The portrait of Frederick Douglass—who often clashed with white leadership figures in the abolitionist movement—contrasts with the other picture in the office which features people of different racial origins representing oppressed groups of the past, and a several racially mixed children who signify the "Rainbow of America's Future" (Ellison 385). The Brotherhood picture neglects images of the present, however, and implies that racial hybridity denotes the end of racial categorization and oppression. The claim that interracial relationships which produce mixed children can signify the absence of subjugation not only fallaciously contradicts logic, but also ignores the complex history of biraciality in the United States, with "one drop" classification rules eliminating the concept of mixed ethnicity altogether.

In its multivalent signification, and juxtaposition with fraught interracial relations and lingering racial trauma, the leg link encapsulates the text's complex vision of the lived black

experience. Noting that the link has "a heap of signifying wrapped up in it," Tarp presents it to the narrator to help him "remember what we're really fighting against" (Ellison 388). He explains it is "the one I filed to get away" (Ellison 388) from his imprisonment. The absence of a preposition after "filed" could denote his grinding or storing the shackle, and presenting both senses (destroying an article of his subjugation, or filing it into memory) as necessities for escape intimates an uncanny bond with his past that the scene continues to develop. Despite experiencing some prosperity since moving North, Tarp holds on to the link as a "keepsake and a reminder" because he "didn't want to forget those nineteen years" of his imprisonment (388). Although the terms appear redundant, the material connotations distinguish "keepsake" from reminder, and for Tarp, his shackle asserts the fixity and tangibility of racial caste; like his persistent dragging of a phantom chain, both melancholic response and counterargument to Brotherhood historicity, Tarp articulates that the contrivances of hegemonic dominance operate imperceptibly, persisting beneath declarations of race neutrality. Ironically, Tarp's message to the Invisible Man advocates the same approach of feigning conformity while working towards African American interests. Even in his sycophancy, Brother Wrestrum recognizes the significance of the link. He suggests that the link "ought to be kept out of sight" (398) because it may "dramatize our differences" (Ellison 392). Wrestrum's comments uncover the divide between collective black identity and the socially enforced conceptions of blackness, the "rind" and "heart" of black subjectivity that the narrator initially presumes is connected, and informs his misinterpretations of interracial dynamics.

The narrator's belabored interpreting of Tarp's gesture displays the conflict between his muted sense of racial double consciousness and his belief in Brotherhood thought. After accepting the shackle, the narrator describes how he "dropped it upon the anonymous letter," and

muses how he "neither wanted it nor knew what to do with it; although there was no question of keeping it" (Ellison 389). The ambiguous "it" in these clauses, however, links both the letter and the shackle syntactically, revealing both the significative capacity of the link, but also its inextricability from its past meanings. This object, as an emblem of white supremacy and resistance to its control, takes on additional resonances in its bequeathal. The narrator notes that the act possessed "the overtones of unstated seriousness and solemnity of the paternal gesture which at once joined him with his ancestors, marked a high point of his present, and promised a concreteness to his nebulous and chaotic future" (Ellison 389-90). Although the narrator perceives the temporal distance of past subjugation as evidence of its antiquation, the link asserts the relevance of the past and cultural legacy to the formation of subjectivity.

For the narrator, the chain link does signify "a heap more," inspiring his reflecting, without connecting, his own similar encounters. The act of signifying "emphasizes refiguration or repetition and difference, or troping, underscoring the foregrounding of the chain of signifiers, rather than the mimetic representation of a novel content" (Gates 79). The associative thinking that the link provokes in the Invisible Man indicates his own, albeit unacknowledged, signifying. He recalls seeing a similar shackle on Dr. Bledsoe's desk while being reprimanded, and subsequently expelled from school after his disastrous trip with Mr. Norton. The Invisible Man recollects that Bledsoe's office was filled with "the relics from the times of the Founder" (Ellison 137). Denoting objects once held by martyrs, the word "relic" evinces the narrator's veneration of the Founder (a Booker T. Washington figure). The Invisible Man's blind adherence to the accommodationist principles, despite his grandfather's injunction, mirrors his devotion to the Brotherhood and shallow understanding of Tarp's statement. From the Latin *relinquere*, to leave behind or relinquish, the word houses the melancholic tensions between releasing and proffering,

suggesting that bequeathing the melancholic object ensures its continuance. These relics, however, could also be the accommodationist and complaisant postures that Bledsoe would display, and those that the narrator failed to reinforce with Norton. By momentarily lifting the façade of homogenized and biding blackness, the narrator forces Norton to confront his own racial paternalism, and the realization that his donations buttress a façade designed to assuage his white guilt precipitates his catatonic collapse. Ellison, however, resists simplistic, binary readings of the two manifestations of the chain link. While the narrator notes that Bledsoe's link "had been smooth," and "Tarp's bore the marks of haste and violence, looking as though it had been attacked and conquered before it stubbornly yielded" (Ellison 389), Ellison complicates allegorizing the links as contrasting relationships to white dominance, and instead focuses on its paradoxical import. Although Bledsoe proudly calls the shackle a "symbol of our progress" (Ellison 141), he also claims that he has had to "act the nigger" (Ellison 143) to maintain his position amongst the white donors. By juxtaposing the link with punishment, Bledsoe maintains its original signification, in which outward challenges to white epistemology must be restricted. While his feigned obeisance to white interests is admittedly self-serving, the act nevertheless fulfills the grandfather's implorations to "overcome'em with yeses, undermine'em with grins, agree'em to death and destruction" (Ellison 16). The progress, then, is the open shackle, the paradoxical freedom of donning and removing fictive representations of black subservience.

As a chain link, the symbol suggests the inextricability of Bledsoe's positioning from collective blackness, which Ellison portrays as an amalgamation of individual subjectivities and shared histories. Both encounters, however, reveal the Invisible Man's misconception of black collectivity, and its relationship to signifiers. Throughout the text, the narrator allegorizes emblems related to blackness, and misapprehends the potential for multivalent meaning. In his

earlier declaration about yams, the narrator presumes a chiasmatic relationship between symbolic object and subject, in which the connotations and signified meaning of an object fuse with the subject. He imagines the scenario of publicly accusing Bledsoe of being "a shameless chitterling eater" and how the accusation, which "would be worse than if I had accused him of raping an old woman of ninety-nine years" would force him to "lose caste" and "recant or retire from public life" (Ellison 265), the consumption of these foods represent a version of blackness which the narrator presumes Bledsoe avoids, as a way to expose Bledsoe's own socially repressed black identity. Kyla Tompkins notes that the eating motif, "often deployed in the service of fixing bodily fictions" (Tompkins 3), depicts a blurred "line between subject and object" (Tompkins 3), conflating presumably discrete signified meanings. By projecting racial stereotypes onto foods, objects, or other acts, and then abstaining from them, the African American subject seeks to control the definitions of subjectivity. Paradoxically, presuming the resignificative properties of blackness would invalidate any assumptions of fixed meaning. The black subject, however, commits the same error as his white counterpart in believing that blackness can be definitively established through a comparison to culturally-specific signifiers and other material referents.

Chapter 2: Lawn Jockeys, Yard Ornaments, and the Racialization of Space

In her examination of the evolution of American suburban landscapes, Virginia Scott Jenkins (1994)[18] traced the philosophical, cultural, and socioeconomic conceptions constituting the mythos of the American lawn. With its evocation of romantic, transcendental "nostalgia for a simpler rural past" (18) and signification of suburban quintessence, the American lawn embodies the coalescence of past and present cultural values. Beneath these idealizations, however, lie notions that complicate the idyllic associations: Washington's European-inspired Mount Vernon, the picturesque gardens considered the precursor to the American lawn, was maintained by several of its 317 slaves. The razing of native flora that the planting of European turf grass would necessitate, as well as the considerable expense of maintaining the grass contradict the rural, natural simplicity the lawn purportedly conveys. As "reminders of the revolution—where militias had trained, troops were raised, and battles fought—and places for patriotic memorials, particularly after the Civil War" (Jenkins 18), the lawn, in its extolling of the natural world, appears incongruent with the realities of warfare and chattel slavery. Furthermore, while the lawn "began as a luxury of the wealthy," and later "became a status symbol of the middle class" (Jenkins 5), this seemingly egalitarian signifier was used (oftentimes by Garden clubs and civic leagues) to solidify and perpetuate class, and as a corollary, racial demarcations. George Lipsitz observes "interconnections among race, place, and power in the United States have a long history" (12), making the American lawn a marker of positionality. Encapsulating revisionist conceptions of American cultural values and practices, the lawn embodies nostalgia for a past manicured of its hegemonic and artificial roots. With its ubiquity masking its contrivance as

[18] Jenkins, Virginia Scott. *The Lawn: A History of an American Obsession.* Smithsonian Institution Press, 1994.

natural, and its ideology as innocuous, the lawn has been cast as an image of American values, rather than a producer of them.

Despite associations with a bucolic past, front lawns did not become staples of Americana until the twentieth century. Municipalities eager to provide automobile travelers with scenic landscapes and post-WWII tract housing programs evoking middle-class desires for homeownership spurred the development of the modern front lawn.[19] Furthermore, lawns distinguished, topographically and otherwise, the suburban from urban, where "family houses set in their own gardens were seen as moral bastions of the nation in opposition to the corruption of the cities" (Jenkins 20). More than merely aesthetic, this space functions discursively, naturalizing hegemonic values and sanitized creation myths beneath the guise of benign cultural custom. Though the proliferation of lawns correlated to widespread automobile travel, "Faithful Groomsman," or lawn jockey hitching posts, began to appear in suburban yards. With the absence of horses, and the ostensible obsolescence of the posts, the lawn jockeys fulfill purposes beyond their presumed function. Kenneth Goings attributes the sprouting of the iron groomsmen to postwar suburban (and concomitant middle-class) expansion. Goings posits that the residents "perhaps to give themselves more of a sense of permanence, or perhaps to give themselves more of a sense of being a member of the privileged master class, began placing 'Jocko' on their lawns in great numbers" (Goings 52). The presence of lawn jockeys uncovers paradoxes in hegemonic racism: while segregation proclaimed white dominance, the absence of a racialized black Other outlined distinctions and hierarchies amongst whites. Steven Dubin suggests lower-middle- and working-class whites would have been the likely owners of such objects because "these groups

[19] D'Costa, Krystal. "The American Obsession with Lawns." *Scientific American*, 3 May 2017.

have traditionally filled an important buffering position and controlling minority groups in regard to both formal social regulation and more informal customs" (Dubin 136). Furthermore, Dubin posits that ephemera

> such as the lawn jockey might reasonably be linked to status aspirations, creating the illusion of having servants for a group who never had them…therefore, two kinds of superior feelings are involved; One involves ridicule, the other emphasizes superiority by the possession and control of black representations. (Dubin 136-37)

With its material, positional and historical fixity, the Faithful Groomsman encapsulates stereotypes that counterbalance notions of blackness that destabilize hegemony. Though grounded in the suburban spatial imaginary, white supremacy retrofits itself with fictive representations that reveal, rather than conceal, its own instability.

Hierarchical racial relations both imperceptibly and unmistakably shape conceptions of physical space. From the Mason-Dixon line, Jim Crow, to busing, race relations refract our perception of locality and solidify hegemonic beliefs by conflating spatial and racial imaginaries. George Lipsitz poses this chiasmatic relationship, in which the "lived experience of race has a spatial dimension, and the lived experience of space has a racial dimension" (12). Within the national spatial imaginary exists a racial divide that perpetuates de facto segregation, socioeconomic disparities, and other material manifestations of racial inferiority. The juxtaposition of historical demography obfuscates the intentionality of this program, allowing the structure to deny and yet preserve its racial exclusivity and perpetuation of white intergenerational wealth. Lipsitz asserts that this interpretation of space concretizes the category of whiteness:

> a white spatial imaginary, based on exclusivity and augmented exchange value, functions as a central mechanism for skewing opportunities and life chances in the United States along racial lines. Whiteness, as used here, is an analytic category that refers to the structured advantages that accrue to whites because of past and present discrimination.
>
> (Lipsitz 13)

This bifurcation of space constitutes a component of the racial dialectic, whose omnipresence ambivalently signals predominance in its scope or precariousness in its reach. Dianne Harris (2007) notes that the constructions of white privilege and socioeconomic dominance are metaphorically naturalized through the "silent signs of wealth, power, belonging, and exclusion" of landscapes appearing to be "willed into existence" and hide the evidence of their efforts of construction (Harris 4). Combined with the presence of the iron groomsman, racial difference is solidified through its spatial component. The iron groomsman ossifies black subservience of the past and serves as a stable, fixed Other that demarcates racial distinctions. The lawn and its jockey reflect the inextricability of racial and spatial imaginaries: the exclusivity of an idealized white, middle-class suburbia necessitates an antithetical positioning of blackness. Their reciprocal reifications and normalizations rest on distortions of their histories, in which the lawn conjures nostalgia for a past that never was, and the groomsman constitutes a relic of a past that has not yet passed.

With their obsolescence predating their proliferation on American lawns, the groomsmen serve purposes beyond the functional or merely ornamental, reinforcing proclamations of racial distinction and hierarchy. Ranging from assertions that time mitigates racist import to homeowner prerogative, the justifications of law jockey ownership often collide with historical fact and belie insecurities that the racist figurine superficially assuage. The ambivalence,

acceptance, animus, and apathy iron jockeys arouse reflect the racial melancholia within owner and onlooker. Anne Anlin Cheng characterizes American racial melancholia as particularly "acute," noting that within "the economic, material, and philosophical advances of the nation…built on a series of legalized exclusions" (10) exists "a history busily disavowing those repudiations" (Cheng 10) to bolster inherent racial hierarchy. For Cheng, "dominant white identity in America operates melancholically—as an elaborate identificatory system based on psychical and social consumption-and-denial" (11). According to Cheng, "the racists need to develop elaborate ideologies in order to accommodate their actions with official American ideals, while white liberals need to keep burying the racial others in order to memorialize them" (Cheng 11). My chapter extends Cheng's description of melancholic framework of white supremacy, and considers the psychic ramifications of failing to hold the material, socioeconomic and spatial markers of whiteness. I assert that the black collectible reflects the inability to disavow the machinery of white supremacy. The material fixity of collectibles signifies black inferiority while exposing the white anxieties that the objects presumably assuage, exemplifying a form of what can be termed the racial uncanny. When the white subject recognizes his/her difference from normative designation or material demarcations of whiteness, I argue that the dissonance enacts an introjection of loss that I term an intra-racial melancholia. For characters confronting or encountering their incongruity with the material designations of their presumed racial collective, the lawn jockey symbolically maintains the fiction of discrete racial categories.

Moreover, this chapter argues that faithful groomsman ownership embodies the paradoxes of the racial uncanny: the domination of and dependance on a totemic racial Other that the subject simultaneously displays and represses. The lawn jockey uncovers the sutures

connecting the racial and spatial imaginaries to white supremacy, disclosing the pervasiveness and complexity of the network buttressing hegemonic dominance. Easily (and mistakenly) dismissed as a quaint emblem of outmoded racial conceptions, the groomsman exemplifies the subtle and imperceptible methods of perpetuating of racial subjugation.

Despite their associations with Americana, provocative (and dubious) formation mythology, and continued occupation of rural and suburban lawns, Faithful groomsmen have garnered only modest literary or critical attention.[20] Debate around the origins of the groomsmen, their purposes and their signification have remained in the realm of popular discourse—newspaper articles, occasional brief television news segments, blogspots—and a documented history of their manufacture has yet to be developed in scholarly discourse. The few references in American literature however surpass mere exposition of a racist locale and instead create apertures into ambiguities within American racialization. In the works covered in this chapter, the authors juxtapose jockeys or other contemptible lawn ornaments with an exploration of the complexities of racial distinction. With their purpose and ubiquity connoting stability and fixity, the groomsmen reflect a normative notion of race relation—-the presumption that blacks strive to nullify racialization while whites seek to uphold it. These texts, however, eschew redefinition-through-negation and complicate the supposition that racialization obstructs subjectivity, contemplating the extent the raced subject uncannily embraces and rejects dialectic racialization.

[20] For additional literary references, see William Melvin Kelley's "The Only Man on Liberty Street," (1964) and Emily Raboteau's "Mrs. Turner's Lawn Jockeys" (2013), Darius James's *Negrophobia* (1992), and I. Bennett Capers' "The Last Tenant" (2002). Dianne Harris' *Little White Houses* (2013), and her article "Race, Space, and the Destabilization of Practice" (2007) discuss the significance of architecture and spatial organization to formations of class and solidification of race. Harris' briefly mentions the lawn jockey, and her overall thesis would include the lawn jockey as this contrivance to codifying racial distinction. The majority of references are based on misreadings of O'Connor's "The Artificial Nigger" (1957), which features not a groomsman, but caricature of a black child eating a watermelon. Critical references will generally be folded into debates about Confederate monuments, and treated anecdotally at most.

Cheng posits this discursive "truth" of blackness "has always been and will continue to be a site of contestation for both those raced subjects as well as for whites. To remain complacent with the assumption that racial fantasies are hegemonic impositions on minorities denies complexity on the part of the latter's subjective landscapes" (106). My position considers this suggestion of Cheng that the stability of racial categorization entails an investment in the constructs by both whites and the racialized Other, and moves beyond it in this chapter to posit that the uncanny devotion/rejection to racialization is in fact not a byproduct, but a cornerstone of the American racial dialectic that distinguishes the black raced experience. Ironically, introjecting chosen aspects of raced blackness contradicts other forms of totalization; for the minority Other, essentialization, as opposed to the preconceived characteristics themselves, circumscribes subjectivity. Cheng explains that melancholic racialization "implies that assimilation may be more intimately linked to identity than a mere consequence of the dominant demand for sameness" (Cheng 106-07), and building from this supposition, I suggest that establishing a racial subjectivity involves negotiating between two irreconcilable inclinations, which creates a tenuous détente between an internal sense of self and a public raced identity that catalyzes the ambivalences of melancholia. Cheng identifies this "malady of doubleness" as "the melancholy of race, a dis-ease of location, a persistent fantasy of identification that *cleaves* and *cleaves to* the marginalized and the master" (137). My claim furthers this nuance of racial melancholia, and uses the figure of the lawn jockey as a signifier of the symptoms of an intraracial melancholia. For whites, the presence of the groomsmen reifies the inferiority of the dialectic Other, but also concretizes the racial insecurities that necessitate such imagining. In the American program of race, our conceptions of racial distinctions are inextricably linked to the hierarchical structures that function as producers and compensations of racial melancholia.

Though the problematics of the Asian American immigrant experience—its collision with an American dialectic of race based on the distinction between whiteness and racialized blackness, the tensions between pressures to assimilate and retain one's indigenous culture, the distinction between first and second generation immigrant experiences—inspired the racial melancholic framework of Anne Cheng and David Eng, several theorists have expanded its application to experiences of the racialized Others, and demonstrated the reach of melancholia beyond its psychological aspects. Lily Cho (2011) notes the material aspects of racial melancholia—instances of racial violence, discrimination, etc.—and explores the role of racial trauma in solidifying the concept of racial collectivity. Her observation provides point of entry into other elements of the ambivalences that racial collectivity creates. More recently, Andrea Davis (2022), Rebecca Wanzo (2020) and Jean Cole (2020) apply the framework to the black diasporic experience. Davis connects the African American experience to other African and Caribbean colonial encounters, associating the Civil Rights struggles and Jim Crow challenges to postcolonial struggles facing black diasporic populations. Rebecca Wanzo uses reading American mainstream comic books and racial caricatures to excavate aspects of white racial melancholia. Wanzo perceives the comic book portrayals of American heroism as melancholic compensations for white subjects, who, when facing the objects that represent American ideals, must confront and repress the loss of an object which never existed.[21] Jean Cole similarly applies racial melancholia to the black American experience by exploring the concept of passing. If being black in the United States is to live "in a state of racial melancholia, one might describe those who chose to pass as living in an even more vexed or enhanced state of melancholia, knowing they could neither attain the 'ideal' of whiteness, nor publicly embrace their blackness"

[21] Wanzo, Rebecca. "Wearing Hero-Face: Melancholic Patriotism in Truth: Red, White & Black." *The Content of Our Caricature: African American Comic Art and Political Belonging*, vol. 25, NYU Press, 2020, pp. 111–38

(Cole 141). Though Cole refers to the traditional, phenotypical "passing" oftentimes employed to attain the material privileges of whiteness, this acknowledgment of material disadvantages of one's racial identity can create another alienation from the self. While the texts in this chapter do not engage the actual instances of phenotypic passing, Whitehead's *Sag Harbor* features an inversion of this dynamic, in which his protagonists possess the material and spatial markers of whiteness. These characters struggle to reconcile their racialized identities with internal senses of selfhood, since their lived experiences and living spaces defy dialectic conventions. Cole's statement, however, presupposes blackness as an originary state of being, and Whitehead's interrogation of these inherent collective subjectivities constitute a form of intraracial melancholia.

One of the possible pitfalls of my variation of racial melancholia is the suggestion that dialectic racialization functions solely to solidify inherent white racial difference/superiority, which raises a paradoxical position on the creation and genesis of race and could centralize whiteness as the stable category against which other subjectivities are defined. Given the complexities of their history, signification and connotations, lawn jockeys house discursive utility beyond the expository, and when viewed from my expansion of Cheng's original model of racial melancholia where I posit that dialectic racialization itself functions to assuage white anxieties of the arbitrariness and illusoriness of racial distinction, the groomsmen illuminate conceptualizations about race "hidden in plain sight." The literary depiction of racist lawn ornaments, ranging from minor references in Colson Whitehead's *Sag Harbor* (2009) and Raymond Chandler's *The High Window* (1942), to the prominent in Ralph Ellison's *Three Days Before the Shooting* (2010), and Flannery O'Connor's "The Artificial Nigger" (1955) frame encounters with the conceptual fissures and ambivalences of dialectic racialization. At first

glance, allusions to lawn jockeys seem the only commonality amongst a grouping of texts spanning over seventy years and multiple genres; despite differing aesthetic, philosophical, and political sensibilities of their authors, the texts engage melancholic anxieties and compensations precipitated by a discordance between the positionalities arranged by racial constructs and the lived experience of race. The merger of racial and spatial imaginaries seemingly concretizes racial caste by assigning these constructs material referents, where interactions with location and space reinforce hegemonic dominance. By fortifying the binarism of the dialectic with class stratification and segregated locales, the elision of skin color, class and space carries the potential for chiasmatic reversal and racial miscasting. Stereotypical representations and images of the racial other, like the lawn jockey, temporarily ballast such constructs that hold the key to their own negation. Homi Bhabha explains that while deploying stereotypical representations appeases "the desire for an originality which is again threatened by the differences of race, color and culture" (298), it is a simplified, "arrested, fixated form of representation that, in denying the play of difference (which the negation through the other permits), constitutes a problem for the representation of the subject in significations of psychic and social relations" (298). Comparison to an Other-by-proxy thwarts unequivocal perception of the self; this short circuiting of the Hegelian dialectic that characterizes American racialization envisages not a realization of essential subjectivity, but a reinforced belief in inherent superiority. Paradoxically, the quintessence sought relies upon distinction from the Other, raising the specter of the contingency of whiteness whose attempted exorcism Chandler, Ellison and O'Connor detail. This chapter studies these literary references to lawn jockeys and argues that the inclusions encapsulate authorial engagement with the concepts of dialectic racialization and white supremacy. In these texts, the authors proceed from the conventional signification of the iron groomsmen as emblems

of black inferiority; the interaction of the characters with the jockeys prompt the characters to confront, examine or reinforce their own racial subjectivities. The groomsmen constitute point of entry through which the authors explore, challenge and even reinforce the entrenchment of racial constructs in the American racial imaginary. These authors investigate melancholic responses to the repressed fear that white preeminence and distinction are not the products of nature, but of a complex social and psychic apparatus that disavows its own necessity or existence.

When the raced other possesses material advantages, the socioeconomic status ostensibly exclusive to whiteness along with the arbitrary and artificial rationales of racialization become harder to validate. Moreover, these texts examine how whites, whose socioeconomic standings and living conditions diverge from the enforced designations of racial/spatial imaginaries, process their racial subjectivities. George Lipsitz notes that "not all people who are white consciously embrace the white spatial imaginary, and not all whites profit equally from their whiteness" (13). Accordingly, though "all whites benefit from the association of whiteness with privilege and the neighborhood effects of spaces defined by their racial demography" (Lipsitz 13), beyond phenotype, how do whites reconcile a lived experience that diverges from the expectations of their hegemonic dominance? In his most racially conscious novel *The High Window*, Raymond Chandler articulates this complication. In the text, private detective Phillip Marlowe's investigation of a stolen rare coin intersects with multiple class and racial conflicts. When wealthy widow and matriarch Elizabeth Murdock suspects her estranged daughter in law (a former lounge singer whose marriage to her son she begrudged) of the theft, Murdock hires Marlowe to preclude the publicity and scrutiny that police involvement would entail. When Marlowe arrives at the comfortable Pasadena home of the Murdocks, complete with its "half acre or so of fine green lawn" (Chandler 3), his treatment at the house causes him to wonder if he

"ought to have gone to the back door" (Chandler 3), and he pats the iron groomsmen while flippantly calling it "brother." For Marlowe, his lower economic status and urban living render him materially distinct from the privileged whiteness of the Murdocks. With the dialectic's ontological intolerance of liminality, and its conflation of race and caste, Marlowe can only process his socioeconomic differences through racial binarism, effectively sequestering him from hegemonic whiteness.

Marlowe's denigration, however, reveals as much of the Murdocks' racial anxieties as it does of Marlowe's. The presence of a lawn jockey, a fixed, static emblem of black subservience, constitutes the only racial *différance* in this monocultural space and unveils paradoxes of hegemonic power. American racialization necessitates clear and unequivocal racial distinctions, which characterizes both blackness and whiteness into monolithic collectives. In these texts, the standards of merged material and phenotypic whiteness used to subjugate blackness produce senses of melancholic exclusion or loss in both blacks and whites. For the impoverished or materially bereft white, hegemonic whiteness is at once empowering and exclusory, but for upper caste whites, the material advantages and privileges of whiteness are not exclusive enough to solidify clear individuation. While the presence of blackness maintains the hierarchical status of whites, the absence of blackness obfuscates hierarchical relations between them. Though the novel depicts Marlowe's continual interactions with several minority groups (some of which border on stereotypical representations of Jewish and Italian Americans, for example), the novel features nearly no African American characters. The full exclusion of the racial other—the ostensible end of the organization of racial/spatial imaginaries—complicates the development of white subjectivity. The absence of the black characters (or their signification in the form of the groomsman) in scenes that display the socioecomonic disparities between Marlowe and his

affluent clients creates an intra-racial hierarchical structure that deconstructs monolithic whiteness. The lawn jockey serves to reaffirm the dominance of Murdocks' racial identities. Charles Scruggs (2012) sees the allusion to the lawn jockey as an emblem of continual subjugation, a discursive object that "reaffirms the American conviction that blacks should remain in their place as servants" (Scruggs 126). He suggests that the image of the lawn jockey parallels the missing Brasher Doubloon, both symbols of "the repetition of the past in the present" (Scruggs 120), and connected through the coin's inscription that commemorates "the continuing legacy of slavery" (Scruggs 119). The purloined coin is widely recognized as a forerunner to early American coin minting. Though numismatists debate its originary purpose, its monetary value and associations with the beginning of the new nation connect the coin to the novel's concept of a hegemonic class stratification. Scruggs, however, dispels the potential subversiveness of Marlowe's identifying with the jockey. "Although Marlowe does identify with an African-American male in the novel," he explains "that figure turns out to be a diminutive, black statuette of a jockey" (Scruggs 119). Furthermore, by referring to the lawn jockey as a "brother," Marlowe displays a racial ambivalence that simultaneously identifies with and further subjugates African Americans to reinforce white supremacy. His playful connection to the jockey asserts that class/economic dominance is a part of hegemonic whiteness from which he as a subordinate, as well as African Americans as a whole, are excluded. His investigative visit to a Bel Air Mansion further reveals more his melancholic tensions. After his rebuffing at the hands of a Filipino butler, Marlowe engages a white chauffeur, "a little runt in breeches and leggings and a sweat stained shirt" who "looked like an overgrown jockey" (Chandler 39-40). When the chauffeur asks why Marlowe is not questioning the homeowners, Marlowe, in mock black dialect to claims he "done asked. They done shut the door in mah face"

(Chandler 40). Rather than challenge the arbitrariness of the dialectic, Marlowe affirms its categorizations by projecting his (and the white chauffeur's) subordinate class statuses onto the groomsman, whose stereotypical import Marlowe conflates with African American identity.

In Flannery O'Connor's "The Artificial Nigger," a racist lawn ornament serves a similar function of assuaging white melancholic anxieties. In the text, the figurine palliates tensions precipitated by intraracial stratification and compromised senses of white dominance. To O'Connor, the expedience and effectiveness of this contrivance in obfuscating discrepancies between beliefs in white superiority and the lived experience of the white underclass destabilizes notions of inherent white supremacy. O'Connor's dissection of hierarchical racialization begins with its ironic subversion of the bildungsroman. Set in a rural township, the story depicts the tenuous relationship between Mr. Head and his irreverent grandson Nelson, who constantly challenges the authority Head assumes his age should command. To solidify his position in their household hierarchy, Head plans a trip to the city for Nelson, where Head hopes that Nelson's unfamiliarity with city mores, urban streets, and black people—for as Head recalls there has not been any in their county "since we run that one out twelve years ago" (O'Connor 107)—would concretize Nelson's subordinate position in the home. Because "the child is always reasserting his position with some new impudence" (O'Connor 124), Head muses, through this trip "the boy would at last find out that he was not as smart as he thought he was" (O'Connor 106). The ambiguity of the pronouns, however obscures subject and object, and in this case, blurs distinction between Head and Nelson. Their physical descriptions further the suggestions of their positional parity: O'Connor notes that they "looked enough alike to be brothers and brothers not too far apart in age" (O'Connor 106). Blackness, for Mr. Head, would solidify the hierarchical order within his household, and by extension, differentiate white subjectivities.

As a setting for Nelson's induction into the racial imaginary, the train complicates the strict demarcations of space that reinforce notions of racial hierarchy. Grace Elizabeth Hale explains that "railroads bridged boundaries of urban and rural white and black" (Hale 130), problematizing the segregated, Jim Crow facilities that would reflect a conflation of race and socioeconomic status. Mr. Head and Nelson's exploration of the train undermines the assumed command of space and socioeconomic power that whiteness presumably signifies and demands; the limitations of physical space prioritize actual material privilege over fictive social privilege. In this liminal space, the nominal adherence to segregation and other constructs of racialization reveals an ephemeral acknowledgment of their factitiousness. After Nelson confidently proclaims he will "know a nigger if I see one" (O'Connor 107), an African American man passes down the aisle. When Nelson can only identify him as "old" and "fat," Head triumphantly declares "that was a nigger" (O'Connor 112), and Nelson protests that Mr. Head "said they were black" and "never said they were tan" (O'Connor 112). Believing the man had intentionally walked past "to make a fool of him," Nelson felt "a fierce raw fresh hate," and "understood now why his grandfather disliked them" (O'Connor 112). In this brief encounter, which Henry Louis Gates calls a "scene of instruction,[22]" Nelson's paradoxical belief in inherent racial categorization and the incongruity of Head's racist depictions with living blacks prompts a melancholic displacement in Nelson, in which he projects his anxieties as hatred on the raced Other. It is not his exposure to an African American that constitutes his instruction, but the psychic process of embracing and suppressing the fictions of racial constructs that "creates for him a new form of racial order" (Hale 130).

[22] As qtd. in Touré. *Who's Afraid of Post-Blackness?: What It Means to Be Black Now*. 1st Free Press hardcover ed., Free Press, 2011. 125

To Mr. Head, the train ride challenges the symbolic currency of whiteness, in which his poverty enervates his accustomed privilege of controlling space. When Mr. Head must decline a black porter's offer of "space for two" in the segregated dining car, the porter tells Mr. Head to "stan' aside" with "an airy wave of the arm as if he were brushing aside flies" (O'Connor 113). The public nature of their discomfiture precludes projecting or displacing their anxieties; thus, Head's disdainful quip about cockroaches in the kitchen, and his explanation that the affluent black man must be "roped" off from the diners are his only recourses to retaining feelings of superiority. The organization of space reifies racial distinction and hierarchical relations, and as Hale notes, "the thin yellow fabric upholds their superiority, their belonging, their whiteness against the black man's roped-off wealth" (Hale 131). The denial scene, however, portrays the psychic limitations of such compensation. Wanting to demonstrate Nelson's dependence on him at last, Head decides to hide while Nelson naps, and observe his grandson's confusion at finding himself alone. When Nelson awakes and cannot find his grandfather, however, Nelson blindly runs down the street, and before Head can catch him, Nelson crashes into and knocks a woman to the pavement. When Head finally arrives, an angry crowd surrounds Nelson threatening to call the police. In this moment, Nelson immediately grabs his grandfather, but rather than defend his grandson, Mr. Head pretends he does not know the child. Though Head's repudiation of Nelson projects the insecurities of his own provincial, underclass identity onto his grandson, the ignominy of the denial nevertheless bars him from privileged communal whiteness. While Nelson's conflict with the bystanders produces the very recognition Head desires, the disavowal also nullifies the positional authority that Nelson concedes. Benjamin Mangrum (2019) observes that while Nelson and Head both "see the world through the mediation of their self-images, the public disgrace of the episode creates a fissure in this initial form of mediated perception,

alienating the two from one another" (Mangrum 247). Without the raced other to mitigate their sense of interracial inferiority, both Head and Nelson are forced to confront the reflection of that self-image in each other, provoking an estrangement indicative of a melancholic denial of the self.

The culminating encounter with the racist lawn ornament illustrates this paradoxical dependence on the black other, revealing the fictive constructs, psychic tensions and compensations that undergird white supremacy. The spatial tropes—locational metaphors and ironic juxtapositions—within this final scene reflect the attempts to concretize conceptions of demarcated and stratified race. For Adrienne Brown (2017) the intersection of racial and material architectures produces and maintains "phenomenologies of race" (Brown 3) that solidify conceptions of racial difference. Though segregated locales and the differences between urban and suburban spaces concretize racial hierarchies, economic factors, such as black affluence or white impoverishment, could disrupt a system of distinction based on these facile conflations. Furthermore, the introduction of the skyscraper, according to Brown, problematize the conventional methods of determining racial distinction. With the foundational truths of absolute racial difference complicated by shifting points of view the skyscraper provides—the staggering heights that would render everyone beneath a homogenized whole, the skyscraper represents a challenge to "the continued viability of perceiving race, a practice heavily reliant on the believed accessibility of racial evidence on and around the body" (Brown 2). Brown explains that

> racial categorizations rely on processes of recognition historically rooted in feeling, genealogy, and visual perception that have allowed whiteness to be conferred upon some and figured as needing defense from the encroachment—spatial, sexual, social—of others. (Brown 21)

Merging racial and spatial imaginaries, however, problematize the maintenance of racial caste, since the intolerance of ambiguity of the dialectic's binarism could be exposed when developments like the skyscraper, for example, threaten the simplifications and omissions of the logics of racialization. O'Connor's text displays this conflict; the socioeconomic superiority that whiteness purportedly signifies (and/or establishes) in the dialectic contrasts with the spatial aspects and lived experience that constitute Nelson and Head's whiteness. O'Connor compounds Nelson and Head's material separation from privileged whiteness with their arrival into "an elegant suburban section where mansions were set back from the road by lawns with birdbaths on them" (O'Connor 128). Mr. Head's declaration of being "lost," both in terms of locality and positionality, are assuaged by the sight of a racist lawn ornament. Upon gazing on the figurine, Mr. Head and Nelson could feel the statue "dissolving their differences" (O'Connor 130-31), not only those of their strained relations, but also their underclass exclusion from privileged collective. For Head, this emblem of black inferiority restores his feelings of inclusion in white hegemonic dominance, and ironically fulfills one of the purposes of their city trip. When Head identifies the statue as an "artificial nigger," Nelson unequivocally concurs. While Nelson struggled to align Head's racial designations with the African Americans he encountered, the stereotypical, exaggerated features of the "artificial" statue becomes the material referent to Head's misconceptions. Mr. Head's declaration that that the neighborhood "got to have an artificial one" because "they ain't got enough real ones" (O'Connor 131) seeks to mitigate the inaccuracy and fictiveness of his racial definitions, and Nelson, rather than challenge these assertions, seems to imbibe them. Nelson's imploration to return home before becoming "lost again," and his revisionist conclusion that he visited town only "once" convey his internalization

of the tenets of this racial imaginary; furthermore, this ambiguous omission of one visit intimates his repression of the negations of his new/old sense of selfhood that trip entailed.

Though the socioeconomic advantages of this segregated community would seemingly obviate the psychic compensations of a racist statue, its presence reveals the buoyancy and resistance of white melancholic anxieties to fixed repression. Ironically, then, these shared melancholic fears of the tenuousness of racial differentiation and supremacy also bind Head and Nelson to the white collective. The tonal characteristics of O'Connor's critique, however, seek to distance her from these racist mores. Benjamin Mangrum argues that O'Connor's undermining of the tale's resolution "further positions herself as an 'outsider' critical of prevailing cultural and social values" and ironizes "the constitutive terms of white supremacy in the United States" (Mangrum 249). Though the dominant, current perspectives of O'Connor position her as a critic of Southern provincial racism, her letters undercut that characterization. Much of these interpretations of O'Connor's positions on racial politics, however, are based on revisions, omissions and mitigations of her written views on African Americans. Paul Elie (2020) examines collections of her personal correspondence that reveal O'Connor's self-conscious awareness of her role as a writer, and in these letters that enumerate her thematic concerns about her fiction, also casually depict her bigotry and unprogressive racial conceptions. As Elie explains, the tendency to excuse her racism as a product of her "place and time," is both inaccurate, ahistorical, and patronizing, for it "backdates" O'Connor (she was a contemporary of such writers as Marquez and Angelou) and suggests "white racism in Georgia was all-encompassing and brooked no dissent, even though…Georgia was then changing more dramatically than at any point before or since" (Elie). Furthermore, these mitigations imply that O'Connor, "a genius who prized detachment" had in some way "lacked the free will to think for herself" (Elie). Declaring

herself "an integrationist by principle & a segregationist by taste" (as qtd. in Elie) in her letters, O'Connor embodies this contradiction, an incongruity which draws a "false equivalence" between the concept of racial parity and the realities of segregation, and undercuts the inclination to see her criticism of Southern racism as evidence of her divergence from White Southern hegemony, or her racism as unavoidable, but as a permissible byproduct of her circumstances. When discussing this tale, O'Connor once lamented "there is nothing that screams out the tragedy of the South like what my uncle calls 'nigger statuary'" (Habit 101), and through her positional critique seeks to redeem Southern white subjectivities from the disrepute of monolithic racism. This refiguring of whiteness, however, historically centers around interactions with the black subject. Though the racial dialectic would form "a common whiteness out of the racial absolutes of the color line" (Hale 74), relations with blacks would function as a barometer for "white class position" where maltreatment of African Americans became synonymous with the lower class. Although the introduction of social class as a determinant destabilizes the concept of monolithic whiteness, blacks nevertheless remain subjugated beings-for-other in this nested dialectic.

The disavowals of oppressive, discriminatory behaviors that constitute "white guilt" seemingly divide whites into two categories marked by a simplified reconstitution of the racial/spatial imaginaries: modern and liberal Northern sensibilities and Southern conventional mores. To Ralph Ellison, the American racial imaginary positions the raced other as a fulcrum counterbalancing white subjectivities. In his unfinished *Three Days Before the Shooting*, he undermines this intraracial schism. Though it may appear to foreclose potential counters to the totalization of dialectic racialization, his position identifies the hypocrisies and repressions of such imagined divisions of the white identity. Ellison's presentation exemplifies an expanded

version of the intra-racial melancholia exhibited in the Chandler and O'Connor texts, where the subjects navigated the discrepancies between constructed, hegemonic whiteness enforced by the American dialectic racialization and a lived experience of whiteness devoid of the socioeconomic privilege presumably concomitant with whiteness. Though Ellison began work on *Three Days* a year after O'Connor published "The Artificial Nigger," a fire that destroyed the original manuscript required Ellison to begin re-writing the text in 1967, at a time in which intracultural differences between Northern and Southern racial sensibilities were presumably more pronounced. In the novel, a dreamed encounter with a talking lawn jockey uncovers a series of repressions within white Northerner journalist Welborn McIntyre, forcing him to confront his own hegemonic views and complicity in racial oppression. As the story opens, McIntyre covers a speaking engagement of race-baiting Senator Bliss Sunraider, who is inexplicably shot during the engagement. After the shooting, black minister Revered Hickman insists on attending to the wounded Senator, an overture that, considering the senator's racist reputation, concerns McIntyre and his inquiry into the relationship becomes another layer of his investigation. His exploration of the case reveals his hegemonic perspectives and perforates the veneer of color neutrality that McIntyre believes distinguishes his attitudes from the more indecorous shows of white supremacy. As Anne Cheng notes, such sentiments reflect not a profound divide in the white consciousness, but racial melancholia, in which "'white guilt' and 'white indifference' may be considered two sides of the same coin, deployed in the service of trying to reconcile the nation's internal betrayal of proclaimed national ideology" (Cheng 94) With the superficial distinctions in attitudes towards the raced other eliciting little difference, both responses diverge only in the degree of justification or mitigation maintaining belief in innate racial superiority necessitates.

McIntyre's interactions with African American characters uncover the repression, projection and recasting used to syncretize the traditional American ideals with racial oppression. His dreamed encounter with the lawn jockey encapsulates pressurized psychic processes entailing white melancholic guilt: the ironic reversal into opposites and symbolic imaging are manifestations of McIntyre's repressed past and present hegemonic thought. His contemplation and investigation of Sunraider's shooting evokes a series of associative memories that resist repression or projection. His initial conversation (and later conflicts) with Reverend Hickman exposes the illusoriness of McIntyre's liberal persona. In a telling exchange that illustrates McIntyre's misapprehension of his own positionality and bias, Hickman attributes that myopia to his reticence. After Hickman asks McIntyre "who do you think I am?" McIntyre responds by asking "Who?" causing Hickman to reframe the question:

> '*What* do you think I am?'
>
> 'A minister, I suppose. I don't know.'
>
> 'That's right, and you won't take my word that I'm a man of God, so you don't know *who* and you don't know *what.* (Ellison 71)

The use of pronouns in this exchange reveals McIntyre's view of African American positionality: his repetition of the interrogative "who," but answer to "what" suggests he disagrees with Hickman's assumption of personhood and responds only when Hickman describes himself as an object. These denials of black subjectivity, on both metaphorical and grammatical levels, frame McIntyre's individuation, but as corollaries, McIntyre perceives Hickman's assertions of subjectivity as negating McIntyre's sense of self. McIntyre reflects that "the fact that the old man now dared assert this force over me seemed to imply a disorder in the society that was far more extensive, and potentially more destructive, than was indicated even by

the shooting of the Senator" (Ellison 72). This dis-order, as McIntyre describes Hickman's use of the nominative, reverses subject-object relations for McIntyre, in which Hickman, unwilling to be an object of information now acts upon McIntyre.

His hyperbolic reaction to Hickman's refusals, however, comes from his associative concatenation of this interaction to other episodes from his repressed past. After Hickman offers to donate blood to the Senator, McIntyre becomes enraged and accusing Hickman of "intruding on his memories," strikes out at Hickman. Initially believing it "was something in his expression which started it, something abstractly accusatory and evocative of a buried time and a repressed defeat, all there on the broad dark face" (Ellison 101), McIntyre begrudgingly acknowledges "that my upset over Hickman's offer of a transfusion was concealing something else, something painful and vile which I feared to face" (Ellison 100)—his failed interracial love affair. Though the associations with miscegenation evoke the memory of the failed relationship, McIntyre overlooks several other parallels that all uncloak his latent white supremacy. Furthermore, McIntyre's relegation of Hickman to a reflective object could compensate for Hickman's refusals to cooperate. In her seminal *Playing in the Dark* (2002), Toni Morrison traces the psychological utility of the concept of blackness in the white consciousness. Morrison explains that blackness has evolved "from its simplistic, though menacing, purposes of establishing hierarchic difference, to its surrogate properties as self-reflexive meditations on the loss of difference, to its lush and fully blossomed existence in the rhetoric of dread and desire" (Morrison 64). This shift into implicit or metonymic conceptions of blackness reveals the depth of its sedimented connection to inferiority in the American racial imaginary. The illusion of its subtlety facilitates its disavowal as an intentional construct, making it a candidate for repression in characters like McIntyre, whose definitions of selfhood depend upon the very constructs he purports to eschew.

McIntyre's retelling of the end of his love affair explores the multiple layers and manifestations of black and white racial melancholia. After his lover Laura becomes pregnant, McIntyre visits her home to inform her family that he intends to marry her. The scene, however, undermines any misinterpretations of McIntyre's courage and color neutrality, and uncloak the racial paternalism and hegemonic yearnings covered by his professed liberalism. According to Ellison, the repressions unearthed by Hickman is not the encounter with Laura's family, but of McIntyre's confrontation with his own white supremacy. When he first meets Laura's mother, McIntyre wonders if "one have to call her 'Mother,' this big black woman, and be part of her most likely classic matriarchy" (Ellison 105). McIntyre's presupposition that the home follows a matriarchal structure (despite Mrs. Johnson's warning about Mr. Johnson's probable violent reaction to McIntyre's "proposal") signals his anxieties about losing aspects of his whiteness in this interracial union. Finding his presumed privilege and socioeconomic superiority rebuffed by Mrs. Johnson, McIntyre reframes Mrs. Johnson's resistance as a symptom of the failure of the African American family to adhere to heteronormative structures. Furthermore, McIntyre's comments align with the traditional misrepresentations of African American households found in Daniel Patrick Moynihan's *The Negro Family: The Case for National Action* (1965). The report aligns the black family with failed heteronormative familial structures, and according to Moynihan, these discrepancies contribute to disparities in racial conditions. McIntyre also distances himself syntactically from the experience by using the indefinite pronoun case, as opposed to the nominative, and using the subjunctive, phrases his thought as a hypothetical, betraying the foreknowledge that this will never occur.

McIntyre further reveals his disingenuity and privilege when he eschews request to declare that "Laura and I have to get married" (Ellison 108). His verb choice seeks to remove

the volition from Mrs. Johnson, and her retort exposes McIntyre's internalized privilege, as well as the self-sabotage underlying his visit. Correcting his verb from "have" to "want," Mrs. Johnson reinterprets McIntyre's "proposal" as an attempt to "brag and try to impress Laura," concluding that he does not "want to do good, you just want to look good" (Ellison 110). Though divergent, Mrs. Johnson's response, and McIntyre's acquiescence display melancholic responses. By dismissing McIntyre, and identifying his latent hegemonic notions, Mrs. Johnson sought to defend her daughter and grandchild from a relationship that would reinforce their own inferiority. With McIntyre, Ellison elucidates the compensations and refiguring that maintain McIntyre's view of himself. Though admitting upon leaving that he "would have felt lucky with the prospect of such an easy solution to my problem—even though I believed that I would have rejected it" (Ellison 110), he reinterprets the incident by omitting his own culpability and reinstating his belief in his color neutrality. McIntyre laments that he

> had been defeated not by my own family ties, or by the codes of my own social background, as I'd feared, but by an outraged, ignorant black woman who wanted no one like me, no one who even looked like me, in her family. And what I couldn't have allowed myself to believe but which she insisted that I secretly hoped: She preferred to have her daughter bear the burden of white bastardy rather than accept me as a son-in-law. (Ellison 111)

His summation of the visit seeks to introduce agents other than white hegemony as contributors to racial oppression. By recasting Mrs. Johnson as an antagonist who perpetuates racial inequalities, McIntyre obfuscates his own positionality and culpability in the events. His claim that an "ignorant" black woman, as opposed to white mores, inhibited the relationship further his deflection of responsibility. The parenthetical "as I'd feared" articulates both a latent

acknowledgment of white hegemony, and his relief that he can exonerate his "cultural codes" in the incident. To Ellison, these rationalizations illustrate the dramatic ironies of white racial melancholia, of which Mrs. Johnson and Reverend Hickman are cognizant, but McIntyre is blind.

The psychic pressures of forging these events into congruence with his liberal self-concept converge in the dreamed lawn jockey confrontation. Despite facile dismissals of his hegemonic behavior, McIntyre struggles to reconcile it with his individuated white subjectivity. The ironic juxtapositions, symbolic reversals and eventual resolution of this scene force McIntyre to confront the fictions of his individuated self, and the facts of his communal identity. In this dream, McIntyre imagines that his colleague McGowan, an intolerant Southerner, fearfully requests McIntyre's help in removing a "crazy nigra" blocking his front door. McIntyre describes feeling "a sudden gratification for the opportunity of undoing some of the effects of McGowan's constant provocation" (Ellison 179-180), finding it "flattering to have him admit that someone else might be able to deal with these people more effectively than himself" (Ellison 180). McIntyre declares he will "persuade the obstinate Negro with logic and kindliness" and wondered when McGowan would "learn that politeness was always more effective than insults" (Ellison 180). The tonal ironies of McIntyre's description negate any distinction in the racial attitudes of McGowan and McIntyre: the assertion that he can deal with African Americans "more effectively" indicate shared objectives—controlling "obstinate" blacks and maintaining the hierarchical order. When McIntyre arrives at McGowan's home, however, he finds only "a small cast-iron hitching-post figure in the form of a diminutive Negro" (Ellison 180). Identifying it as those "seen mainly in the South, but which in recent years have mushroomed throughout the North…especially before the meanest, least aristocratic of

dwellings" (Ellison 180), McIntyre notes the iron groom "was a cheap, crudely made symbol of easily acquired tradition; the favorite statuary of the lazy seeker for facile symbolic status" (Ellison 180). With its connotations, symbolic import, and racist utility, the lawn jockey emblemizes the merger of the racial and spatial imaginaries. The ability of this image of black subservience to compensate for the lack of the material advantages of whiteness reveals the artificiality of racial stratification. Folded into the racial dialectic are expectations of white hegemonic dominance, and the discrepancy between the internalized notions of superiority and the reality of low socioeconomic status necessitates these contrivances. The jockey's illusory expedience and efficacy, however, evoke melancholic responses of fortified, resentful racism and guilty but forced disregard of its necessity, which for Ellison, instead of distinguishing white subjectivities, merely reflect differing defenses of supremacist thought.

The ironic reversals in the setting and imagery of this dream reflect the fraught psychic processes of reconciling internalized white supremacy with a professed liberal white subjectivity. In its combination of minstrel tropes (the gleaming teeth, "blood-red lips," and "thyroid eyes" of the conventional Sambo, and the replacement of the riding habit with a Zip Coon, "Italian Continental" suit), the reimaging of the lawn jockey reflects McIntyre's assessment of his own repressed views of African Americans. Throughout the scene, the groomsman negates McIntyre's attempts to mitigate and obfuscate his own involvement in hegemonic white domination. McIntyre's supposition that McGowan's Southern friends "wired this thing for sound" (Ellison 181) to have "fun with a Yankee" (182) not only intends to underscore his distinction from this element of whiteness, but also reduces the groomsman's social critiques to minstrel parody. The lawn jockey, however, undercuts these compensations, calling McIntyre "McGowan," and deconstructing the intraracial distinctions that inform his sense of selfhood.

According to the groomsman, distinction and hierarchy are inextricable in the American racial imaginary, and McIntyre's "stance of innocence" (Ellison 185) on this dynamic evinces a repression of his "own nature." Rejecting the realization that he "had in fact become McGowan" (Ellison 186), McIntyre angrily throws the groom from the porch, ironically returning it to its customary position on the lawn. As he studies the dropped statue, McIntyre watches its face dissolve as his "own face, pale and ghastly, eyes closed and dank-haired, was emerging as from the cracked shell of a black iron egg" (Ellison 193). This concluding image of McIntyre's dream distills the mechanism of dialectical racialization, in which conceptions of a dominant whiteness depend upon the constructs of stereotypical and inferior blackness. When he wakes, he gazes at Hickman, wondering if he would "see the smaller, iron-cast face again, grinning at me through the features of a living man" (Ellison 194). Though he seeks to dismiss the groomsman's stances by projecting them onto an "indignant Negro," McIntyre's melancholic concern that the groomsman or its sentiments could uncannily return in a "living man" acknowledges the veracity of its perceptions, or in this case, McIntyre's repressed recognition of the fictiveness of his individuated identity.

Ellison balances his meditation of racial subjectivity upon the narrowest of ballasts: while his work could suggest the fallacy of intraracial individuation or cast racial difference as illusory, Ellison centers on the paradoxical compulsion and aversion to communal identification that the oxymoronic term denotes. Ellison's text exemplifies intracultural tensions that expand the dialectical aspects of racial melancholia. In *Invisible Man* as well, he explores the problematics of racial individuation, a process which not only occurs interracially, but intraracially, and for McIntyre, who seeks to disavow (and centralize) racist thought by associating it with McGowan's unadulterated racial animosity, McIntyre can mitigate his own racial paternalism

and maintain a self-image that nominally fulfills conventional American ideals of equality. *Three Days* uncovers intracultural elements of racial melancholia that expand Cheng's theorizing of white guilt. Ellison's treatment of white intraracial melancholia diverges tonally from his *Invisible Man* portrayal of similar ambivalences within black collective racial identity. In his earlier novel, the raced subject navigates alienation from two forms of selfhood; his narrator experienced the isolation from both a fully recognized American selfhood associated with whiteness, and an imposed black identity mitigated by collective efforts at negating stereotypes. For the black subject, racial individuation entails identifying with notions oftentimes external from the self (or contrary to one's internal subjectivity or lived experiences). In *Invisible Man*, Ellison treats this isolation sympathetically as a double-bind of blackness, but in *Three Days*, McIntyre's white intraracial melancholia is the byproduct of perpetuating the paradoxical drives of white supremacy.

The psychic investment in maintaining this balance of ambivalence encapsulates my conception of the racial uncanny—a liminal position between the disavowals and adoptions of the constructs of race that intersect with subjectivity. Positionality, however, appears to color the explorations and expressions of this concept. Though O'Connor and Chandler challenge notions undergirding hegemonic whiteness, both buttress their critiques by presupposing a stable sense of racial identity in the black subject. For them, the melancholic anxiety of embracing and repudiating racial constructs is within the domain of a white racial uncanny, while blacks, presumably assured of internal senses of racial identity, function as an essentialized reflective other. Ellison, however, identifies the dramatic ironies of a position that requires a totalized and facile blackness to demonstrate the comparative complexities of whiteness. Colson Whitehead negates the presumption of racial difference in the manifestation of the racial uncanny.

Conventionally, racial melancholia for the raced other involves the loss (or unattainability via social conditions and practices) of a self independent of the validations or degradations of racial hierarchy, and the inability to accept this absence spurs an introjection of an image of the accepted, socially integrated self. Whitehead explores the ambivalences racialization evokes—its constricting of subjectivity and its unifying, stabilizing effects on the raced identity—and the uncanny attachment to its structures when the material markers of racial inferiority are removed. Much of the American racial/spatial imaginaries functions melancholically, designed to foreclose white melancholic guilt by espousing social equality and integration, but foster African American racial melancholia by metonymizing socioeconomic inferiority with blackness. Conversely, for the raced subject, it is not the designed unattainability of these ideals that evokes racial melancholia, but the possibilities of its achievement, and the objectionable methods it entails. These scenarios illustrate an extension of Cheng's model of melancholia in their exemplification of the tensions of intraracial melancholia when the material, spatial and socioeconomic elements of assimilation (ones used to fortify racial distinction/stratification) are actualized, but nevertheless intact, and one's loss of material affinity with a racial collective, and perpetual loss of recognized citizenship compound the alienation of racial melancholia. Cheng explains that as a mechanism of the ideals of integration, assimilation "catches all the material and immaterial anxieties inadmissible to that promise" (Cheng 70). As "the objects of that national ambivalence," the racialized also have "ambivalent responses of one's own" (Cheng 70), which, in my expansion of her observation, I define the ambivalence not as struggle between adopting white cultural norms and discarding one's original cultural beliefs, but as an interfamilial conflict between parent and their racially or culturally hybrid children. Faced with offspring who transcend or transgress the boundaries of the racial/spatial imaginaries, these

parents displace their uncanny fears/desires of losing their racial subjectivities into conflicts with their families. At the center of these collisions are images of lawn jockeys, ironically introducing children to and reminding parents of the hegemonic resistance (and vulnerability) to renovating the imaginaries.

As one of the more contemporary texts covered in this chapter, Whitehead's *Sag Harbor* meditates on the interplay of postblackness and racial collectivity. For Benji, the novel's protagonist, the elimination of the material and spatial markers of a raced caste position complicates his assumption and expression of a raced identity. Raised in an affluent family, and attending an exclusive private school in Manhattan, Benji and his siblings have limited interactions with other African Americans, and ironically, their summers in this section of the Hamptons constitute his most prolonged exposures to communal blackness. As a part of the small community of black summer vacationers in Sag Harbor, Benji observes that "to the world, we were the definition of paradox: black boys with beach houses" (Whitehead 71). By attributing this perspective to the "world," Benji intimates his separation from these constructs, ones which presume incongruity between affluence and blackness and bifurcate his subjectivity from the conventional notions of blackness. Benji locates the self at an intersection of such artificial oppositions: he contrasts the possibilities of accepting the "luxury," performing "some idea you had about what real blackness was, and make theater of it," before embracing the ambivalences, where "what you call paradox, I call *myself*" (Whitehead 72). Cameron Leader-Picone sees the novel outlining a deeper generational conflict, where nascent resistance to the stereotypical conceptions woven into communal blackness "generates the post-blackness emphasis on individual performance and critiques obligations rooted in a collective group identity" (Leader-Picone 435). While the liberatory possibilities of Benji's emergent postblack consciousness

contrast with the racialized notions of his father (whose conflicted attachment to his own raced identity manifests itself in the novel's several "scenes of instruction"), the sociocultural milieu still carries elements of a racist imaginary that undercut postrace optimism. The novel depicts the contradictions of a raced consciousness, and like Ellison, Whitehead portrays its ability to foster collectivity but inhibit individualism. Conversely, advancing postblackness as a panacea to hegemonic racism would disregard the role privilege plays in stabilizing Benji's insulated positionality. By exploring these ambivalences, Whitehead precludes prescription of a revised essentialized blackness that would merely replicate the totalizations of the racial dialectic.

Through the distinctions in their interpretations of racial incidents, Whitehead contrasts the raced and postblack lenses. Benji's misapprehension of racial components of these encounters, while elucidating the liberatory potential of the postblack lens, also illustrates its potential for misreading reality. Although his reframing of the incidents elucidates the complex power dynamics within racial relations, Benji's father seems to exacerbate the very psychic injuries Benji's socioeconomic position and postblack perspective would ostensibly neutralize. Like Ellison, Whitehead intimates the complicity of communal blackness in inflicting the traumas that reinforce racial differentiation, but also recognizes the possibility of hegemonic domination that fully embracing a postracial, color neutral subjectivity tacitly enacts. The affluence that has liberated him from much of the discrimination also insulates him from much of the collectivity, and his ambivalence in his racial perspective reflects another manifestation of racial melancholia. This ambivalence is apparent in his father's management of Benji's performance of blackness. For instance, when contemplating wearing "gold chains," sneakers and other conventionally black apparel, Benji forecasted his father's disapproval. Whitehead depicts the father's paradoxical conflict with his own black identity in spatial terms; Benji

explains that for his father, the "Street" is "a vast, abstract plane of black pathology" and any intimation that he had not escaped "kindled his temper and his deep fear that aspiration was an illusion and the street a labyrinth without exit," which for Benji indicated "no gold chains" (Whitehead 107). From his father's perspective, Benji's circumvention of this black pathology signifies an inability to perceive racial slights. When a classmate runs a finger down Benji's face and remarks that his blackness "doesn't come off" (Whitehead 162), the father translates the act as the classmate "calling you a nigger" (Whitehead 163), and after his father strikes Benji for his inaction, conditions Benji that physical violence is the appropriate response to racial insults. When a Doberman chases them off an unfamiliar street in Sag Harbor, the boys return with their father, who immediately notices a "shining, well-polished" lawn jockey planted in the middle of the lawn. The father proclaims the "cracker in there tosses raw meat by the lawn jockey, the dog eats there every day and then when it sees black people it thinks, Food" (Whitehead 231). In this complex line of signification, where people and canines metonymize inferior blackness in the lawn jockey, the father attempts to reassert this signification of blackness that the lived experiences of his children rarely encounter or substantiate. Whitehead navigates the ambiguity of a postblack racial identity, which impedes recognition and internalization of conceptions of black inferiority. Though the text seemingly frames these scenes of instruction as a quasi-racial bildungsroman for Benji, the instances are more reflective of the father's racial melancholia and uncanny connection to what he considers markers of his black subjectivity—an index obscured by his change in locale and socioeconomic status. Benji's father exemplifies the psychic tensions of a black intra-racial melancholia, an ambivalent, uncanny attachment to his blackness that assuages and confirms his alienation. Despite his socioeconomic stature, Benji's father still occupies the essentialized position of the raced black, and in the absence of the material

disadvantages or spatial limitations on racialized African Americanness, instances of discrimination and memories of a subordinated upbringing are the only markers of his blackness. His incongruity with the dialectical designations of blackness and whiteness exacerbates his psychic alienation, making his racial individuation a continual source of loss and discordance with a racial identity.

For these authors, the appearance of lawn jockeys (and the ceramic black boy in O'Connor's work) constitute a point of entry into contemplations of the interplay of racial collectivity and individual subjectivities. While the race and status of their protagonists to a degree shaped the interactions with the groomsmen, each author explored the discrepancies between the presumed perquisites of racial hierarchy and material socioeconomic realities, where the expected privileges (or limitations) of racial caste were merely nominal social fictions bypassed by economic class. The portrayal of economic class in these texts uncover intracultural distinctions that destabilize senses of racial subjectivity for the protagonists, and the tenor of the anxieties of these characters problematizes the processes of racial individuation that provoke intracultural or intra-racial melancholia. In O'Connor's and Chandler's texts, for example, the caricatured lawn ornaments reflected (or mollified) the anxieties about membership in a monolithic whiteness presumably interchangeable with socioeconomic dominance that these characters could not possess. Whitehead's *Sag Harbor* also explores the interplay of economic class and racial collectivity, where the characters' affluence transgresses the presumed racial/spatial imaginaries and initiate a struggle to adopt a sense of collective blackness. Whitehead similarly explores the struggles of racial individuation when his protagonists occupy spaces and retain privileges associated with whiteness. For these characters, racial trauma, as opposed to internal feeling, direct their identification with blackness. Furthermore, his

characters' encounter with an iron groomsman in the privileged Hamptons reveals the melancholic insecurities about the stability of a white dominance seemingly solidified by wealth and spatial exclusivity. These texts enlarge the scope of racial melancholia by presenting the psychic consequences of the failures of the conventional spatial designations and socioeconomic factors used to locate the raced subject within the expected category. In this variation of racial melancholia, an exacerbated sense of alienation can rise from one's difference from one's presumed racial collective, and the defunct, extant factors that distinguish the subject from another race.

In these works, the juxtaposition of the lawn jockey with socioracial discourse suggests that racist lawn ornaments are more than forgotten, innocuous artifacts of a bygone era, and raise additional interpretative possibilities to their material presence on American lawns. The tendency to palliate the racial import of these objects by relegating them (and the racial constructs they house) to a distant past, despite their fixity within the domestic landscape and the marketplace, exemplifies the network of contradictory drives maintaining white hegemonic domination. By examining their treatment in literature and their juxtaposition to discourses on race, I can begin to account for the fixity of a series of objects that have lost their effective, but retained their affective use value. The allusions in these texts provide a meditation that expanded the framework of racial melancholia into intraracial conflicts and ambivalent relations with racial collectivity that white/raced subjects face, and in the desire to resolve these anxieties, further embrace or internalize the dialectic boundaries that further perpetuate the black/white racial dyad and exacerbate their own alienation.

The next chapters will examine the psychological utility of this viewpoint as it pertains to the material objects themselves, and how the continued commerce and manufacturing of racist

paraphernalia are reframed as simple, color neutral, apolitical preservations (or perpetuations) of history. These justifications become as central a point of inquiry as the objects they mitigate, and the next chapters analyze the expedience of counterinterpretations of the objects and the act of collecting. Chapter 3 explores the hidden racial discourse beneath the practice of collecting racist collectibles, while Chapter 4 studies how the manifestation of the stereotypical tropes in the form of public monuments and commercial statues function to naturalize racial constructs. Both chapters build on the postulate that racist collectibles symbolize the double bind of white supremacy, where concretizing conceptions of black inferiority/white superiority into material objects paradoxically acknowledges the artificiality of its notions. In other words, the racist collectible that is meant to assuage white racial anxieties over the fallacy of inherent superiority emblemizes the melancholic fears themselves, and the ahistorical frames used to justify the continued circulation of the ephemera are merely other forms of melancholic compensation. This chapter focused on the literary meditations on this aspect of racial melancholia, furthering the discourse on the melancholic aspects of whiteness that for Cheng involved latent guilt over hegemonic oppression, and the need to obfuscate the traces of actions that would subjugate racial others. The analysis of the O'Connor and Chandler texts uncovered layers of racial anxiety beneath the superiority-declaring display of racist lawn ornaments, and explored the concept of intraracial melancholia where the individual white subject must resolve his/her socioeconomic and material incongruity with the internalized image of hegemonic whiteness. At the center of the resolution of this dissonance is black ephemera, a paradox resolving technology that exploits the racial dialectic's intolerance for ambiguity and maintains the tenuous criteria of racial stratification.

Chapter 3: Social Media, Price Guides and Continued Trade and Production

"the past that is not past reappears, always, to rupture the present" (Sharpe 9).

When visiting the Antique Corral, a popular antique store located on Highway 160 near the Utah border in Colorado, Nicola Shanks encountered several Jim Crow replica signs strewn amongst the store's selection of black collectibles. Born in Britain, and a mother of a biracial child, Shanks was dismayed at the store's nonchalant display of the racist signs and demanded that the owner Cheryl Dean remove them. Dean asserted that the signs had "nothing to do with racism," and allegedly stated that if the signs made Shanks uncomfortable, then she should "go back to England" (CNN). After Shanks photographed the signs and detailed the incident on Facebook, the story quickly garnered national (and even international) news coverage. In interviews with several media outlets, Dean dismissed the controversy surrounding the signs, asserting the "black people" who visit "laugh" about them, and far from jeopardizing her business, she claimed, the press coverage and negative online reviews of her store increased her sales of replica signs. Despite the threat of protests and boycotts, she steadfastly maintains her right to sell them, placing the following message in her black collectibles section:

> SIGNS ARE NOT HERE TO OFFEND ANYONE. It's collectible history. It's to remind and teach people how far we've come. There's people that collect history. So if it offends you—I'm sorry, but I have them here to sell to people that want them. IT HAS NOTHING TO DO WITH RACISM!!!

Though Dean no longer carries the reproduced signs, and purports to have no plans of resuming their sale, the printed declaration remains in her black collectibles section, visible in the photographs of Antique Corral on several review and travel websites. This image of a

forgotten, obsolete message hanging above an assemblage of ceramic mammies, gator bait figurines and Rastus jars composes an ironic visual metaphor for a positional myopia that encompasses Dean, Shanks and dozens of commenters alike. Although CNN, NBC and local networks covered the incident (with almost all of the stories using images solely from Shanks's social media posting), only a fraction of the news outlets—Britain's *Daily Mail* and a number of African-American online publications, to name a few—noted the rows of racist figurines above the half dozen replica signs. This counterintuitive discrepancy in reactions constitutes one of the central inquiries of this chapter: what are the processes that have rendered such racist figuration transparent or presumably innocuous in the American collective consciousness? What are the sociological ramifications and psychic utilities of viewing and treating black ephemera as mere artifacts, devoid of their originary, discursive significance? This chapter examines the possibility that these objects can be resignified, and questions whether black appropriation of the objects also ironically validates white revisionism of them.

Despite the seeming discordance with the purportedly color neutral, postracial American imaginary of the present, the sale, trade and manufacture of black collectibles have experienced a sustained renaissance since the 1980's. This presumption that the stereotypes no longer represent current racial conceptions or reflect the sociological conditions of the past justifies the recirculation of the items. Ironically, the uncanny presence of these items is used to signify their divergence from the conceptions of the contemporary racial imaginary. Russell Belk (1995) explains that collectors "create, combine, classify and curate the objects they acquire in such a way that a new product, the collection, emerges" (55) and through the process, new meanings arise. Belk explains that the act of collecting initiates a "process of socially reconstructing shared meanings for the objects they collect" (Belk 55). Beyond the changes in import of the items, this

chapter explores how the act of collecting has its own signification. Collecting black memorabilia constitutes a discursive act that seeks to substantiate perceptions of the current racial order. This chapter examines how elements within the practice of collecting are used to concretize divergent perspectives on contemporary race relations, where the trade in collectibles demonstrates a postracial imaginary, or a new iteration of Jim Crow domination. Informed by the theories on material and visual media of Barthes (1967), deSaussure (1966), Levi-Strauss (1963), Grant McCraken (1986), this chapter asserts how material culture and cultural principles undergo a process of mutual substantiation with the world of product exchange. To McCraken, "goods are both the creations and the creators of the culturally constituted world" (74), used to naturalize and substantiate cultural notions. Henry Louis Gates (2013) explains that the "mountain of negative Sambo images" would "subliminally reinforce the perverted logic of the separate and unequal system of Jim Crow itself" (Gates). These images of blacks materially confirmed an inferiority, making this substantiation of white supremacy another commodity.

This chapter investigates the complex relationship to the past that the discordance perspectives on black collectibles illustrate. For many of the collectors, the past objects signify the distinction of the present, but for others, the presence of the objects suggests that the past has yet to pass. For many white collectors, these figurines are merely objects, defunct signifiers of outmoded conceptions of race, but such seemingly colorblind interpretations reveal the presence of the same white privilege that engendered the creation of such items. This chapter argues that the collectible functions as a palimpsest of racial discourse in which previous significations are "under erasure," and the act of collecting can signify an uncanny return of Jim Crow denigration of blackness, or a theatre of disavowal and exorcism of the forms white hegemonic domination took in the past.

Many of the sellers believe that the display of racist memorabilia paradoxically, in the words of Cheryl Dean, show "how far we've come" (KDVR). As emblems of a time of overt oppression, these caricatured, hyperbolic images are seemingly out of step in the current age, which serves to mitigate current racial inequities. Michelle Holz, the owner of Michelle's Antiques, considers her selection of mammy figurines "simply a part of history" (Cabral). Memorabilia for Holz "was made to be cute. It wasn't made to be racist," and when "you erase this stuff, people have no knowledge where they came from" (qtd. in Cabral). Sallie Hurt, owner of Etc. Collectibles in Bristol, Tennessee notes that one of her biggest sellers is a black Santa Claus figurine carrying a sack of watermelons. Hurt relates that she receives no complaints about the figurines and other reproductions of black memorabilia, which constitute about 80% of her $1 million in annual sales. In fact, she says, 60% of her clients are black. Hurt claims that the African American clientele are "glad to see that their history is being preserved" (qtd. in Hernandez). By relegating this history of racist iconography to a segment of black history, Hurt distances it from American history. Patricia Turner (2002) sees these interpretations as "uncritically accepting the fabricated history lesson entrenched in the iconography" (Turner 29). Despite these ahistorical rationales, these sellers reap "profits from the sense of superiority and comfort these icons offered" (Turner 29). Turner's use of the past tense, in its implication that the objects no longer fulfill this prior function, or contain this past import constitutes another argument this chapter pursues. Moreover, referring to these racist objects as "memorabilia" not only euphemizes their insidiousness, but implies that the racial anxieties that instigated their manufacture, and the conceptions of blackness they crystallize have passed. Turner prefers the term "contemptible collectibles" to counter the presumption of their innocuousness or obsolescence. Henry Louis Gates, Jr., a confessed collector of these objects, calls the amalgam

"Sambo Art," which, like Turner's redefinition, undercuts the assignation of temporality to a segment of material culture still produced today. For those involved in the commerce of collectibles, history is used to signify a stance of apoliticism and objectivity, and the suggestion that the objects represent static attitudes of the past functions to foreclose a dialogue on the perpetuation of these past racial conditions.

If Cheryl Dean and the other sellers of black collectibles are correct, and the sales of Jim Crow replica signs are merely "preserving history," then what are the moments in need of preservation? As presented, "history" seemingly metonymizes an apolitical, color neutral stance, and assumes a sense of pure objectivity. In the case of the Jim Crow era signs, these were evidence of legal subjugation of blackness, and even the process of preserving the defunct signs from destruction after desegregation would become a fraught endeavor for collectors looking to maintain their social superiority, or for the raced other who desired the signs for multitudinous, and often ambivalent reasons. Historically, the significance of the signs transcended disenfranchisement and second-class citizenship, but had effects on the expression and fulfillment of normative gender relations. Alexander Weheliye (2020) asserts that the

> iconography of the rest room signs during the era of legal segregation in the US South underscores this disavowal of gender difference in no uncertain terms seeing that the white side is split into two doors, one for 'ladies' and one for 'gentlemen,' whereas there is only one entry way on the 'colored' side: The vestibule to the ungendering of the door of no return. (Weheliye 239)

In this instance, blackness stayed as a being-for-other, used not only to affirm white racial identity, but also white gendered identity. The blocking of blacks from normative gender relations has been well documented as a byproduct of slavery. Moreover, in a contemporary

context of segregation, The Moynihan Report, from its hegemonic, heteronormative position, decried the ramifications of Jim Crow on the black family organization and gender expression:

> When Jim Crow made its appearance towards the end of the nineteenth century, it may be speculated that it was the Negro male who was most humiliated thereby; the male was more likely to use public facilities, which rapidly became segregated once the process began, and just as important, segregation, and the submissiveness it exacts, is surely more destructive to the male than to the female personality. Keeping the Negro 'in his place' can be translated as keeping the Negro male in his place: the female was not a threat to anyone. (Moynihan)

The Moynihan report interpreted the designation of segregated space as a method of emasculating black masculinities while dismissing the plight of females, and these Jim Crow signs simultaneously enforced a racial/gender hierarchy, which in other words, located heteronormative gender and patriarchal dominance within the province of whiteness. For Hortense Spillers (1987), the report renders "ethnicity" an atemporal, static category upon which binary oppositions can be solidified and naturalized. In her blistering deconstruction of the report, Spillers asserts that the construct of the heteronormative "white family" rests upon the (mis)conception of a matriarchal black family structure. Both Spillers and Weheliye, however posit that the othering of blackness encases the potential for liberation from the limitations of gender bifurcation. Spillers explains that the misrepresentations of African American familial structures, misconceptions that paradoxically stabilize the white patriarchal order, reconfigures "representational potentialities" for both the African American male to acknowledge the female within the self, and for the black female to become a "different social subject" (80). The inclination of negating these perceptions of blackness involved an emulation of a white ethic that

for many, their lived experience of blackness rendered unattainable, and merely underscored the outlines of racial difference. The reframing of these hegemonic constructs that both Spillers and Weheliye undertake illustrate another framework for viewing the black ephemera—a method of seeing that uncovers more about white racial anxieties than about black subjectivity.

Store owner and artisan Marchel'le Renise Barber disrupts the simplified revisionism that presumably authorizes sale of the Jim Crow signs. Noticing that her white customers were purchasing the "White Only" sign "to keep the pleasure of entitlement symbolically alive" (Abel 58-59), Barber sought to undermine the facile, public justifications of "preserving history" by reproducing copies of the signs that acknowledge their own "inauthenticity" and deconstruct the concept of reproductions that are used to determine the value of the items. By registering her reproductions signs for copyright, Barber not only reclaims these as her intellectual property, but also identifies the arbitrariness of concept of authenticity that drives the valuation of black ephemera. Even the copyrighting of the signs appropriate and neutralize the import by attributing it to a single author, and invalidate the phantom authorship that decentralized the sign into a generalized, social statement. Barber's other reclaimed crafts, like her slave shackle jewelry, appropriate the trope of resignifying the objects, and infuse the items with import that asserts "victory over the past" by repurposing the symbols of subjugation into trophies. Her "signifying" on the shackles denies them the absolute and stable signification upon which mainstream collection is ostensibly based.

Both Elizabeth Abel (2010) and Bill Brown (2003) posit how collecting reflects complex relationships with the past. In her study of the repurposing of Jim Crow signs, Abel posits that "Jim Crow signs retain a monitory function in the service of their new owners: by keeping the past in sight, they ward off its return" (Abel 50). Bill Brown however observes a more

multifaceted view of collecting, where it can serve to keep “the past proximate” and incorporated into daily life, or remain distant in order to “arrest its spectral power” (Brown 12). Abel posits when objects are temporally repositioned “they cease to be defined by their function and are redefined in relation to a new set of conditions. It is the collector rather than the producer who determines their meaning by defining the new frame” (Abel 50). The identical objects and acts are used as illustration of diametrical interpretations of the past. Brown explains that this “history” becomes visible when “an object becomes something else, emerges as a thing dislocated from the circuits of everyday life” (Brown 251). The assertion that these objects can be reframed at all is contingent upon an ahistoricism that ignores the material and sociological indication that these are less artifacts of a bygone era than earlier models of a current and insidious brand. This chapter treats the reinscribed objects as palimpsests, and examines the relationship between the previous, presumably effaced content of the black collectibles, and the new import as revisions of the texts of white supremacy. The attempts to expunge this record of racial animus and anxieties without rectifying the attendant social inequities symbolizes an uncanniness to hegemonic domination, and reading the technologies of white supremacy involves a perception of its palimpsestic structure. Christina Sharpe (2016) identifies a similar contradiction in the recent declaration of a postracial imaginary. Sharpe discusses the problematics of accounting for the consequences and effects of past racial conditions when those conditions are still present and shaping current conditions. The suggestion is that this racial past is somehow static and unable to affect the present constitutes a form of epistemological violence, and Sharpe posits a new form of interpretation functioning within the perpetually adapting machinery of white supremacist dominance. Using the metaphor of redacting and annotating, Sharpe describes a new method of viewing the imaginings and imaging of blackness in the

American racial consciousness. The figurations of blackness, in popular culture, news broadcasts, and other media, like racist collectibles, "work to confirm the status, location, and already held opinions within dominant ideology about those exhibitions spectacular black bodies whose meanings then remained unchanged" (Sharpe 116). The method is meta-interpretative, analyzing not only the racialized images, but also the interpretation of those images. The images and objects that articulate conceptions of blackness, and the interpretative frames through which we engage those objects, reinforce white hegemonic dominance. This layering of past and present meanings, meant to revise or redact a history of exploitation leaves compositional traces in its wake, and using Sharpe's framework, this chapter envisions the reframing of black ephemera and the act of collecting as a palimpsest in the project of racial formation. Much like Spillers' analysis of the Moynihan report, and Weheliye's interpretation of segregation signs, Sharpe's framework illuminates the racial anxieties and liberatory possibilities beneath imaging intending to denigrate blackness. For Sharpe, while "there is a long history and present of resistance to, disruption and refashioning of images of blackness and black people" there also exists a "long history and present of imaging and imagining blackness and Black selves otherwise, in excess of the containment of the long and brutal history of the violent annotations of Black being" (Sharpe 115). To divorce the black collectibles from their original use value serves to "fix" their signification and treat them as metonyms of a distant racial past. This presupposes, however that utility comprised their use value, and neglects the psychic utility of their cementing of racial stereotypes. In other words, these objects cannot simply be illustrations of the past when they are still functional items used to substantiate past and present fictions of racial conditions.

For several black collectors, the moment of encountering racist objects constitutes what Henry Louis Gates calls a "scene of instruction" and many of the writers of price guides describe this moment when witnessing stereotypes in effigy and the extent to which conceptions of black inferiority go for their reification. In his essay "Should Blacks Collect Racist Memorabilia?" (2013), Gates recalls his first encounter with a racist object, an ashtray that his family owned. Gates ponders the rationale behind hyperbolized black features of this ashtray, and other memorabilia he encounters. For Gates, the excesses in racist figuration, and rationale behind the sheer volume of produced objects would stimulate his "scholarly interest" in racist collectibles. Though Gates, and other critics focus on the signification and history of the objects they collect, the uncanny fascination these items provoke amongst black collectors (myself included) remains unexamined, and redirected into critiques of the import of the objects themselves (of which this project is itself guilty). Gates leaves the titular question of his essay unanswered, instead opting to illustrate the critical possibilities of this genre of material culture, and hoping that his inquiry constitutes a way of keeping "this sort of thing from being used against our people and any other subjugated people ever again." Gates ponders the superfluity of the objects themselves, and links their proliferation to the early twentieth century rise of black homeownership and development of a middle class. In his documentary series *Many Rivers to Cross*, Gates continues his examination of the objects and the significance of their mass production, and visits the Jim Crow Museum of Racist Memorabilia at Ferris State University. In his interview with the museum's curator David Pilgrim, sociological professor and fellow African-American collector, Gates discusses the expedience of the volume of racist objects. According to Pilgrim, the continued production ensured that new generations would be "taught" these conceptions of blackness. Pilgrim would also publish a piece outlining his relationship with collecting, and like Gates,

aligns the interest in the items with the didactic. Pilgrim explains that he collects "this garbage because I believe, and know to be true, that items of intolerance can be used to teach tolerance" (Pilgrim). When describing his first experience with memorabilia, which, far from the nostalgia and the excitement described in many price guides, Pilgrim explains that after purchasing it from a small store, he "threw the item to the ground, shattering it" prompting the white proprietor to use a racial epithet Pilgrim can no longer recall, though Pilgrim is sure the name was "something other than David Pilgrim," for in those days, that could happen "without incident." Pilgrim's juxtaposition of the items and his treatment encapsulates the ambivalence black collectibles evoke. While the incident elucidates his relative powerlessness, his destruction of this totem of black inferiority forced the seller to manufacture another image of subjugation in the form of the epithet. Pilgrim also suggests many Americans "understand historical racism mainly as a general abstraction: racism existed; it was bad, though probably not as bad as Blacks and other minorities claim" (Pilgrim) but when confronted with tangible, "visual evidence of racism" many of the mitigations and revisionist historicizing would warrant reconsideration. Nevertheless, perhaps from the racial melancholic compensations used to perpetuate white supremacy, these examinations of black collectibles are used alternatively, and their signification seen as mere reminders of past, and not present racial attitudes and conditions.

With the dearth of scholarly criticism on the phenomenon of trading, the memorabilia price guides constitute the definitive texts on the objects, and their problematic, depoliticized or revisionist presentation of collecting mirror and buttress contemporary attitudes on racial conditions. Patricia Turner briefly alludes to the uncritical, ahistorical presentation of the objects in these guides, and using her indictment as a point of entry, this chapter examines the complicitly of these guides in the normalization of these conceptions of blackness. The creation

of these seemingly apolitical, neutral texts attempts to render the act of collection, and the objects themselves as obsolete representations of past ideas, constituting a paradoxical cessation and continuation of its symbolic function, since the objects, divested of their racist import, can now continue their circulation in a postracial atmosphere. Price guides, usually reserved for other antique genres, authenticate the activity itself, lending the practice credibility through its own mundanity and thereby associating the recirculation of the racist objects with other antiques. The price guides seek to dehistoricize the objects and the act of their collection by emphasizing their materiality and deemphasizing their Brownian "thingness," or symbolic import. This preoccupation on their trade and commercial value reduces the objects to a representation of a set of valuative properties—age, condition, craftmanship, rarity—and that no longer carry socioracial significance beyond their past historic use, making them emblems of defunct, antiquated attitudes, and their ownership therefore palatable. The argument that these objects simply reflect "history," and no possess the same symbolic import ignores its own attempt at resignifying the objects and collecting. The price guides conduct an unacknowledged discourse on race: the avoidance of engaging the import of the iconography, the inclusion of rationales for collecting, and the emphasis on historical value all serve to substantiate a belief in color neutral racial imaginary. For Patricia Turner, the specious arguments employed in these price guides suggests a lack of progression, for the guides demonstrate that we "still live in a world eager to develop new reasons and rationales for commodifying African Americans" (Turner 30). The logic behind these attempts is circular: the ability to display the items demonstrates the enervation of their racist signification, and proves that these past racial issues have indeed passed, and discomfort with the items would be the result of unprogressive thought. The act of collecting ironically maintains the status of blackness as a concept-for-other, in which the display

of these racist items now demonstrates the social dissipation of racial oppression. The price guides analogize substantiating belief in a post-race, color neutral milieu, in which the temporal distance from eras of overt discrimination and brazen racial violence, and the absence of these same conditions indicates that racism is no longer a problem.

The experiences outlined and endorsed in the price guides, however, diverge from the visceral responses of Gates or Buster, and narrate experiences with the ephemera that in many ways reinforce the hegemonic order. Beneath the objective, informational structure, the apolitical perspectives, and the blithe advice on the minutia of collecting, these price guides function as polemics that seek to naturalize the façade of a postracial imaginary. The cover of Jackie Young's *Black Collectables: Mammy and her friends* (1988) belies this hegemonic positionality. Young characterizes the creation of the objects as "prompted by nostalgia and memories of warm households peopled by loving black hands, these kitchen tools with cute expressions so pleasant to have around are used as decorations in many homes" (front). Young explains that she "became a devotee of mammy collectibles because of the warm, happy memories I associate with them" (Young 5), but would later "realize that the black items I saw had a darker side to them. They were stereotypes and caricatures that helped reinforce ignorant white notions of racial superiority" (Young 5-6). Young, however, undercuts the obligatory caveat by rejoicing that "the civil rights movement ended this once common portrayal of an entire race and closed that chapter in American culture" (Young 6). These revisions of history (and present conditions) are reflected in the sanitized descriptions of the items themselves. Throughout her guide, despite the grotesque and exaggerated features of many of these kitchen caricatures, Young frequently describes them as "adorable" or "charming." Her pithy caption of a postcard exemplifies the dismissals that are justified by the conventions of price guide. The postcard depicts an

overweight black woman and her with three children, one resembling Topsy, and the others also stereotypically portrayed, visiting a department store glove counter. A white woman behind the counter asks the woman if she could be "interested in a pair of white kids?" In addition to the double entendre of the gloves, the reference to the white children suggests that this black woman is divided from her stereotypical role as a mammy, a role that oftentimes necessitated leaving one's own children to raise their white charges. Young, however, disregards the nuances, and simply designates this postcard as a "humorous postcard of a black lady shopping for gloves" (Young 123). By following conventions of price guides—brief captions with factual information—these subtle dismissals naturalize the hegemonic dismissals of the significance of the items, and seek to substantiate this belief in a color neutral imaginary.

The conflations, elisions and totalizations that accompany the price guide authors' euphemistic definitions of black collectibles seemingly render hegemonic biases transparent. Patricia Turner sees these price guides not only perpetuating the misunderstanding or underestimation of the objects' virulence, but also propagating notions of monolithic blackness. Citing the works of Dawn Reno and Douglas Congdon-Martin (1999), Turner argues that their use of the terms "black Americana" and "black collectibles" code "blackness to mean both images of blacks and images by blacks" (Turner 10). Turner categorizes this terminology not as an oversight, but as a "refusal to distinguish art blacks can be proud of from the mass-produced schlock that distorts and degrades us" (Turner 10). These conflations complicate the maintenance of a singular signification of the objects, and reveal a positionality that seems to maintain a monolithic view of blackness. One of the black authors, P.J. Gibbs (1987) also conflates the terms black collectible, in which the only criterion is an association with African American. Gibbs states that the black collectible is an object "made in the imagery of a Black person or it

must be directly attributed to a Black artisan" (7). One of the contentious parts of the black collectible trade is the inclusivity of the term itself, and Gibbs reiterates that while "the materials created by Black artisans…are usually not looked upon as Black collectibles" (8). *In Black memorabilia around the house: a Handbook & price guide* (1993), Jan Lindenberger problematically simplifies these contentions over representation by conflating all of these positions into a single category. Lindenberger explains that "to some, it is anything associated with the black people, from derogatory items to souvenirs to fine art period, to others it is folk art made by black people. For others i''s comprised of slave documents to shackles or anything related to the slave era" (6). However, for her "it is all of this combined" (Lindenberger 6). When distinguishing black ephemera from other ethnic collectibles, Lindenberger claims "the African-American collectible is far more broadened than any other period: when was the last time you saw a Mexican salt and pepper shaker or a German head cookie jar or a Japanese yard man?" (Lindenberger 6). According to Lindenberger, black collectibles, however, serve a different utility, but referring to these groups as "ethnic" reveals that the intended audience is somehow un-raced. In his obligatory defining of collectibles, Elvin Montgomery differentiates the category of a collectibles as any "object that expresses the experience or culture of African Americans" (Montgomery 9), from memorabilia which "usually portrays Blacks in a derogatory manner in accordance with someone else's stereotype" (Montgomery 10). Referring to these objects as "mammy-bilia," Montgomery asserts that such items "are more evidence of racist perceptions of Blacks than of the history of African Americans" (Montgomery 10). In a move unique to these guides, Montgomery discusses the difference between Black and African American, explaining his decision to use the appellations interchangeably, and problematically concludes that "what to

call African Americans is not considered as important here as the collecting, preservation, and use of their experience" (Montgomery 10).

For Leonard Davis, the term "memorabilia" trivializes the impact of the imagery (11), and prefers the term "Americana" because the "negative and positive images are truly a part of the history that makes up America" (Davis 11). His redefining of the term, however, subtly endorses his position on collecting all items for this unexplored concept of "historical value." Dawn Reno also provides a cursory differentiation between the racist objects and works created by black artists that reveals her own hidebound positionality. Referring to such pieces as "folk art," Reno describes this work and the artist, whom she declares is "rarely schooled, uses readily available tools and supplies, and creates forms of art, art that has only recently, in the long history of antiques, become appreciated as true works of art" (23). These black folk artists, according to Reno, "reveal their deep rooted Africanism and the belief in witchcraft and non-western religions" (25) in their pieces, though her totalizations do not differentiate between the multitude of cultures in the black diaspora. According to Reno, "many African cultures believed that witches traveled as animals" and this "superstition" as she terms it "is reflected in black American folk art" (Reno 30). The overgeneralization of several cultures and ethnicities into a monolithic "African culture" totalizing black art, the hegemonic dismissal of possible cultural traditions as superstition also announces her position. Reno also presents a movement categorized by collectors as "outsider art," which are pieces made by "unschooled people, often those with psychological, criminal, or poor backgrounds" (Reno 26). Reno explains that she feels "more comfortable" coalescing Outsider art into folk art, since fine art is produced by "someone who has had some kind of formal training--an apprenticeship or college degree" (Reno 26).

These conflations of terms have a visual component exemplified in the composition and organization of the images. J.P. Thompson's *Collecting Black Memorabilia* (2002) avoids narrative, opting to feature pictures of racist object with terse captions, as in his description of ceramic black child being engulfed by an alligator as "Native and Alligator ashtray" (Thompson 39). For example, Thompson juxtaposes E.G. Renesch's painting "True Blue" (1919) from World War I (unattributed in the guide) appears below a framed page of *Little Black Sambo*, and an illustration of a Santa Claus holding a sack with a dangling Golliwog Doll. Though the title seems to expand the term "black" by including several objects that seem to portray Northern Africans, with figurines wearing turbans or riding camels, Thompson generally refers to figures as "natives."

The price guides follow a conventional structure of a foreword or introduction describing the writer or editor's first encounter with black memorabilia, marking an initiation into a practice, in which these objects have a form of nostalgia for the writers. For texts authored by white writers, forewords, introductions or allusions to black involvement in collections function as authorization devices. Like captivity narratives that opened with the authorizing white voice, these guides often find their credibility by including an African American voice that ostensibly demonstrates the propriety of the practice. Dawn Reno's *Reno's Encyclopedia of Black Collectibles* (1996), begins with an enthusiastic foreword by an African American collector Steven Lewis, who celebrates the publication of Reno's *Collecting Black Americana*. Lewis' claims that Reno's original text "was the first book to fully validate the subject of black America. It's no surprise to me that *Collecting Black Americana* sold as fast as Nancy Green's hot cakes at the Chicago World's Fair in 1893" (ix). For Lewis, this latest version of the text "is proof positive that black memorabilia is real, that it is here to stay, and that there is a hungry market for

it!" (x). Lewis relates his own ambiguous feelings about "these rare icons of history," that possess their own stories about "the pride and pain of a people—*my* people" (ix). These openings of black testimonials serve to render the practice of collecting permissible. Reno promises her reader that he or she will have "a wonderful time collecting these items, you will learn a lot about the history of an oppressed people, and you'll often be stunned by the derogatory items you come across" (xii). The history of blacks is distanced from Reno in her phrasing, and it assumes that the audience, or neophyte collector, is also non-black.

In *Black Americana Price Guide* (1996) Julian Bond writes an enthusiastic foreword, and Lindenberger quotes Wall Street Journal article that that refers to a statement made by Jeanette Carson about the prevalence of black collectors:

> In a Wall Street Journal article that ran on August 10th, 1992, Jeanette Carson (a promoter of black memorabilia shows) was quoted as saying that 'of the 30,000 collectors of black memorabilia the majority are themselves black.' This is their way of preserving their black heritage and to educate their children to the way things used to be in America and the way some folks perceived the black folk. (Lindenberger 6)

Lindenberger's convenient interpretation intends to palliate collecting by implying that African Americans use black ephemera to inculcate historical lessons about past American racism. When contrasted with the original article by Carol Hernandez (1992), Lindenberger's conclusion appears out of context. Hernandez explains that "rising interest in black collectibles isn't tied just to objectionable items. With the growth of a black middle class and black pride has come an interest in black culture and history" (Hernandez). Moreover, Carson's statement refers to the 30,000 collectors in her organization, of whom, 70% are African American. Though Hernandez explicitly states that the interest in collectibles extends beyond the "objectionable items,"

Lindenberger nevertheless posits that "the 'stereotypical' or 'negative image' items seem to be the most highly collected by the black people" and attributes the interest to "the Civil Rights Act passed in 1964 'making it illegal to mass produce stereotypes.' This law also made all such black items a 'hot' commodity" (Lindenberger 6). Lindenberger distances herself from the pejorative characterization of the racist objects through her use of quotation marks, suggesting that the negativity of the images is subjective. Furthermore, Lindenberger misapprehends the import of the quotation she misattributes to the Civil Rights Acts of 1964; assuming the "mass production" to which she refers is the manufacturing of material items, her discussion of the reproduction market would be additionally problematic if producing stereotypes were legally prohibited.

Douglas Congdon-Martin draws from the same article by citing the same statistics, but presents a different interpretation in the introduction to his text. Congdon-Martin accentuates the ambivalence with which these objects are perceived, and uses the statistic to contextualize the different interpretations of the objects. Congdon-Martin notes that it is

> estimated that up to 70% of those who collect black memorabilia are African Americans, most of whom see how their history has been influenced by and is somehow connected to these objects. Other collectors, black and white, find the items so offensive that they purchased them simply to remove them from the marketplace. People simply find the items to be "cute" and receive from them a nostalgic feeling for 'the good old days.' Still others find that the objects reinforce their attitudes about race, allowing them to maintain the stereotypes and beliefs they have held since childhood. (Congdon-Martin 3).

Congdon-Martin seeks to place the objects in the frame of a study of material culture and examines the viewpoints that may have informed their creation, use, and perpetuation in

continued trade and collecting. Referring to the collectibles as "images in black," Congdon-Martin claims that the collectibles make it possible "to trace the changing racial attitudes of the society" (Congdon-Martin 4), the treatment of the items, as opposed to the objects themselves, reflect the investment in color neutrality that forecloses critical discussions of race. In an introductory section entitled "Images in Black," Congdon-Martin relates the potential subversiveness of the Sambo or contented slave construct, beneath which "hid the underlying anger and day-to-day resistance" (Congdon-Martin 6). In this instance, Congdon-Martin seeks to vindicate much of the Sambo items by identifying its multiple associations. Congdon-Martin, however, does not differentiate between the objects depicting this construct, and the literary instances in which the construct is appropriated. The conclusion suggests that these brief explorations are nominal, for Congdon-Martin ends his guide with "A Note to Collectors" in which he has the conventional caution for avoiding counterfeit items, and exclaiming that the "old adage of collectors holds true: "Collect what you like!'" (159), which intimates that these brief historical anecdotes are for the purposes of vindicating the collection of items that now only appear to possess singular racist import.

Conversely, the price guides authored by African Americans reveal a construction of a unique "black" writerly self, one that acknowledges the writer's ethnicity to establish the propriety of collecting racist memorabilia, but avoids raced interpretations of the items or the practice of collecting. These guides differ from the texts of Pilgrim, Gates and Buster, who in their description of pieces and exploration of the practice of collecting, describe their initial encounters with racist ephemera. These encounters approximate what Gates had described as "scenes of instruction" in which an African Americans experience a quasi-Lacanian mirror stage that involves the black subject facing material representation of hegemonic conceptions of the

black self. Pilgrim, Gates and Buster, all avid collectors, describe this moment, and discuss the ambivalence that their uncanny fascination/aversion to the objects precipitate. Larry Buster (2001) discusses his encounter with black memorabilia, explaining that the images unearthed "painful memories of my childhood in Virginia in the late—950s--especially the Saturdays, when my brother, sister, and I would walk past the white only schools and sit in the colored only balcony of the local movie house" (Buster 10). Leonard Davis (2005) relates his inspiration for collecting black memorabilia in a troubling anecdote. Davis recalls watching a cable television show in which interviewed housekeepers claimed "they could usually determine the ethnic heritage of the homeowner by observing the artifacts and adornments decorating the homes" and added that "black people do not decorate their homes with images that reflect their heritage and culture" (Davis and Husfloen 6). This unqualified generalization deeply affected Davis (though he does not explain why), prompting him to remove all his decorations and visit a flea market, where he purchased a "mammy" cookie jar, salt and pepper shakers, and *The Uncalled* by Paul Laurence Dunbar. Somehow, this combination of items fulfills what Davis perhaps internalized as the expected emblems of black heritage and culture.

For the writers of the price guides, these moments, as well as one's own black identity, are deemphasized to substantiate the mythology that these objects no longer possess the same potency when removed from the past context of virulent racial oppression. Elvin Montgomery in his *Collecting African American History* (2001) has a problematic approach to describing the impetus for collecting memorabilia. Montgomery does not discuss his personal connection to the items, but merges his presentation of the items with a discussion of history. Instead of obligatorily redefining memorabilia, Montgomery equates the practice of collecting memorabilia to collecting "history." According to Montgomery, people desire more than simply learn about

African American history, they "want to own it and accumulate it" (Montgomery 9). Montgomery conflates the objects that reflect history with the history and experience itself, and not only describes it as an object, but as a commodity. The reductions continue when Montgomery states that all people "can learn and benefit greatly from this history, just as they have benefited from African American labor and culture over the years" (Montgomery 10). Equally problematic is the rationale Montgomery offers around the practice of blacks collecting ephemera. Stating that many blacks "undervalue their own history when it comes to being personally involved with historical objects" (Montgomery 10), Montgomery posits that blacks consider "the pursuit of upward mobility as incompatible with an involvement with African American history and therefore seek to deemphasize that heritage in the interests of apparent social or economic success" (Montgomery 10). Ironically, this deemphasis permeates the positionality of the guides written by African Americans.

Though Montgomery goes through great lengths to establish the historical content and importance of objects that do not symbolize, but metonymize black history, his description of the processes of collecting contains a number of elisions. For instance, when describing the prominence of portraits, though he does not distinguish between painting, photography or other mediums, he asserts that "Portraits capturing subjects' inner essence are highly sought after since they reveal something about the state of the African American psyche" (Montgomery 141), though whether it is the psyche of the African American subject or artist remains unclear. Montgomery cites the process of deciphering the sociological content, "the 'might be, could be' hints" as he identifies them, that comprise the fun of collecting (Montgomery 162). Montgomery models this approach when studying a photograph of ten African American young adults. Montgomery explains the clerical collar worn by one of the men suggests that there is "a church

connection…making this picture unusual and collectible" (162) although nothing in the photograph other than the one man's collar has any overt references to a religious affiliation. Furthermore, Montgomery observes that "the skin shades within the group vary widely which is notable because then color consciousness among African Americas [sic] was rampant and severe. Many collectors will pick up and consciously or unconsciously respond to these various factors in deciding to acquire photos such as this" (Montgomery 162). Here, Montgomery blurs the description of the practice and his own, idiosyncratic approach to collecting, which serve to substantiate each other.

For the African American writers, endorsing the collection of items originally and perhaps presently intended to concretize black inferiority necessitates deemphasizing the black writerly presence in the text, which problematically perpetuates color neutral mitigations of the import of the items, as well as their continued trade. Though his text covers the collection of African American "history," Elvin Montgomery ahistorically organizes the overtly racist collectibles into a brief chapter entitled "Racism" and defines the items falling under this category as reflective of a "mistaken, self-serving sense of superiority that others tried to perpetuate" (Montgomery 250). Montgomery, however, does not continue his historicizing of the specific tropes or manufacture of the items, but rather adopts the conventions of a traditional price guide, and dispassionately delineates how the authenticity and the "level" of the blatant racism determines their monetary value. P.J. Gibbs (1987) also adopts a stance of color neutrality and objective distance from the racism of the collectibles featured in her text. When describing a set of nine figurines of caricatured black children eating watermelon, Gibbs describes the hyperbolized dark skin and red lips, and stereotypical action as a "naturalistic" scene with the caricatures evincing a "slight exaggeration of the lips" (Gibbs 167). This euphemizing of the

social and racial implications of the items is furthered in a section entitled “The Controversy,” where she simplifies this undefined “controversy” as a divider of “two major camps with Blacks and whites representing both sides” (Gibbs 8). Gibbs reduces the contentions surrounding black ephemera—their racist import, the potential of naturalizing hegemonic conceptions of blackness—to binary positions of those who “feel that the existence of items which depict Blacks in a negative light should not be sold” and others who consider the collectible “an artifact of history” that can be sold (Gibbs 8). Gibbs concludes that “there is no right or wrong” for both sides “have valid reasons for their acceptance or rejection of different types of black collectibles” (Gibbs 8). In his guide, rather than unequivocally acknowledging or denouncing their racist import, Leonard Davis insinuates his discomfort with the objects, pondering “whether these images really reflect the true lives and history of black people” (Davis and Husfloen 10). His use of a rhetorical question here seems designed to effect objectivity which in this mode of discourse means unraced. As he discusses a series of stereotypical figures manufactured in Japan, Davis seems to excuse the figuration, conjecturing that “the Japanese artist created these exaggerated images based on verbal descriptions and cartoon caricatures, which were considered at that time to be cute and humorous depictions of people of African descent” (Davis and Husfloen 10).

For other writers, the ambivalence manifests itself in contrasting content and tonal shifts that acknowledge but ultimate dismiss the racial ramifications of the objects. These attempts to mitigate the pellucid racist import of the collectibles parallel a deemphasizing of authorial subjectivity and the positionality, suggesting that the implied audience of the texts, one which would find the suggestion that their pastime is racist and hegemonic an inconvenient truth. This subordination of racial perspectives exemplifies Toni Morrison’s query of what “positing one's

writerly self, in the wholly racialized society that is the United States, as unraced" (xii) entails—a sanitization of the racist history of these objects to justify their continued circulation.

The prevalence of online commerce in black collectibles has, in addition to the age of the guides, rendered them obsolete in navigating trading and pricing, but significant as authoritative sources of the "history" of the objects. Though dozens of e-commerce sites function as their own price guides, where simple filtered searches inform consumers and sellers pricing trends, the original price guides, because of their seemingly apolitical, objective perspective on the materiality of the collectibles have apotheosized as exemplars of the purported color neutrality of the practice. In recent years, sites such as eBay and Etsy find much of the commerce migrating to Instagram and Facebook, in which transactions are conducted through comment sections and direct messaging to avoid sellers' fees and sales tax levied on auction sites. For instance, a search of "mammycookiejar" will produce dozens of posts, with information on how to complete trades or purchases for the items, and "jollybank" produced a mix of people proudly displaying their items with instructions for purchase. With the recent discontinuing of the Aunt Jemima trademark, and other companies, such as Cream of Wheat and Uncle Ben's contemplating rebranding, Aunt Jemima products could be even more popular on the trade market. The hashtag blackmemorabilia, blackamericana have over 5000 posts, usually used by collectors who want to display their collections, or sellers offering their wares. There is a discrepancy, however, in some of the hashtags, with some of the sellers using several derogatory terms as hashtags, such as #jollyniggerbank, #pickaninny that occasionally evade Instagram or Twitter content editing. Other traders will write the offensive hashtags in different languages, or condense the terms to be included in searches.

On Facebook and Instagram, the construction of pages, style of posts, and content distinguish sellers and users who present themselves as collectors and preservers of African American history. The profiles of African American collectors (or those presenting themselves as such) generally attach black empowerment vernacular as hashtags with the names of the objects that the sellers generally lack in their posts. The restrictive algorithms and editing of potentially-offensive content, however, which are inconsistently applied on sites such as eBay, can complicate ephemera posts on Instagram, Twitter and Facebook. In my search for memorabilia sellers and appreciation groups on Instagram, I came across a redacted post on the page of black memorabilia collector @negroknacks. The caption described his reaction to a cast-iron, Niggerhead cap gun, with an analysis of what these racist items reveal about the psyche of the creators. Though the commentary remained, the original images of the gun were censored. The comment section of the post featured a running dialogue that alleged discriminatory censuring that in @negroknacks view, disproportionately targeted African American users. @negroknacks attributed the censoring to a user who had (in a now deleted comment exchange) protested the description of the gun because @negroknacks's commentary "questioned the type of person who played with this type [of] toy gun and how they view people." Other users would cite what they perceived as a double standard, with one poster complaining that she had "reported white sellers of offensive memorabilia before and they always say it's not against guidelines. Yet, they took yours down?" Though the algorithm, or the specific complaint from a sensitive user could account for the removal of the post, this instance exemplifies the continued contention over the import of the objects, a conflict that, despite the advance of technology, and duration of years since the original items were produced, persists today.

Despite the continued production of these items, and the evolution of their commerce, price guide authors, traders and sellers present racist paraphernalia as static, defunct artifacts of past, and the act of collecting a preservation of those periods. This chapter sought to challenge the ahistoricism of this position, and beyond identifying its myopic interpretation, uncover its tacit statement about past and present racial conditions, in which the continued circulation of the racist objects serve as a metaphor for the dismissals of the afterlife of racial oppression. Christina Sharpe's interpretative framework, when applied to the justifications for the perpetual trade of racist memorabilia, uncovers the melancholic compensations and hegemonic reinforcement undergirding, and to an extent, driving the longevity of these items. The literary allusions in the previous chapters, as well as the exploration of the significances of the lawn jockeys in Chapter 2 identified the psychic utility of these artificial objects in buttressing tenuous racial constructs. Simultaneously, the attachment to these items reveals an uncanny disavowal and acknowledgment of the fictiveness of hegemonic contrivances, a duality represented by the metaphor of a palimpsest. The revision of history and legacy of racial oppression, orchestrated through the development of tropes like the Mammy, and dismissals of the inherent racism of the collectibles, still leave behind the originary traces that create an enlarged view of white supremacist perspectives. Furthermore, Chapter 3 sought to trace this dynamic in material culture, and furthered the examination of the rationales for collecting by connecting them to manifestations of white melancholic compensation. Chapter 4 will continue this exploration by examining public displays of stereotypical conceptions of blackness, and expose the paradoxes and contradictions that support, and seek to conceal contrivances of white hegemony.

Chapter 4: Monuments of Melancholia

"the farther removed from true being, the purer, the finer, the better it is. Living in semblance as goal"[23] Nietzsche

On a visit to Natchez, Mississippi, author Walt Harrington muses that he did not "suppose Mammy's Cupboard was what the civic-boosting sloganeers of Natchez had in mind when they dubbed their town of 19,460 people as the place 'where the Old South still lives'" (Harrington 124). Harrington proffers that the expression refers to the "magnolias and mint juleps," or the "downtown homes of the long-dead planter class" and not the roadside luncheonette built in the shape of a gigantic, brick and mortar stereotypical mammy. With the renewal of Antebellum nostalgia spurred by the theatrical release of *Gone With the Wind*, and the rising popularity of touring of the Natchez Plantation Pilgrimage, in 1940 Henry Gaude would build the 28-foot mammy at his Highway 61 service station to attract the visitors of the tours. Featuring a stucco head wrapped in a polka dotted headkerchief, a metal tray in its hands, and a brick skirt housing a moderately sized, but frequently packed dining room, Mammy's Cupboard hosts thousands of visitors each year who stop for banana crème pie and self-portrait opportunities beneath its gigantic mammy. Over the years, however, proprietors would "lighten" Mammy's original red lips and minstrel-black skin, but as a popular travel website notes, some visitors leave "disappointed that she's not still black."[24] Current owner Lorna Martin believes her establishment celebrates this figuration of the black domestic, offering mammy postcards, t-shirts and other merchandise in its gift shop. "Here in the South," Martin proclaims, "the mammy

[23] Heidegger, Martin, and David Farrell Krell. *Nietzsche. Vol. 1, the Will to Power As Art,* Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1984. 154.
[24] Roadsideamerica.com

was good; she was revered." [25] Contrary to Harrington's supposition, the historical repression and false nostalgia surrounding Mammy's Cupboard epitomize the psychic spaces in which "the Old South still lives."

Like casual displays of Aunt Jemima and Uncle Mose kitchenware, whose ubiquity inures perception of their hegemonic import and intentionality, the continued presence of a multi-storied, roadside Mammy monument obfuscates the racial fictions it embodies. Space and race have historically intertwined—segregation, restrictive covenants, for example—and the material stability and seeming transparency of the physical environment functions as a method of naturalizing racial constructs. For Adrienne Brown (2017), the merger of spatial and racial imaginaries reflects a tacit recognition of the tenuousness of the racial constructs. "When one set of racial features are proven unstable—threatening to disclose race's fictionality" posits Brown, architecture and landscapes can "determine which concepts of race become viable" (Brown 35). According to Dianne Harris (2007), architecture and landscapes are never "neutral" empty signifiers, but are "containers of cultural values" that "simultaneously work to construct culture" (4). "With Mammy as part of the physical landscape," Naa Kwate (2019) notes, "the built environment is a racial project" reinforcing "what Blackness means" (Kwate 25). With the continual legal contestations over racial distinctions which have far reaching ramifications over the organization of public space, the spatial environment has historically and materially reinforced the nebulous boundaries between races.

The popularity of Mammy's Cupboard reflects the historical amnesia and myopic positionality that Antebellum romanticization necessitates. Based on the proximity of the restaurant to the historical plantations, the nostalgia both locales inspire blur distinction between

[25] Roadsideamerica.com

historical fact and romantic revisionism. Described as a "national treasure" on Natchez's official tourism site, the restaurant elicits reviews that rhapsodize about its "quaint," memorabilia-adorned interior, and joke about entering and eating "under Mammy's skirts." For many of these patrons, the black mammy represents nurturing and salient aspects of interracial relations, rendering the black body a vector for paternalistic nostalgia, racial distinction, and historical revision. The tenor of this imaging of the raced Other, particularly in material culture, is as Toni Morrison observes "reflexive," and stages a "revelation of longing, of terror, of perplexity, of shame, of magnanimity" (Morrison 17) within the white subject. For bell hooks, such interactions with mass culture serve as public declarations of the "pleasure to be found in the acknowledgment and enjoyment of racial difference" (hooks 21). The mass culture substitutes facilitate an exploration of the "unconscious fantasies" around contact with the Other "embedded in the secret (not so secret) deep structure of white supremacy" (hooks 21), facilitating these taboo faux encounters between white patrons and the black body of Mammy. The acknowledgment of otherness, and the forbidden explorations that undermine racial stratification can be experienced safely via mediation of material culture representations. The nominal recognitions of racial difference function melancholically, and engagement with mythologized racial Otherness buffers confrontations with the realities of race relations, creating a space to simulate the disavowal of hegemonic notions and practices. Frederic Jameson (1979) states mass culture is the locus in which "fundamental social anxieties and concerns, hopes and blind spots, ideological antinomies and fantasies of disaster" (141) are repressed through "narrative construction of imaginary resolutions and by the projection of an optical illusion" (141). The Lost Cause, revisionist narratives of past racial relations suppress the ambivalences undergirding white supremacy, as Jameson notes

> in the United States, indeed, ethnic groups are not only the object of prejudice, they are also the object of envy; and these two impulses are deeply intermingled and reinforce each other mutually. The dominant white middle class groups--already given over to anomie and social fragmentation and atomization—find in the ethnic and racial groups which are the object of their social oppression status contempt at one in the same time the image of some older collective ghetto or ethnic neighborhood solidarity (146).

Jameson's critique distills the construct of white hegemonic domination to the base racial anxieties it encases. While dialectic racialization ensures white supremacy through a Hegelian structure that subordinates blackness, the position of superiority is illusory and contingent upon the submission of the racial Other. This dynamic intimates that all the political and economic predominance is reflective not of innate superiority, but of perpetual subjugation. Moreover, the essentializing required by dialectic racialization, though it conflicts with one's sense of subjectivity, appears to the white melancholic subject that the racialized Other feels a sense of collectivity that the white subject lacks. Ironically, it is this Master-Slave dialectic that precipitates the inability to recognize that the presumed collectivity of the racial other may be as much a byproduct of racialization as an innate sense of communal solidarity. This paradox underlies white melancholic anxieties, and galvanizes the machinery of hegemonic domination.

Despite their psychic utility in obfuscating white guilt, the romanticized narratives only superficially efface a history of hegemonic dominance. Given the chasm between ersatz and real, this discrepancy, as Toni Morrison observes, "requires hard work not to see" (Morrison 17). Nicole Maurantonio (2019) attributes the pressurized repression and revision of the problematic Southern racial past to what she terms a Confederate exceptionalism--a manifestation of public memory that amalgamates Lost Cause, "faithful slave" fictions of harmonious racial conditions

with a sense of anti-racialism that reduces "racism to the mere invocation of race, forsaking its historical and structural roots" (Maurantonio 3). Confederate exceptionalism sublimates dismissal of past and present racial inequities into a stance of color neutrality. These transformations serve to compensate aspects of white racial melancholia, where the lineages of hegemonic control can be both repudiated and maintained, and the recognition of the artificiality of white supremacy can be deferred. Furthermore, challenges to these images of harmonious Southern past are repositioned as assaults on an august heritage, and prompt a vigorous defense of these monuments and other public displays of material culture that incarnate the mythologized Southern history.

Much of the scholarship on racialized monuments focuses on the impetus of Confederate nostalgia and its interplay with past and present conceptions of race. The devotion to Lost Cause romanticizing, according to these critics, began the memorializing of this sanitized vision of the antebellum, and those same omissions of the economic and sexual exploitation of African Americans are embedded within defenses of the monuments, and by extension, within defenses of the white racial order. Adam Domby (2020) sees the monuments as manifestations of false memories and mythologies of the past used to naturalize racial inequities. Hilary Neroni (2022) reads the rigorous defense of the monuments psychoanalytically, positing that the objects are fetishes that deny the lack of the racial Other as the racial inequalities that instigated that lack persist. While the ethics of Confederate monuments have been the subject of much critical and political debate, the recent shift in the national conversation towards systemic racial inequalities, and the interest in critical race theories and studies, have made the concept of contending historical memory particularly salient.

Up to this juncture, the aspects of material, visual and textual culture this project analyzes centered around the overtly racist and stereotypical objects meant to reify conceptions of black inferiority. Much like the adaptations of Jim Crow, these objects not only maintain white supremacy, but resolve the paradoxical drives that engender white guilt. This chapter explores the psychic utility of monuments that capture conceptions of race and the past; despite their ostensible material indestructibility (and persistence in the collective consciousness), the material, filmic and literary monuments in this chapter paradoxically identify the fragility of the ideology of white superiority. The shift of black body from chattel to subject, and blackness from its designation of legal inferiority attenuated the stability of the black body as a signifier and necessitated new mediums to signify inferiority. These monuments represent a "symbolic resolution"[26] of the paradoxical desires that fuel white supremacy: they communicate color-neutral egalitarianism by commemorating idealized conceptions of blackness or romanticized portraits of racial harmony that disavow supremacist thought. In other words, these monuments function to exorcise white guilt, and in the process, maintain the dialectic, being-for-other status of the African American subject.

This chapter builds on the argument that these statues and monuments serve to concretize racial and historical fictions, but asserts that the drive to memorialize mythologies not only signifies the need to perpetuate white supremacy, but also uncovers repressed doubts in the inherence and stability of racial superiority. In this chapter, I use the term monument both literally and figuratively, referring to the material statues and edifices as well as the ubiquitous

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[26] Jameson, Frederic. *The Political Unconscious: Narrative as a Socially Symbolic Act*. Cornel UP, 1981. P. 42

stereotypical tropes that surface in literary and filmic texts. The first section investigates the endurance of the Mammy trope in the national consciousness, and examines its centrality in solidifying mythologies of past racial conditions. Though the stereotypical troping of the Mammy diverges from the characteristics of the historical African American women who worked as housekeepers, the perpetuation and celebration of this construct assuaged multiple anxieties within the white female psyche. Beyond its historical and political significance, the Mammy construct extends the differentiations of racial dialectic by projecting a desexualized figure onto the black female that concretizes white femininity. The second section of the chapter moves from Mammy to the Good Darky statue from Natchitoches, Louisiana. Like the mass culture iterations of the Mammy, this statue of an elderly black man deferentially tipping his hat bolsters revisionist counternarratives of the contented African American and reserves conventional conceptions of phallic masculinity to the white passer-by. The chapter concludes with a return to the iron groomsman, and examines a counterintuitive example that problematizes assigning revisionist historicism exclusively to the province of hegemonic whiteness. The story of Jocko Graves, of whom the iron groomsmen supposedly commemorate, has been circulating as a piece of forgotten African American history. Though several historians have debunked the tale of black child who died holding Washington's steeds in a snowstorm, the dearth of verification has been used to bolster suggestion of its suppression. Coincidentally, contention surrounding the presence of lawn jockeys rarely involves the racial import of the image, but instead, centers around discussions of whether time and the hitching post's functional obsolescence has rendered the racism innocuous. For Earl Koger (1963) and Waymon Lefall (2003), however, the iron groomsmen are symbols of African American heroism, and their publications seek to reclaim the lawn jockey by removing the imbricated racist associations.

Problematically, echoes of the "Faithful slave" trope resonate through the Graves tale (though Graves was purportedly free born), and the act of memorializing a tableau in which an individual rendered himself an object warrants critical examination. Like the continued trade in black collectibles, which maintains the circulation of these demeaning images, the involvement of African Americans complicates a clear, simplified interpretation of the expedience of revising and memorializing mythologies of a racial past.

Part I: The Mammy

The domestic sphere in the Post-Civil War South was the crucible of myth making; while segregation could be rigidly enforced without, within the rationales for racial separations collided with the behaviors of private space. Because public segregation rendered the white home an "integrated space," maintaining hegemonic "relationships between white southerners and black women domestics became crucial to the reproduction of white supremacy" (Hale 115). With the conventional contrivances that enforce black inferiority/white superiority threatening the mythologies of Southern white womanhood, enacting a more gentle and genteel domination would necessitate another paradigm. For Saidiya Hartman, the pastoral, sentimentalized portrait of slavery "is in reconciling sentiment with the brute force of the racial economic order," as the antagonisms of house slavery are "obscured in favor of an enchanting reciprocity" (Hartman 52-53). These revisions constitute an idealized model for continued domestic/mistress relations that conceal and perpetuate inequities. By ballasting the charges of inherent black inferiority with fictions of inherent black loyalty, these paternal revisions could minimize "the extremity of domination with assertions about the mutually recognized humanity" (Hartman 52) of both servant and mistress. Though the mutuality it articulates presumably counteracts hegemonic dominance, this romanticized construction emerges from "the desires of white supremacy, not in

spite of them" (McElya 162). The mammy construct resolved the paradoxical drives undergirding white supremacy: while she constitutes "a reassuring figure" who "soothed white guilt over slavery" (Manring 23), her natural loyalty and acceptance of her subordination simultaneously maintains the extant racial order by ensconcing its apparatus beneath inherence.

Developed on the minstrel stage, promoted in proslavery tracts and reified by the Pearl Milling Company's Aunt Jemima campaign, the mammy served as a counternarrative to the abolitionist accounts of the abuses in slavery. Characterized as a gregarious, rotund, and asexual figure navigating white households, the prototypical mammy image differed greatly from the historical black domestic servants. Patricia Turner notes most slaves were employed in the fields, and utilizing them in the home was a luxury reserved for the affluent. Like field hands, the actual bondswomen working indoors were rarely overweight because "their foodstuffs were severely rationed" (Turner 44), and were generally lighter skinned "because household jobs were frequently assigned to mixed raced women" (Turner 44). Nor were they very old, for "fewer than 10 percent of black women lived beyond their fiftieth birthday" (Turner 44). Furthermore, the "overdrawn maternalism and asexuality" of the mammy figure signified, according to Micki McElya, a "denial of sex, forced and otherwise, between white men and black women" (McElya 162), presupposing, of course, that the black woman's fulfillment of normative gender prompted interracial sexual relations, and her indeterminacy foreclosed the possibilities of miscegenation. More than a corroboration of white heteronormative identity, the mammy construct exposed "the centrality of blackness to the making of whiteness" (Hale 113). This section of the chapter explores the utility of this construct beyond its historical revisionism or marketing capabilities, viewing it instead as a position in racial/gendered dialectic against which white female subjectivities are established. Moreover, the mammy construct exposes the sexual inequalities

beneath the edifice of white hegemonic domination, and becomes the object through which white womanhood could dissolve the sexual inequalities within white supremacy.

After the defeat of the Dyer Anti-Lynching bill, Southern Democrats in 1923 would counter with the introduction of Senate Bill S. 4119, which contained a proposal for the erection of a "Monument to Faithful Colored Mammies of the South," was introduced to the U.S. Senate. Though Leonidas Dyer had also introduced a planned monument to black soldiers, which made provisions to build meeting rooms, auditorium and museum, his bill would languish in favor of this proposal. Driven by the lobbying of the United Daughters of the Confederacy, the monument would be symbolic of idealized race relations, promoting a "vision of a mutually beneficial, national segregation defined by 'affection.'" (McElya 142). With the "race problem" erupting in lynching and other forms of violence in several Southern states, the UDC ethic of a gentle reciprocity in segregation found its material referent in the form of the mammy. "Content with her enslavement," the mammy figure "sanctioned white supremacy" and "embodied the best potential for interracial relations" (McElya 141). Some of the proposed designs involved a mammy holding a white child as two "pickannies" anxiously clung to her dress, while another design depicted a seated mammy breastfeeding an infant (Horwitz). The creation of these structures is not without precedence. In 1896, cotton mill owner Samuel E. White dedicated the faithful slave monument in Confederate Park in Fort Mill, South Carolina. The 13-foot marble monument features bas relief sculptures of several Confederate soldiers, a mammy passing a white child to a confederate soldier, while another child pulls at her skirt, and a black man reaping wheat. The legend on the monument is dedicated to "the faithful slaves who, loyal to a sacred trust, toiled for the support of the army with matchless devotion and sterling fidelity guarded our defenseless homes, women and children during the struggle for the principles of our

'Confederate States of America.'"[27] Where the UDC monument would differ, however, was in its perspective; the faithful slaves monument privileged the male perspective, where the loyalty of the slaves revolved around their support of conventional male obligations.

More was at stake however than the legitimacy the passage of the bill would confer upon this revisionist construct; the success of the monument could signal the relevance of the female role within white hegemonic dominance. Despite the passage of the nineteenth amendment, suffrage could not distinguish white women from black, but with this monument, mammy would become "the canvas upon which white women painted their new authority" (Hale 115). Opposition to the monument came from a variety of sources, and ironically, the most vociferous was the National Association of Colored Women's Clubs. Hallie Quinn Brown issued a statement protesting the erection of the monument, noting that "one generation held the black mammy in abject slavery, the next would erect a monument to her fidelity" (qtd. in Kelly). Though the proposed monument failed, the UDC later successfully lobbied for the erection of a monument to Heyward Shepherd in Harpers Ferry, West Virginia. Framing the "Lost Cause" mythos as a silenced counternarrative, the UDC and proponents of the new monument positioned "history" as an extension of national liberal sentiment. Shepherd, a free black working as a porter, was shot at a railroad and considered the "first victim of this attempted insurrection" by John Brown's force. The monument reads

> This boulder is erected by the United Daughters of the Confederacy and the Sons of Confederate Veterans as a memorial to Heyward Shepherd, exemplifying the character and faithfulness of thousands of negros who, under many temptations throughout

[27] In June 2020, the monument was the focus of a sit-in protest demanding the revocation of Confederate monuments, in conjunction with an anonymous manifesto sent to local news station WCNC with a number of demands, including renaming monuments that endorse white supremacy.

> subsequent years of war, so conducted themselves that no stain was left upon a record which is the peculiar heritage of the American people, and an everlasting tribute to the best in both races.

The monument frames Shepherd's accidental death as evidence of his opposition to John Brown's mission, and as corollary, casts Shepherd as a supporter of harmonious Antebellum racial conditions. Like the mammy, Shepherd is presented as loyal and amenable to the continuance of white supremacy, suggesting that the tenor of the fictive constructs of blackness revolve around the perpetuation of white dominance. While the failure of the Faithful Mammy monument could be attributed to multiple factors, the circumstances around the proposal elucidated the centrality of male dominance within the hegemonic racial order.

The mammy and other racial stereotypes demonstrate how the black body functions as a locus of racial discourse, where definitions of race, and in particular, definitions of whiteness are mediated through (re)significations of blackness. If the Mammy and its proposed monument illustrate the political utility of revising the image of racial conditions, Kathryn Stockett's novel *The Help* (2009) exemplifies the psychological utility of the construct. Though discussions of the literature in this dissertation have centered around authorial engagement with images of black ephemera, the novel *The Help* and its critically and commercially successful film adaptation have spawned a segment of consumer culture that fetishizes relations between black domestics and their white employers in the forms of several, seemingly innocuous but stereotype-perpetuating collectibles. Several blogspots feature mock recipes for "Minnie's Fried Chicken," one of the domestics from the novel who stereotypically and prideful proclaims that she "don't burn no chicken," or her infamous Chocolate pie which she filled with feces and served to her bigoted former employer Hilly Holbrook. On the art/craft commerce site Etsy, hundreds of retailers offer

coffee mugs, embroidered pillows, onesies, and posters with the protagonist Aibileen's message to her white charge Mae Mobley, "You is smart, You is kind, You is important"—some with the image of Viola Davis (the actress who portrayed Aibileen) superimposed next to this statement of white female empowerment delivered in prototypical black dialect. The commerce site also offers Amigurumi patterns and dolls of Minnie holding a pie, or t-shirts, posters and stickers of the actress Octavia Spencer who plays Minnie, clad in the maid uniform, with her facial expression and size of eyes exaggerated in the same fashion as prototypical black caricatures. These fetishized emblems of the Mammy stereotype, refracted through Stockett's novel and Tate Taylor's adaptation of the work, provide consumers with socially acceptable items that reify black subservience and romanticized notions of Civil Rights era race relations. The objects, like the novel itself, depict the disavowal of racist notions, as if through the proud and paradoxical display of the stereotypical Mammy, one can profess belief in racial equality by celebrating racial alterity. While the other examples of material culture in this chapter center around pieces made in the early twentieth century, the products developed by admirers of *The Help* illustrate how the concept of the collectible functions as a palimpsest, in which contemporary, ostensibly postracial notions of race relations can be inscribed upon these older technologies of white supremacy, while perpetuating the racial distinctions that substantiate hegemonic dominance.

The Help functions as a quasi-racial bildungsroman for the novel's protagonist Skeeter, whose interactions with black domestic workers uncover her own racial and gender anxieties. These recognitions, though they confront hegemonic dynamics within the mistress/maid relations, fail to challenge the tendency of those relations to render the black subject the perpetual being-for-another. Viewed from this perspective, the metatextual, mis en abyme structures function as melancholic compensations; as the frame narrative intimates the

inescapability of a dynamic that subordinates the racial Other, it absolves the white subject of agency in this subjugation. Moreover, Skeeter's collection of anonymous tales that resemble captivity narratives, subverts the conventional authenticating strategies of that genre by rendering the experiences fictive and unverifiable. Ostensibly, the fictionalizing protects the contributing black housekeepers from retaliation, but consequentially, allows the housewives to experience the catharsis from white guilt and disavow the "fictive" tyrannical mistresses. Her collection of these experiences coincides with her own individuation from the restrictions placed on women writers in her milieu, and her own struggles to detach from its conventional views of proper racial interactions. Elements of a kunstlerroman and a racialized bildungsroman render the black characters objects through which Skeeter's development can be actualized. Christine Farris (2016) sees Skeeter's expose, contrary to its ostensible purpose, cementing the mammy construct as a model of interracial relations. Farris observes that "Skeeter's coming-of-age remains intertwined with the unconditional love of the loyal mammy and the mammy's white employer, for whom the mammy feels—true to the myth—genuine affection and the need to sacrifice" (Farris 48). In short, Skeeter's text perpetuates the very construct it ostensibly seeks to expose, and epitomizes the uncanny ambivalence towards white supremacy characterizing white racial melancholia, where acknowledging the practices that construct the white supremacist social order reveals the fictiveness of inherent white superiority, prompting a confrontation with one's complicity in this domination. By reinterpreting or revising the practices of social order, Skeeter can absolve the white subject of this lack/guilt, but consequently reinstate and naturalize the racial inequities.

Much of the criticism of the novel and film adaptation of *The Help* view the texts as continuations of the long tradition of racial melodrama. Using Baldwin's trenchant critique of

Stowe's *Uncle Tom's Cabin* as a point of departure, critics investigate the expedience and significance of Stockett's portrayal of interracial relations through the melodramatic mode. By prioritizing the domestic, interpersonal conflicts and their resolution, both the novel and film intend to demystify racial difference, but in the process obfuscates the interracial conflicts produced by white supremacist social order. Justin Gomer (2020) links the melodramatic tradition into twentieth-century film making, where racial melodrama allowed filmmakers "to represent, shape and contest the racial anxieties of the historical moment" (183) by instituting a colorblind mode presented as the antidote to racism. Skeeter's construction of the anonymous narrative that essentially de-raced the authors of the individual tales signifies an effacement of race consciousness, suggesting that race neutrality can facilitate productive racial discourse. For Allison Page (2022), the mode has become a method of processing the complicated afterlife of chattel slavery, and the empathy that emerges from immersing the self in the position of the subjugated "works to distance whiteness from racism" (80). In her seminal *Playing the Race Card: Melodramas of Black and White from Uncle Tom to O. J. Simpson* (2001), Linda Williams characterizes the melodramatic mode as a "search for moral legibility" in an American context that continues to shift. In many ways, melodrama functions melancholically by facilitating disavowal through its simplified binary organization of racist and anti-racist positions. Sharon Willis (2015) identifies this problematic conception of racism and its reconciling that cultural texts like *The Help* proffer. "As white discourse reconceives racism," Willis notes, it bifurcates white culture into two elements, where a segment professing "progressive politics needs to educate the ignorant, backward racists against whom it defines its own enlightened position" (4). Despite this conception of racism as a collective problem, Willis observes that "popular culture remains intent on visualizing the salutary effects of this pedagogical enterprise at the level of the

individual encounter" (4). Part of the melodramatic mode is the simplification of the conflicts through polarized positions. For Willis, both the film adaptation and Stockett's novel align the "good" with a pseudo-feminist, racially progressive position occupied by the protagonist Skeeter, and the "bad" with the racist, sexist housewives. Insulating Skeeter from the implication that her literary ventriloquism contributes to the racial status quo reduces the intricacies of the hegemonic racial order to personal ignorance, creating an incomplete cartography of the racist landscape that perpetuates the racial order.

Though the book houses transgressive potentialities, where Skeeter's compiled narrative is a response to the power structures that limit both women and African Americans, rather than initiate change, these moments of interracial and homosocial collision merely reduce the experiences of the black domestic to a backdrop for discussing white female hardships. Ayesha K. Hardison (2016) notes that while *The Help* "invites audiences to empathize with all women's unsung domestic trials, as the nature of domestic work fosters black and white women economic, social, and spatial interdependence," their familiarity, however "does not negate the ideologies of white supremacy recapitulated in the hierarchical relationship between employer and employee" (134). Christine Farris (2017) and Gregory Jay (2017) explore the use of melodrama in reframing uncomfortable truths of the past and absolving white guilt. Jay states that the "liberal white anti racism" perspective the novel adopts "emphasizes the attainment of a superior moral consciousness and cleansed subjectivity that pays for its salvation through the abjection of the racial Other" (27). White readers "identify with their superficial antiracism and so experience a salvational sublime in their conviction that they have abjected racism itself" (Jay 29). Nikol G. Alexander-Floyd (2021) also examines the interplay of whiteness and gender and looks at how the resulting intersection of white female privilege is ignored in the novel's romanticizing of

racial relations. Alexander-Floyd sees the novel as a representation of the problematics of post-feminism, where the concepts of color neutrality obscure the deep fissures of racial difference between women. Alexander-Floyd traces Stockett's attempts at homogenizing the female experience that underscore her avoidance of the racial and sexual trauma many black domestics endured. Sanitizing a historical setting fraught with interracial, social, economic and sexual exploitation, and rendering these conditions subordinate to interpersonal dramas of the characters diminish the potential for authentic engagement with issues of race. The resuscitation of the Mammy caricature effaces this history through its de-sexualization of the black woman—an imposition that presumably invalidates the potential for miscegenation, and as corollary, attenuates the conditions of the domestic. Kemeshia Randle (2016) interprets Stockett's desexualizing of the black domestic as "colonizing the black female body," falling into the tradition of removing the racial anxieties and historical realities of miscegenation in ways that can make racial similarity palatable to whites, but keeps the black body captive to white psychical needs.

My reading of *The Help* deals exclusively with Stockett's novel and examines how the Mammy resonances within her portrayal of the black domestics uncover the ambiguities and ambivalences undergirding Stockett's complicated view of race relations from the Mississippi of her youth. Despite her intentions of deemphasizing racial distinction and promoting an image of genial interracial relationships that flowered despite the social, economic and racial conditions of her setting, a sense of the Lost Cause nostalgia haunts the sentimentality of the text. Stockett's novel frames the problematic history of the black domestic experience as an unnuanced generality that her novel's specific portraits mitigate and dispel. Stockett's undermining of racial difference portrays the historical lived experiences of black women as insubstantial and

circumstantial, and subordinate to shared experience and racial similarity. I seek to prove how the elements of racial melodrama in *The Help* reflect the resolution of paradoxical psychical drives of disavowing and upholding of the white supremacist social order.

Responding to the commercial success of both Stockett's novel and its film adaptation, the Association of Black Women Historians posted "An Open Statement to the Fans of The Help" on their website. The efforts of marketing the book and film "as a progressive story of triumph over racial injustice" obfuscate the historical lived experience of black domestic workers where the novel's representation of black women--"a disappointing resurrection of mammy"--allows "mainstream America" to ignore systems of oppression that perpetuate white supremacy. In an interview with *Vanity Fair*, Viola Davis, the actor portraying Aibileen in the film adaptation of *The Help*, lamented that the film was created in both "the filter and the cesspool of systemic racism" (Sairaiya). Though directed at the film, her comments also resonate with Stockett's ur-text, in which they identify an ambivalence between professing and expiating hegemonic behaviors that the frame narrative and the novel itself (un)consciously conflate. With these contradictory drives neutralizing each other, both the frame and the novel itself circumvent the examination of the psychic needs that evoke the subjugating behaviors the maids describe, and instead negate racism by deconstructing racial difference. By employing framed narratives in her novel, Stockett decentralizes a privileged viewpoint to mirror her concept of essentialized racial parity. Her text, however, displays the problematics of equating racism and racial difference: dissolving racial difference posits an "unraced" positionality as the antidote of racial discord. Stockett positions Aibileen as a promoter of this concept of color neutrality, and the overtures to representing the black perspective are directed towards racial similarity. These characterizations, according to Toni Morrison are "reflexive" and constitute "an extraordinary

meditation on the self" (Morrison 17). According to Morrison, fabricating a black persona, rather than promote a universal perspective, further bifurcates racial position and perspective. The characterization of these black characters, as well as the thematic concerns they fulfill uncover the "self-evident ways that Americans choose to talk about themselves" (Morrison 17). The transparency of these uses of the black persona further distinguishes black and white perspectives, and individual black subjectivities from white conceptions of blackness. Ironically, Stockett's frame narrative maintains the centrality of the white voice, in which the fiction is not racial difference, but that a decentralized perspective could exist at all.

Stockett's composition of this novel is enveloped in a concentric layer of its own within the mise en abyme structure of *The Help*. In 2011, Ableen Cooper, longtime housekeeper employed by Stockett's brother, sued Stockett for the use of her likeness. Though the suit would be dismissed for its late filing, the similarities between Cooper and her fictional counterpart Aibileen are quite striking. From Cooper's gold tooth to the death of Cooper's eldest son, the hasty addition of vowels in Aibileen's first name only thinly veils the debt to Ms. Cooper. Cooper found Aibileen's enduring of the racial slights in the book "embarrassing," which not only implies the use of her likeness or experiences was nonconsensual, but also that such patient, abiding loyalty in the face of the abuses Aibileen encounters are fictional. Stockett's inclusion of the closing essay "Too Little, Too Late" further blurs the novel's distinction between fiction and real life. This ambiguity captures the complexities of a view of race relations that is refracted through white racial melancholia; the romanticized portrait of the biding, Mammy-esque black woman represents a mythologized view that is central to Stockett's musings on race relations. The essay centers around Stockett's recollection of Demetrie, a housekeeper employed by her family during the author's childhood. Like her protagonist Skeeter, Stockett reflects on the

possibility of divergent perspectives on the lived racial experience. Though Stockett identifies her positionality, her narrative promptly mitigates any reflections that approach acknowledging her own complicity in the caste structure. Stockett admits to "pitying" African Americans, but never Demetrie, for she found Demetrie "immensely lucky" to have a "secure job in a nice house, cleaning up after white Christian people" (Stockett 526), and without irony, adds "because Demetrie had no babies of her own…we felt like we were filling a void in her life" (Stockett 526). Stockett's projection of this imperative onto Demetrie merges the roles of surrogate mother and prototypical black mammy, and in both cases, relegates Demetrie to an inherent Other whose existence depends on her relations to whites. Stockett muses that she doubts anyone "in my family ever asked Demetrie what it felt like to be black in Mississippi, working for our white family" for it "wasn't something people felt compelled to examine" (Stockett 530). Her conceptualization of Demetrie's lived experience presupposes the universality of whiteness and describes blackness as a feeling, one inextricable from and dependent on a contrasting whiteness. Her book, Stockett explains, extrapolates how she imagines Demetrie would describe her experience as a black woman working for a white family, and given the history of unequal power dynamics, may be exactly how Demetrie would discuss her experience to a white audience.

Stockett's text navigates the tensions of white melancholic guilt characterized by the expedience of racial oppression, and a discomfort with one's complicity, and an anxiety from the loss of racial predominance. These tensions resolve into a defense and maintenance of a romanticized view of racial relations that obfuscates the severity of oppression. When summarizing her work, Stockett fears she may "have told too little" of the black/white relations:

> Not just that life was so much worse for many black women working in the homes in Mississippi, but also that there was so much more love between white families and black domestics than I had the ink or the time to portray. (Stockett 529)

Though the correlative conjunction implies parity of both ideas in the clauses, the additional subordinate clause in the second clause syntactically prioritizes its ideas. While she admits that she does not presume to know what black women felt, "trying to understand is vital to our humanity" (Stockett 530). At issue here is how Stockett positions her reader; the "our" excludes blacks from her audience, and the assertion that "trying," as opposed simply to understanding suffices, reflects the mitigations inherent in racial melancholia. Her description of writing black characters displays a similar tension of acknowledging her problematic positionality that her view of the reciprocity of the relationships assuages. In two parallel sentences, Stockett describes her fear of "crossing a terrible line, writing in the voice of a black person" but balances with an equal fear of failing "to describe a relationship that was so intensely influential in my life, so loving, so grossly stereotyped" (Stockett 528-29). Nevertheless, the use of black dialect, and the parallels to the mammy trope become inextricable to the impression Stockett articulates about her experience with her African American housekeeper. The pronunciation spelling and assignation of non-standard English to the black characters, and the use of standard English by whites, underscores the racial binary. Sarah Rude Walker (2016) notes that this distinction reflects the ambiguities beneath representations of blackness that contain stereotypical resonances. Rude explains that Stockett's portrayal of her black characters include an "obscured and misdirected element of respect for the distinctly unique and creative elements of Black culture and language" (76), but the use of altered spellings and grammatical constructions opens Stockett "to comparison with authors and entertainers who have used similar strategies purposely

to reinforce racist stereotypes and racial hierarchies" (76). The "love and theft" beneath her representations of blackness complicate her view of racial similarity.

Written as a vindication of the history of Southern race relations, *The Help* advances a counternarrative portraying the intimacy and interconnectedness of black domestic servants and the white families. Though these connections ostensibly transcend the animus and social antagonisms of Southern racial dynamics, the relations are the product of the prototypical relationship of white family and black mammy. For M. M. Manring, with its multivalent function as a "living justification of the correctness of slavery, as a carrier of black political sensibility after slavery" and as "an 'uplifter' of white southern womanhood" the mammy construct "has been as useful a servant to the historians and novelists as she was to her southern masters" (Manring 10). Though Stockett presents the intimate connections as a challenge to white hegemonic dominance, the mammy construct is designed to make such oppression psychically palatable for the oppressor. Both Aibileen and Minny, despite their narrative prominence in the text, incarnate this stereotype. The absence of erotic, sexual or romantic concerns for either Aibileen or Minny is underscored by those of Celia Foote and Skeeter. Though Minny has domestic conflicts an abusive husband, her marriage merely illustrates her motherhood, while Aibileen's past motherhood is her only sexual distinction. According to Christine Farris, the husbands of the black domestics are "consistent with black male caricature" (44), and in the absence of normative romantic relations, these portrayals form a backdrop for the white counterparts to explore their romantic struggles. For both Celia and Skeeter, the black servants buttress their own anxieties around fulfilling heteronormative expectations of femininity, ones which are inextricably linked to the domestic sphere. Celia surreptitiously hires Minny to cast a version of herself to her husband, while Skeeter, whose writing aspirations are misogynistically

limited to discussing domestic issues, also hides Aibileen's (and later the black maids') contributions to her writing. Though presented in guise of comedy, this simultaneous use and effacement of the black female epitomizes white racial melancholia. For Morrison, both dynamics demonstrate what she views as a tradition in American literature, "the reckless, unabated power of a white woman gathering identity unto herself from the wholly available and serviceable lives of Africanist others" (Morrison 25), reflected not only in Celia and Skeeter's relations with the black domestics, but also in Stockett's narrative. For Celia and Skeeter, the mammy compensates for failures to fulfill heteronormative domesticity, and for Stockett, the mammy palliates the recognition of complicitly in hegemonic domination.

Stockett's narrative indicts racial distinction as the source of racial animus, and uses Aibileen to decry the insignificance of racial differences, a conventional, reductio ad absurdum conclusion that obfuscates and acquits the role of white supremacy in racial conflicts. Stockett challenges the stability of racial boundaries through an exchange between Minny and Aibileen. When Minny complains that Celia's interactions with her do not abide by the "lines" or the expected relations between white mistress and black maid, Aibileen asserts that such divisions do not exist, for "They's just positions, like on a checkerboard. Who work for who don't mean nothing" (Stockett 368). Though Aibileen asserts the arbitrariness of domestic hierarchy, which, based on the performance of labor, would elevate the black maid, her answer nevertheless is in a double negative—which syntactically would assert that the hierarchy does mean something. Stockett's use of black dialect contradicts the very sentiment her novel purports to advance, but uncovers the ambivalence towards white hegemony that the novel arduously represses. The suggestion that hierarchal positions dissipate in the private domestic sphere disregards not only the lived experience of blackness, but that the white household functions as an extension of the

public sphere for the black housekeeper. Aibileen later removes the qualifier, proclaiming the lines “between black and white ain't there neither” (Stockett 368), though Minny counters that she “know they there cause you get punished for crossing em” (Stockett 367). Though Minny disagrees with Aibileen, her evidence for the existence of the color line is punishment for transgressing them, and Celia’s lack of enforcing those lines identifies their illusoriness or lack of universality. Minny suggests that this optimism is at the core of Aibileen’s interpretation of her housekeeping, and she observes that Aibileen “moves on to another job when the babies get too old and stop being color-blind” (Stockett 150). Minny’s observation illustrates Aibileen’s internalization and perpetuation of her own position as a prototypical mammy. Her comments suggest that the formation of a maternal bond between black caregiver and white child is a requisite for Aibileen, and paternalistically implies a longing for this role on the part of blacks. Through her characterization of Aibileen, Stockett suggests that the romanticized mammy construct represents the epitome of positive relations between black and white families.

Part II: The Curious Case of *The Good Darky*

While the Mammy construct epitomizes a history and instructive framework for the fictionalized interracial relations within the white racial order, the trope refers to interactions within the private domestic sphere, and assuages the anxieties (and obfuscates the history) of miscegenation that the integrated space could produce. The interactions between black males and the white social structure, however, are associated with the public sphere, and as the trope of the Mammy provides an authorized model of black female comportment, the figure of an obsequious, deferential “Darky” or Uncle performs a similar didactic purpose for black men. The placid acceptance and perpetuation of racial stratification that the Darky trope signifies serves as a countermeasure to the 1920’s racial violence perpetrated against black males who presumably

transgressed circumscribed behaviors emblemized in the stereotypical trope. Like the Mammy, the Uncle figure validated heteronormative, gendered constructs of white manhood, either through black resignation to fulfilling this dialectical characterization, or through the violent or public displays of punishment for black challenges to racial oppression.

Five years after the failure of the proposed Mammy Monument, another statue commemorating the subordinate position of African Americans appeared in the town of Natchitoches, Louisiana. Called the Good Darky, the statue depicts an elderly African American man, bowing deferentially and tipping his hat. Like the image of the mammy, this figuration of the accommodating black male encompasses the multiple and contradictory drives that perpetuate white supremacy. Though the Mammy epitomizes Lost Cause romanticizing of Antebellum race relations, the black male lived experience has been subjected to similar mythologizing. Both the mammy trope and this shuffling, humble "Uncle" figure, presented as symbols of idealized racial relations, sanitize a legacy of exploitation and oppression, and function as didactic models for black conduct. George Lipsitz (1990) explains that the coalescence of ideologically contingent historical memory and material culture shifts the perspective of "the present by informing it with memories of the past and hopes for the future." Furthermore, this merger engenders an "accommodation with prevailing power realities" and reflects an internalization of "the dominant culture's norms and values as necessary and inevitable" (Lipsitz 16). In the era of racial segregation, economic exploitation and lynching, images of black accomodationism and racial harmony are deliberately juxtaposed to create a myth of the past and a model for the present.

For the last thirty years, the stoop-shouldered, Good Darky statue has greeted visitors at the entrance of Louisiana State University's Rural Life Museum. Known affectionately to some

and paternalistically to others at LSU as "Uncle Jack," the statue was relocated to the museum from Natchitoches in September 1972, and stood prominently at the entrance until its recent move to a remote corner of the grounds, conspicuous in his isolation amongst the Southern trees and native foliage. At first glance, the placement of Uncle Jack in the LSU Rural Life Museum appears arbitrary, but based on the mission statement of the museum, its placement is entirely appropriate. The mission of the museum, according to its website, intends to "increase the appreciation of our heritage and the way of life of our ancestors, their hardships, toils, vision, inspiration, and determination by preserving something of the architecture and artifacts from our rural past" (Steele and Ione Burden, 1971). The inclusion of this statue, and the stereotypical conception of a servile and compliant African American it signifies and promotes, demonstrates the inextricability of black subjugation from the Southern past. The inclusion of this emblem of black inferiority in a space used to commemorate a Southern "heritage" and "way of life," undercuts the veneer of neutrality and innocuousness that perpetuate white supremacy as a naturalized status quo of racial relations. During its tenure, the statue consistently evoked reactions over its imaging, connotations and prominent positioning on school grounds, prompting the museum to include the following caveat on its now defunct Uncle Jack exhibit page:

> Uncle Jack is still controversial today. Individual reactions vary: to some, it is an honor; to others, it's demeaning; and still to others, it is fond reminiscences. However, everyone will agree that it is part of Louisiana's history. In the future [it] is hoped that an accurate interpretation of the statue will be revealed not only to our visitors but also to ourselves.[28]

[28] LSU Rural Life Museum

The "accurate," or in this case, singular interpretation appears contingent upon the reconciliation of the three perspectives as opposed to validating any of the one of them. The University, however, interjected itself in the (re)signification and interpretation of this monument, installing three plaques that presented a revised history of Uncle Jack. Prominent cotton planter and banker Jackson Bryan commissioned Hans Schuler to create the statue, and in 1927, Bryan dedicated it to his hometown of Natchitoches, Louisiana, where it stood on Front Street until September 25, 1968. Initially, the plaques contend, a monument commemorating "a Negro would not be tolerated by many white citizens in the community," but subsequently Uncle Jack "was generally accepted and later beloved by the white community in Natchitoches and throughout the United States."[29] This act of revising a statue that originally purported to commemorate its own mythologized conception of African Americans suggests that the signification of the object reflects accommodates the evolving needs of white hegemonic dominance.

In an essay detailing his engagement with Uncle Jack in Natchitoches of the 1950's, Ned Sublette challenges these revisions of the history of the statue. Sublette notes that while the museum depicts the raising of the statue as "an act of liberalism" on the new placards, Sublette recalls the original placard's stated recognition of "the Arduous and Faithful Service of the Good Darkies of Louisiana." Erected "to honor the slaves who didn't leave their masters at the end of the war" (Sublette 100), Uncle Jack, or the Good Darky represented an approved model of black performativity. "If you were black and wanted a job in the Natchitoches of my childhood," Sublette observes "the Good Darkey was there, beaming his benevolent eyes down to instruct you in deportment" (Sublette 100). Ellen Daugherty asserted that the statue "instructed viewers in white supremacist notions of the appropriate status, condition of servitude, deference, and

[29] LSU Rural Life Museum

powerlessness of African Americans" (Daugherty 631), and represented a concretized, fixed notion of a blackness that would serve as a stable Other against which whiteness could be reified. The Good Darky served as the alternative to the other dominant representation of African Americans—the oversexed, rapacious black male stereotype from D.W. Griffith's *The Birth of a Nation*. The Good Darky captured a neutralized version of black male masculinity, an image informed by a mythology of the Lost Cause. With the increase in lynching and other forms of racial violence, ostensibly attributed to African American transgression of "their place," Uncle Jack, like the Mammy trope, represented the proper comportment for interracial encounters—a docile show of deference.

Though even at its inception, the monument was viewed with skepticism. A 1927 article in *Time,* overlooking its own racial paternalism, excoriates Bryan's gesture. Because Jackson Bryan "had been lulled to sleep in his babyhood by Negro spirituals, and had played with little slave boys on his father's old plantation," as the anonymous writer relates, he "felt the urge to do something big for the Negro" and this bronze statue "was the result" (*Time*). Poet Sterling Brown would also travel to Natchitoches to see the statue. Upon his visit, Brown consulted the Good Darky entry in 1945 edition of the Louisiana Guide, and rather than the history of the statue, found the following anecdote:

> Plantation Negroes, inebriated after a spree in town, go to the statue to ask the way home, and the Good Darkey never fails to tell them the right direction. (LWP 310)

Contrary to Jackson's sentimentalizing of deferential blackness, the state guide's description of the statue evinces a merging of the racial and spatial imaginary that authorizes white racial domination. According to the entry, the Good Darky signifies the internalization of hegemonic social order, where blacks who momentarily (and figuratively to a degree) stray from the

plantation and to town are redirected to back to their "home" or proper—lace--a deferential, abiding blackness. Brown notes that the statue concretizes dialectical notions of race, where "whites are idealized for dashing courage, self-assertiveness and rebellion against injustice or subjection" while blacks are "idealized for loyalty to others, humility, and uncomplaining acceptance" (Brown 23-24). Though he challenges the essentializing of blackness that the monument enacts, Brown concedes that the statue, however, did not "lie," for many blacks

> in the past could have been found to whom it was second nature to fall into the pose that this statue immortalizes in bronze. Too many in the present could be found willing to assume the pose, though in better clothing than the rusty jimswinger and baggy breeches. (Brown 22)

Brown's observations identify this blurring of trope and identity, and suggests that the antiquated notions of servile blackness are not only perpetuated by the statue, but by practitioners of these expressions of blackness, which Brown ambivalently attributes to both a willingness to "assume a pose" and a "second nature" in African Americans. By averring that other African Americans "naturally" assume such characteristics, Brown paradoxically posits the same assumptions of inherent black servility that engender or are engendered by these statues. Despite delineating socialized racial differentiation, Brown neglects the circumstances around these expressions of blackness, where the poses of docility were adopted not from choice, but necessity. His position, then, evinces the same fallacious logic that seeks to validate and obfuscate structural racism through the guise of racial essentialism.

Sterling Brown's suggestion that many donned the posture of the statue found its substantiation in Ellen Daugherty's exploration of the history of the statue. Though it was presented as an original work, Daugherty traced the image to its likely source, a photograph from

National Geographic. For Daugherty, the May 1926 issue exemplified the "racist stereotypes ubiquitous in the visual culture of the United States and quasi-scientific ethnographic imagery for which the magazine was famous" (Daugherty 632). The panegyric collection, "The Ashley River and its gardens," includes a photograph, *Ancient of Days* and *The Keeper of the Outer Gate* of Ansel Horlbeck tipping his hat deferentially to a presumed passerby. The caption of the photograph ahistorically lionizes antebellum social mores, noting that through Horlbeck's gesture viewers are swept "back into the past by the courtly bow of the ancient Negro gatekeeper who has in like manner welcomed generations of guests that once came dashing in coach and four to visit the 'great house'" (Shaffer 529). The accompanying essay by E.T.H. Shaffer buttresses the mythologizing of Horlbeck, where Shaffer includes an apocryphal tale of the partially deaf Horlbeck recalling his days as a young slave attending the funeral procession of John C. Calhoun. The choice of former Senator and Vice President is not arbitrary; as a plantation owner, and ardent defender of slavery in his political writings and congressional debate, Calhoun emblemizes the racially chauvinistic and paternalistic interpretations of slavery. Referring to slavery as a "positive good" in his famed February 6, 1837 address, Calhoun asserted that through the institution blacks "attained a condition so civilised and so improved, not only physically but morally and intellectually"[30] in the brief course of these few generations of slavery. Calhoun's reconstitution of slavery as a benevolent institution constitutes one of the many ballasts that uphold white supremacy; portraying slavery as mutually-beneficial both perpetuates white dominance while disavowing, or sublimating the practices that would invalidate belief in inherent white superiority. Though the funeral had taken place before Horlbeck's probable date of birth, for Shaffer, and presumably Bryan, Ansel Horlbeck captured

[30] John C. Calhoun. "Slavery a Positive Good". Speech, February 06, 1837. From Teaching American History. https://teachingamericanhistory.org/document/slavery-a-positive-good/ (accessed March 13, 2022).

the subservient, biding African American whose reverence of Calhoun would illustrate the "Lost Cause" image of reciprocal affection between slave and master. More than coincidentally similar, Daugherty notes, the posture, garments and expression of the image and statue are identical, and a statue professing to commemorate the faithful slave "took an actual person, stripped him of his historical reality, and rendered him as a trope" (Daugherty 640). Even the alternative moniker of "Uncle Jack," an elision of the patron's name and Horlbeck's status signifies another way "the real identity of Ansel Horlbeck was stripped from his effigy" (Daugherty 639). The statue serves as a metaphor for the artificial processes of reifying racial and historical fictions, and the attempt to perpetuate the conceptions of blackness they espouse in concrete form as a statue, and in human form as a manner of comportment.

Part III: The Contending Signification of Jocko Graves

Despite the fictitiousness and black opposition to the Mammy and Uncle stereotypes, both tropes have flourished in the racial consciousness (though recently Aunt Jemima and Uncle Ben have been discontinued as marketing trademarks). Attributing the longevity of these racial constructs to the reiterative force of stereotyping inundating black counter-discourse oversimplifies the complex intersections of racial representation and self-identification. As opposed to the earlier discussions, which deconstructed the false memories as hegemonic contrivances, this section explores the ambivalence that these images of blackness raise. Underlying black racial melancholia is a sense of loss that comes from exclusion and the imposition of permanent difference, and to a degree, the deconstruction of white supremacy nullifies those differences. In her analysis of Ralph Ellison's *Invisible Man*, Anne Anlin Cheng (2000) posits "minority discourse might prove to be most powerful when it resides within the consciousness of melancholia itself, when it can maintain a 'negative capability' between neither dismissing nor

sentimentalizing the minority's desires" (127). As Cheng observes, and as the African American reactions to the iterations of Mammy and the Good Darky statue attest, the raced Other occupies a position of negating representations and misconceptions of blackness. This positionality replicates the dialectic racial distinction, and as corollary, collapses subjectivities into a singular racial category. Ellison explores the racial melancholia that resides in the imposition of a racial identity which presupposes a collective sense of blackness that the individual may or may not experience, though such intraracial anxieties are often portrayed as counterproductive in racial discourse. Similarly, the historical revisions and idealizing of black subordination, despite their promotion of racial mutualism and its potential of inclusivity, are the narratives that necessitate negation. In the story of Jocko Graves, and the earlier false narratives, an image of racial mutualism emerges, though it required the black Other to accept one's subordination. The promotion of the Graves myth reflects this attempt to occupy a liminal space in the racial dialectic, in which the struggle between the consciousnesses of subject and object do not require suppression of one and the resistance of the Other.

When Dr. Elmer Martin and Dr. Joanne Martin established The National Great Blacks in Wax Museum in Baltimore, Maryland, they intended for their unique tableaux to stimulate "interest in African American history by revealing the little-known, often-neglected facts of history." In an exhibit entitled "And a Little Child Shall Lead Them" features tableaux of significant historical events involving black children. Along the variegated wall are scenes of the Scottsboro boys, Emmett Till, and the figure of a snow-covered black child clutching the reigns of two horses. On the back wall of his section is a print of Emanuel Leutze's *Washington Crossing the Delaware* (1851), placed to appear as if Washington approaches the shore. This tableau depicts the story of Tom "Jocko" Graves, a free-black child believed to have died when

he faithfully held General Washington's steeds during a snowstorm. Washington, purportedly moved by his bravery and sacrifice, ordered a statue cast in Graves' honor to be placed on the "front lawn" of the Mount Vernon estate. In front of the exhibit, outside of the scene itself, sits a conventional lawn jockey, complete with riding habit and stereotypically exaggerated black features.

The juxtaposition of this mis en scene and a lawn jockey composes a statement about the shift in import of the Faithful Groomsman. The discrepancy between young Jocko and the ubiquitous, caricatured jockey seems to reflect a hegemonic obfuscation of a historical instance of black heroism. With the centrality of appropriation or "signifying" in black racial discourse, viewing this alternative tale of the lawn jockey as a reclamation has precedence, though in this case, the Graves resignification functions regressively and restoratively. The story has circulated long enough to be addressed on the Mount Vernon website. In an exchange archived under the *Ask Mount Vernon* section, Research Historian Mary V. Thompson calls the story "apocryphal" and the equivalent to the legend of the cherry tree. This treatment of Jocko Graves illuminates the problematic intersection of American racialization and historicizing, and brings to the surface the arbitrariness of the criteria used which authorizes the transformation of experience into history. Viewing this tradition in Western thought from that systematically censured the experience of the raced other, a tendency, for example, that shaped the written conventions of captivity narratives, denials of credibility were oftentimes used to reinforce hegemonic domination, making counternarrativity an integral part of African American history. Several facets of the museum reflect this methodology, and raise problems of historicity. With counternarratives such as the story of Jocko Graves that purportedly illustrate black achievements, the absence of evidence is evidence of its absenting, paradoxically functioning as

its own authentication. When I learned of the exhibit, I contacted the museum to inquire about the source of the Jocko story. Days later, I received a message from museum that contained a single citation—Waymon Lefall's *The Legend of Jocko: Child Hero of the American Revolution* (2003).

Waymon Lefall began his literary career under the tutelage of Earl Koger, working for his small newspaper *Good News*. Koger, who was involved in the Baltimore civil rights movement, rose to some notoriety for his series of children's books and coloring books promoting racial pride. His pamphlet "The Legend of Jocko: The Boy Who Inspired George Washington" (1963) which would later become the children's book, *Jocko: a Legend of the American Revolution* (1976) details the origins of the Faithful groomsmen. Written to promote the inclusivity of patriotism, the story relates Jocko's involvement in the revolutionary war. Koger includes the obligatory mitigation of Washington's slaveholding past, where Jocko's father Tom, a free black who enlists in the army, describes how George Washington pledges "freedom for every man" (Koger 12), but though he owns slaves, "doesn't believe any human being should be another's slave" (Koger 16), and "plans to set his slaves free, a few at a time" for "black people will be able to adjust better that way" (Koger 16). Absconding to join his father in the war, Jocko would volunteer to quiet Washington's horse, Old Nelson, during a snowstorm, which led to the child, but not the horse, freezing to death. Koger explains that Washington had a likeness of Jocko put on his front lawn (a problem since Mount Vernon did not exactly have a "front" lawn, and the grounds were maintained by slaves), and from this first tribute, on the front of American homes "may be found statues of Jocko, the brave little black boy who willing gave his best for his country" (Koger 28). On one level, the recasting of the lawn jockey reflects black racial melancholic revisioning of racist iconography; rather than being internalized and

naturalized in their ubiquity, children could associate these objects with a source of African American inclusivity and pride. Koger's retelling would receive local attention from the *Atlanta Constitution*. In "Those Black Jockeys May Hail a Hero," Chester Hampton cites Koger's reputation as a "race man," an ambiguous reference either to Koger's African American heritage or his interests in Civil rights, to explain his palliation of a seemingly racist object. Nevertheless, Hampton paternalistically reports when questioned about the authenticity of his research, Koger replied "if Americans can believe the 'I cannot tell a lie' legend concerning Washington and the one about Lincoln walking several miles to return a penny or two, they should be able to believe in Jocko, too" (Hampton). Though this ambiguous response complicates viewing the Jocko story as authentic, Koger identifies what he sees as discrepancy in American mythos making, and points out the difference in reception in tales involving African American heroism.

Lefall would later continue the Jocko mythology, first in a self-published book *The Legend of Jocko: child Hero of the American Revolution* (2003) and then a revised edition simply entitled *The Legend of Jocko* (2014). Both texts would come to the attention of Jack Paten, a local Australian whose search for information regarding two lawn jockeys in the town of Maitland led him to Lefall's books. Paten would initiate correspondence with Lefall regarding the existence of the itinerant groomsmen, and suggests a trip to Maitland which Lefall undertakes in 2009. *Jocko: A Long Way from Home Down Under* (2014) chronicles his visit to Maitland. A pastiche of press releases, letters and emails, the work opens with an unattributed foreword, and contains a narrative structure that is both box and epistolary. In its haphazard, destabilizing arrangement of personal correspondence and narrative, the text itself mirrors the complexities of centralizing and codifying the Jocko Graves story out of disparate, and at times questionable material. Lefall's mission of restoring a singular signification to an object raises

several epistemological concerns, and tests Bill Brown's positing that "a residual ontology" persists within artifacts of material, visual and literary culture (Brown 250). For Lefall, signification stops at the object itself, and its meaning is independent of the interplay of subject and audience, speaker and listener. Nevertheless, the migration of the object, ambiguously based on a racist trope or a heroic act, destabilizes its meaning. On the release of *Jocko: A Long Way from Home Down Under,* Rebecca Berry (2014) reports that the jockey was gifted to a Maitland tobacconist in 1866, though "there was always a mystery about who the little boy was – until LeFall revealed the statue represents a small African American boy called Jocko Graves" (Berry). For the people of Maitland, Australia, Lefall's narrative is reported as historical truth, though for some Australians, the Maitland groomsman possessed overtones of racism.

Although Australia contains a relatively small population of Australians of African descent, the first Africans arrived as convicts in 1788. Many African Australians detail experiences remarkably reminiscent of American experiences[31]. The appearance of a lawn jockey, without any recognizable connection to the American mythologizing, presumably contradicts Lefall's thesis about the celebration of Jocko as the purpose for their display. Paten relates that there were two others in South Australia, but both were decapitated because some felt that the groomsmen connoted the "black slavery era" (Lefall 206). The eventual fate of the Maitland jockey would follow the same contention over its signification that parallel much of the conflicts in American neighborhoods. Though the Maitland City Council passed an initiative to "relate the tale of 'Jocko's' role in the American War of Independence" and include "a replica of the 'little black boy' in the foyer of Maitland City Council's administrative building" (Lefall 324), the replica and original were protested vigorously by the town's black citizens, and

[31] Clarke, Maxine Beneba. *Growing Up African in Australia*. Schwartz Publishing Pty, Limited, 2019.

repeatedly vandalized. With the coverage of the Maitland jockey dissipating shortly after Berry's article, I contacted the Maitland City Council, and was informed that the statue was no longer on the premises, and its current whereabouts were not disclosed. The representative included a single page from a book outlining the brief history of the now-absent lawn jockey, which provocatively made no allusions to the Jocko Graves origins, focusing instead on its legacy in Maitland.

The iron groomsman represents the prototypical racialized monument--a material embodiment of hegemonic definitions of blackness, fixed in its status as an object, a permanent tableau that depicts transformation of the black body into an object. Ubiquity and age have inured perception of the epistemological violence the lawn jockey's signification commits, and with its status as a signifier blurred, its originary signification has been "frozen, purified, eternalized, *made absent* by this literal sense" (Barthes 124). By merging mythology and landscape, concept and material, the ideology of white supremacy becomes part of the environment, and the racial inequality it produces appear natural occurrence, and not intentional contrivance. In recent years, opposition to Confederate monuments has garnered more media attention, forcing conversations about representation and historical memory, but also fortifying the Confederate exceptionalism as it merged with the "Make America Great Again" rhetoric of hegemonic whiteness. Movements to remove objects considered central to a historical memory mired in revisionist, romanticized interpretations of the past simply reinforce the white melancholic anxieties of losing distinction/domination, which enhances the significance of the objects to reflecting the inherence of white supremacy.

Presuming that these objects, however, merely reflect the white hegemonic power structure, and that the rigorous defense of the sale of black collectibles, or the maintenance of

racial monuments are solely coded declarations of white privilege would miscast the claims of "Jemimas, Jockeys and Jolly Banks" into the very racially melodramatic mode that this chapter critiques. From Ellison's complicated exposition on racial collectivity, to the substantial number of African American collectors of racist memorabilia, and the attempts to resignify the iron groomsman, the conventional positions of contention within racial representation no longer sufficiently characterize the complexities and problematics surrounding black ephemera. Though Lefall, Koger and other adherents to the Jocko Graves mythology appear to buttress idealized portraits of black subordination, the attempts to re-signify and freight these objects with alternative conceptions serves as a precursor to later developments in polemic art. These chapters have intimated a growing tension within black intellectual and aesthetic thought between conventional, post-Civil rights perspective on representations of blackness, and a provocative, iconoclastic viewpoint that encompasses non-normative black lived experiences. The next chapter situates this philosophical collision through a contrast of the works of black artists who appropriate the racist objects and imaginary the precedent chapters discussed. By simply advocating for the removal of the racialized monuments and objects, the import of the objects remains uncontested; however, by appropriating the same objects and tropes, the images themselves become indictments and exposures of the artificiality of supremacist ideology, as opposed to substantiations of its inherence. Artists like Kara Walker and Betye Saar reconfigure racist iconography in ways that disrupt the presumed stability of the signification of the black collectibles and stereotypical tropes. This chapter will present this conflict between the polemical and aesthetic concerns of the Black Arts Movement with an emerging, perspective oftentimes associated with what is termed postblackness. The next chapter considers the possibility of

reconciling both perspectives, and avoiding the conflict with collectivity and essentialism that both the literary and visual artists covered have contended.

Chapter 5: Appropriation and the Reclamation of Aunt Jemima

"The American image of the Negro lives also in the Negro's heart; and when he has surrendered to this image life has no other possible reality" --James Baldwin[32]

In November 1993, *Emerge* magazine garnered national attention for a cover featuring a caricatured Justice Clarence Thomas, superciliously smirking and glancing sidelong beneath a stereotypical mammy headwrap. In response to the controversy the cover evoked, *Emerge* ran a mock retraction in the November 1996 issue, with a cover image of Justice Thomas, eyes slightly bulging beneath his glasses, visible teeth between a widened grin, clad in the habit of a lawn jockey. The accompanying piece, "Uncle Thomas, Lawn Jockey for the Far Right," defends the magazine's proclivity for excoriating Thomas. Apologizing for being "far too benevolent" in his imaging of Thomas, editor George Curry laments that the portrayals are "too compassionate for a person who has done so much to turn back the clock on civil rights" (Curry). "Clarence has a way of even besmirching the reputations of Uncle Toms and lawn jockeys" declares Curry, wryly adding that "those two symbols had proud origins, only to evolve over the years into symbols of degradation." The combination of the contemporary servile connotations and original associations (albeit paternalistic in Stowe's characterization of Tom, and apocryphal in the lawn jockey's conflicting storied role in abetting or hindering slave escapes) indicates a sense of ambivalence and disappointment underlying the magazine's vitriolic caricatures—pride in a black achievement undercut by what Curry and *Emerge* perceive as an unprogressive, sycophantic accomodationism. Critical response to the covers varied, with some finding the caricatures unproductive, and others feeling the images transgressed the boundaries of satire. In

[32] Baldwin, James. *Notes of a Native Son*. First Beacon paperback ed., Beacon Press, 1957. P. 38

an interview with NPR in 2008, Curry explained that the images were not satirical but "accurate," for "Clarence Thomas never met a civil rights law that he liked" (NPR).

Curry's defense of these representations exhumes several underexamined ambiguities of signifying on racist imagery. With authorial positionality as opposed to intent oftentimes distinguishing appropriation from perpetuation, the messaging of these covers complicates such distinctions. The use of racist tropes and epithets to delineate acceptable expressions of blackness has been a problematic convention of African American intraracial discourse. Although African Americans apply the stereotypes to identify conduct that enervates conceptions of communal blackness, repeating the racist constructs not only risks reifying notions of essentialized blackness, but also replicating the cultural hegemony that provoked such intraracial policing. Moreover, by justifying the characterizations based on their fidelity to racist stereotypes, Curry tacitly presupposes a degree of factuality to the constructs, and reveals the depth of their sedimentation within a collective black consciousness. These caricatures exemplify the strange career of these tropes from their material manifestation as bric-a-brac that casually reinforced senses of black inferiority/white supremacy, to collectibles of enduring and contested signification. The objects, and the stereotypical definitions of blackness they embody, "have now installed themselves in the human psyche" (Brown 219) as metonyms for abject expressions of blackness against which racial subjectivity can individuate. The internalizing and repurposing exemplify an uncanny relation to the racial constructs, in which racial individuation involves crafting a racial identity contradistinctive from imposed notions of blackness. This dynamic uncovers the intracultural contestations over the definitions of blackness, and substantiating one's distinction from the definition may entail projecting those undesirable characteristics onto another, paradoxically using of the master's tools to raze/raise the master's construction.

This chapter examines black appropriation of racist iconography in the visual arts, focusing on the recasting of the Mammy construct in a group of paintings, assemblages, sculpture and other media. The pervasiveness and longevity of the Mammy trope, as well as its utility in ongoing revisions of Antebellum and contemporary race relations demonstrates its centrality in collective American consciousness. The forms these pieces of art take confront the multiple ballasts used to solidify the romanticized figuration—its fabricated history, its inextricability from commodity, for example—and examine how the fictiveness has been converted into a social reality. The artists' intermedial engagement with Mammy construct attempts to re-freight the signifier, transforming it into an emblem for something other than the nostalgia for era of unchallenged white supremacy. The appropriation of Mammy iconography is guided by what Christina Sharpe (2016) advocates as black annotation and redaction—new ways of viewing representations of blackness, which look beyond the hegemonic attempts to frame blacks as the Other, and examine the racial anxieties that prompt such depictions of African Americans. The artists' recasting of the conventional mammy uncovers the intersecting currents of racial, sexual, and economic exploitation. The works of Joe Overstreet, Jeff Donaldson, Betye Saar, Kara Walker and others reimagine Mammy to contradict misconceptions about the African American woman used to romanticize the sedimented inequities. Overstreet, Donaldson, Saar and others subvert the docility and deference encapsulated in Aunt Jemima iconography to declare an active role for African American women in the presumably male dominated world of black resistance. Focusing on racial pride and the negation of stereotype, the works of this period typify the ethos of the post-Civil rights Black Arts Movement, a set of values that continue to refract interpretation and acceptance of the works of black artists to the present day. However, prioritizing the reversal of negative images could limit artistic expression to proscribed polemical

aims, and foreclose other expressions of black subjectivity that did not explicitly counter stereotypes. In recent years, artists like Faith Ringgold and Kara Walker have produced works designed, like the art of the earlier generations, to critique racial conditions, but these contemporary works collide with the respectability politics and values the Black Arts Movement championed. In particular, the portrayals in Walker's provocative and satirical works underscored a conflict within the world of Black art, uncovering an ideological chasm between the traditional Black Arts Movement ethos of the late 1960's, and a shifting, postblack perspective on racial subjectivity. Using their reclaimed images of mammy as a point of entry, I investigate the generational conflict and examine the how these ideological ruptures can be sutured into a productive, inclusive framework to conceptualize African American subjectivities that encompass varied lived experiences of blackness. This chapter builds on the expansive amount of scholarship on Betye Saar and Kara Walker, but rather than the focus on their conflicting ideologies, I analyze their artwork through the lens of black annotation and redaction, and study how their repurposing of the Mammy construct uncovers their musings on the racial anxieties underlying such productions of white supremacist thought.

When describing the composition of the *Black Book* (1974), a compilation of artifacts and counter-memorabilia that portray the heterogeneity of the African American experience, Toni Morrison observes "so much black history and art is not reinterpretation and re-evaluation as it should be, but an attempt to defend a new idea or destroy an old one" (Morrison 88). Morrison's nuanced observation not only identifies a topical problem within the Black Arts Movement of the 1970s, but also anticipates a fissure that continues to widen within Black thought. Morrison laments the absence of self-criticality and reflection within these disciplines, and as the lived black experience has become increasingly heterogenous, a singular agenda informed by values of

the past can no longer represent a now variegated black life. Carol Bunch Davis (2015) notes that the cultural memory of black struggles for freedom hinge on a "master narrative" that lionizes the Civil Rights era. This interpretation of the past found its artistic expression in the Black Arts Movement, which Davis observes could advocate "proscriptive notions of black authenticity as a condition of black identity and cultural production" (10). Zadie Smith (2020) asserts that "public art claiming to represent our collective memory is just as often a work of historical erasure and political manipulation. It is just as often the violent inscription of myth over truth, a form of "overwriting"—one story overlaid and thus obscuring another" (Smith). Derek Conrad Murray (2020) sees a similar compression of the complexities that excludes expression of blackness that challenge the sanctity of black solidarity or heteronormativity. In this chapter, I examine the refiguring of the mammy as the nexus of intracultural policing and contentions over racial representations that divide two generations of black artists.

Though Betye Saar and Howardena Pindell castigate Kara Walker's representations of slavery and the mammy, the conflict transcends disagreement over artistic depictions; the unresolved differences reveal a deeper ideological divide in contemporary black thought that, if bridged, could undermine efforts to essentialize blackness. In *Black Post-Blackness: The Black Arts Movement and Twenty-First-Century Aesthetics* (2017), Margo Natalie Crawford demystifies the divergences between these movements. Crawford categorizes the philosophy of both the Black Arts Movement, and that of the generalized grouping of contemporary artists as a "black post-blackness." For Crawford, black aesthetic movements share the goal of capturing the lived experiences of blackness through art. Crawford posits that the imposition of linearity on the political agendas associated with alterations in black lived experiences presupposes static fixity to the definitions of blackness, but to Crawford, "being and becoming cannot be separated" (2).

Characterizing the criticism of the Black Arts Movement by 21st century postblack artists as misunderstandings of the precedent group's mission, Crawford claims that "the irony of the post black critiques of essentialized blackness is that the emerging post black 'marketing' obscures the transnational motion that was created when black was mobilized as a unifying concept full of layers and different temporalities" (13). Rather than homogenizing expressions of African American subjectivities, Crawford explains, the Black Arts Movement's declarations of blackness sought to empower collectivity. Nevertheless, instances of homophobia, misogyny and a privileged masculine perspective within some of the art of BAM complicates simply equating the Black Arts Movement with the ideologies of late twentieth, early 21st century post-blackness based on the notion that blackness is a continual process of becoming.

Alternatively, the expansiveness and contentions surrounding the use of the term "postblackness" impedes discretely separating the ideals of this concept from the ethos of the Black Arts Movement. Jesse Goldberg (2019) considers postblackness an "antiessentialist account of blackness that explicitly resists attempts to police black identity" because "blackness can be and is in fact expressible in multitudinous, heterogeneous ways (Goldberg 147-48). Soyica Diggs Colbert (2016) further qualifies the term, claiming the "new millennial identifications—post-black, post-soul, and new black—present aesthetic configurations that emerge in relationship to shifting political, social, and purportedly racial contexts" and "attempt to define blackness after the classical phase of the civil rights movement" (Colbert 4). Much of the scholarship on postblack aesthetics centers around the incongruities of the 21st century lived black experience with those of the post-Civil rights era. Colbert contends that "the sensibilities informing earlier aesthetic modes render the formulations themselves ill-fitted for late twentieth- and early twenty-first-century cultural production" (Colbert 5). This statement, however, implies

that the temporality enervated the racial conditions that precipitated the ideological and aesthetic aims of the movement. While the rigid precepts demanding positive representation of blackness and adherence to respectability politics positions the Black Arts Movement as the punctilious restrictor of individuation, the artists of this period were still forced to engage and negate stereotypical imaging that predominated representations of blackness. Though the counternarrative aims seemed to dominate the aesthetic goals, Tru Leverette (2021) observes several BAM artists challenged "both the black aesthetic itself and the ideologies of black nationalism, specifically Black Power, while still joining the larger fight against oppression" (8). Moreover, these artists deconstructed notions that "black art should be only for and about black people, that it should conform to specific aesthetic principles, or that it should altogether reject European influences and presence" (Leverette 9). These challenges "opened up space for more complex definitions of blackness, for broader understandings of black experiences, and for more avenues through which black lives might be given voice and affirmation" (Leverette 9). Based on these observations, the conventional critiques (though valid and substantiated) of the Black Arts Movement run the risk of essentializing the ethic of the movement that contains its own fissures.

This chapter will consider the possibility and ramifications of fusing the generational distinctions, and will trace how aesthetic movements that seek to represent the diverse lived experience of blackness can negotiate the tenuous balance between inclusivity and essentialism. Of less importance is determining what traits, characteristics, and experiences constitute "authentic" blackness than examining the belief that racial expression itself necessitates such delineations. This chapter considers the extent to which the framework for defining race is inseparable from dialectical thinking, and explores the possibility that diverging expressions of

blackness can expand racial discourse and avoid the intracultural policing that recreates an intraracial dialectic that "others" itself.

The artwork covered in this chapter feature nuanced meditations on the multiple significances of the Mammy construct. Though the figuration of the rotund, gregarious, and accommodating mammy originated on the minstrel stage, the image is inextricably tied to the Pearl Milling Company's Aunt Jemima branding. In her study of Victorian era advertising, Anne McClintock (1995) described the interplay between Victorian era commodity advertising and the naturalization of racial fictions used to normalize imperialism. McClintock posits the efficacy of advertising in a colonial program, which in many respects, American racialization resembles. McClintock explains that "no preexisting form of organized racism had ever before been able to reach so large and so differentiated a mass of the populace" (McClintock 209). A similar movement in the U.S., and the development of Jemima trademark would coincide with a reinvention of legal and social means of reinforcing white supremacy since Emancipation and remodeling racial caste. Part of the allure of Mammy/Jemima is the nostalgia for the halcyon days of harmonious race relations the figure presumably evokes, though the Aunt Jemima figure was not based on historical, extant relations between black domestics and white families, but rather was the source of this idealized relationship. Its ongoing significance, though the brand has been discontinued, "illustrates the extent to which U.S. racial capitalism is enmeshed with and buttressed by the material history and cultural imagination of enslaved black female reproductivity" (Kaplan 36). Maurice Manring (1998) charts the development of Jemima mythology from a marketing campaign to a fixture of idealized interracial relations. The self-rising flour it endorsed appealed "to existing white female needs in a time of revolutionary changes in the household" which coincided with altered "white perceptions of the self relative to

Blacks" (Manring 38). Through Jemima, white women could secure "a type of femininity, whiteness, and class uplift" that Emancipation and a changing racial landscape threatened. Reflecting on the endurance of the image, Sara Clarke Kaplan (2021) explains that though Jemima was invented "to suture the break between chattel slavery and its postemancipation afterlife," she manages to exceed "the historical moment of her creation even as she reflects its particular tropes and technologies of Black subordination" (Kaplan 34). Underlying this construct are several white racial anxieties that mammy assuages and obfuscates, making Mammy's expedience a magnifier of repressed white melancholia. David Eng and Shinhee Han (2000) argue that "the melancholic makes every conceivable effort to retain the last object, to keep it alive within the domain of the psyche" "in identifying with the last object, the melancholic is able to preserve it but only as a type of haunted, ghostly identification. That is, the melancholic assumes the emptiness of the last object or ideal, identifies with this emptiness, and this participates in his or her own self-denigration and ruination of self-esteem" (Eng 346). As Eng and Han note, the formation of the U.S. nation-state, and to an extent, the solidification of a discrete whiteness out of the diverse class and divisions, "literally entailed, and continues to entail, a history of institutionalized exclusions" (Eng 347). Within the moves to fortify a discrete white identity are discourses of "American exceptionalism and democratic myths of liberty, individualism, and inclusion" that force and necessitate "a misremembering of these exclusions, an enforced psychic amnesia that can return only as a type of repetitive national haunting" (Eng 347). This knowledge of the mechanisms used to maintain racial distinction/domination threatens the revelation of the illusion of these founding principles, and by extension, the fiction of inherent racial superiority. What distinguishes white racial melancholia is a denial of this

absence, and tropes like the Mammy that obfuscate the racial conditions reinforce the mythological ballasts of naturalized white supremacy.

The artistic renditions, as Doris Witt (1999) observes, surpass "ridiculing the trademark as a demeaning continuation of slave iconography to appropriate it as a symbol of the necessity of physical resistance to white domination" (Witt 44). Though the reclamation of the mammy figure entails resistance to white supremacy, the import of the art reveals a positional divide on the role women should take in these movements. Charging that segregation and other legacies of oppressive statues have forced the black familial unit into a "matriarchal structure," the Moynihan Report (1965) sees this subversion of heteronormative familial structure placing black culture that "at a distinct disadvantage." The conventional imaginings of black women epitomized by the asexual, laboring mammy, and the misrepresentation of a matriarchal black social structure excludes the black woman from normative femininity, and as a corollary, presupposes the inability of the black male to assume conventional masculinities, which conflates normative genders and whiteness. Hortense Spillers (1987) identifies the liberatory possibilities in these exclusions, arguing that the black woman is "less interested in joining the ranks of gendered femaleness than gaining the surgent ground as female social subject" (80). With normative gendering and dialectic racialization functioning to substantiate white masculinities and femininities, Alexander Weheliye (2020) sees freedom beneath the role of the racial/ungendered other. For Weheliye, the merger of racial/gender dialectic that forces blacks into ungendered/raced beings-for-other "represents an opportunity for imaging gender/sexuality otherwise, for embracing and inhabiting the ungendered flesh, for fully and differently inhabiting the gift of Black Life" (Weheliye 239). In other words, blackness becomes "ungendered flesh," but as Weheliye and Spillers posit, the indefiniteness has liberatory properties, and frees black

flesh from the restrictions of gender bifurcation. The traditional imaging of Jemima straddles the gender binary: she is both overbearing and nurturing, aligned to the domestic sphere, but denied eroticism or sexuality. From this stance, embracing the asexualized, ungendered figure of Jemima can liberate blackness from an internalized racial/sexual hegemonic binary. The works of Jeff Donaldson (1963), Murry Depillars (1968) and Joe Overstreet (1964), though they demonstrate degrees of aggressive physicality of the Mammy, also embed normative sexualities within their portraits of Jemima. The paintings portray the Mammy figure as an emblem of subversiveness, emphasizing her physical resistance to oppression, indicating the inclusivity of women in the challenges against racial oppression.

Jeff Donaldson's *Aunt Jemima and the Pillsbury Doughboy* (1963) is defined by its visual ambiguities that reflect its signifying on the racial/marketing construct of the mammy figure. Donaldson's piece captures the duality and potential for resistance within the image of the mammy. Intersecting connotations of imperialist, sexual, economic and racial oppression, Donaldson's painting depicts a corpulent police officer with an upraised baton, subduing a stern, androgynous rendition of Aunt Jemima. This control, however, appears uncertain, for her expression communicates more defiance than resignation, and though her posture appears nonthreatening, she maintains a clinched fist. The position of her torso in relation to his, as well as his hand on her shoulder indicates the characters may be upright or prone, insinuating the possibility of a sexual assault, which corrects the fictionalized asexuality that erases the history of sexual exploitation black female domestic endured. In the background of the painting is a reimaged American flag with arched stripes of military insignia, raising the scenario of a military occupation or quelling of an uprising. On one level, the inclusion of a figure typically associated with the domestic sphere, could be an indictment of the proscribed, limiting roles black women

experience within a white hegemonic power structure fortified by social, economic and sexual domination. For Mike Sell (1988), referring to the police officer as the "Pillsbury Doughboy," synonymizes the police officer/soldier with a commodity, where the marketing of products seeks to subjugate a recalcitrant racial construct that challenges the restrictions of her portrayal. This interplay highlights the dual and intertwined impositions of commercial culture and racialization upon the black identity.

Both Joe Overstreet (1964) and Murry Depillars (1968) also confront the role commodification and marketing play in stabilization of racial constructs. Their incorporation of aspects of detournement indicts these industries for their complicity in perpetuating these conceptions of blackness. With *The New Jemima*, Joe Overstreet shapes his painting as a box, with a smiling Aunt Jemima, firing pancakes from an automatic rifle, with the globe in lower foreground. Above her head is written "Made in USA" and beneath the rifle are the words "New Jemima." In an interview with Tate Galleries, Overstreet explains that the incongruity between the Quaker Oats image of an "idealised black woman" representing "a nostalgic, personified image of Southern hospitality" (Tate) who chooses "a machine gun as her stove" (Tate) articulates the subversive potential concealed behind the constructs. Murray Depillars' *Aunt Jemima* also uses the detournement reference to the materiality of Jemima's commodified imaging, where the piece depicts a row of four boxes, but from the front box, one of the Jemima figures aggressively jumps. Her spatula, used to flip pancakes, is raised menacingly as a weapon, and her bare breasts protrude aggressively, as if her usually asexual, nonthreatening physicality also revolts from the conceptual limitations signified by the homogenized boxes. Depillars places an American flag in the background, but replaces the stars with the Chicago Police Department badges (as a criticism of the police department's raiding of the Black Panther headquarters).

Nika Elder (2018) sees the pop art resonances of these pieces as keys to their critiques, positing that by "granting the logo agency, they revealed the strident and persistent ways in which the Quaker Oats Company promulgated and normalized the stereotype of the grateful and obsequious black woman" (Elder 32). As opposed to the Donaldson piece, Overstreet maintains the conventional bodily figuration of Jemima, but the weaponization of her domestic tasks illustrates ambiguous attitude towards the place of women in political resistance movements. Doris Witt (1999) saw these paintings of revised Jemimas focusing on "a phallicized" Aunt Jemima, noting Overstreet's depiction of the assault rifle and the protruding breasts of Depillars' Jemima undercutting the nurturing associations of the conventional mammy. For Witt, the play with the masculinization of Jemima's features in these works reveals "marked concern with the role of black women in a so-called black man's revolution" (Witt 45). Simultaneously, however, these transgressions of the gender binary signals ways that widening black subjectivities beyond compliance with the heteropatriarchal order can disrupt the limitations of dialectic racialization.

Though her assemblage cycle succeeds the aforementioned paintings, Betye Saar's repurposing of the mammy has maintained a preeminence in the art world for decades. Her current show "Call and Response" includes signature pieces, sketchbook, paintings and assemblages that chronicle her storied career. In a 2007 lecture at the Museum of Contemporary Art, Angela Davis reportedly attributed the start of the Black Women's movement to Betye Saar's *The Liberation of Aunt Jemima* (1972). This assemblage artwork, a tableau of repurposed mammy ephemera, engages the intersection of inter- and intra- racial conflicts that locate the black woman's positionality outside of traditional feminist or black liberation movements. In this work, and many of her others, the mammy memorabilia signify the black woman's positional paradoxes and burdens, in which the fictive construct of an accommodating, content black maid

resolves the anxieties surrounding the integrated domestic space. Saar began collecting mammy memorabilia in 1960's, viewing them as indicators of the ways race was (mis)conceived by both whites and blacks. Saar observed an internalization of these images in the black psyche, where the tropes became "the only source of how we saw ourselves" (Saar 3). The repurposing the mammy figurines, pictures and other media in her assemblage art disrupts the euphemistic representation of the black domestic experience and the sanitized revisions of white hegemonic dominance that the ephemera substantiate. By using the domestic sphere as a setting, Saar engages the identity production of the space that distinguishes conventional male and female labor, but is susceptible to the mixing of race that the trope of the mammy alleviates. Arlene Raven (1998) posits the recasting of the memorabilia create a "visual analogue for the intricacy and interdependence of definitions of 'black' and 'white'" (Saar 6). Raven sees Saar's repurposing of mammy figurines, Aunt Jemima advertisements and common domestic items deconstructing "a differentiating and demeaning strategy for cementing the construction of a 'pure' identity" (Saar 6). Rather than negate their import, Saar reconfigures the images, and points to the potential not only of their resignification, but of a re-evaluation of the black women whose livelihoods depended on fulfilling these domestic roles. Applying Bill Brown's (2016) analysis of appropriating collectible objects to Saar's assemblages uncovers additional layers of import. According to Brown, repositioning objects from one cultural context to another serves to "decommodify" the ephemera, and "assert semiotic control over this concrete record of the production and distribution of black stereotypes" (Brown 258). In these new contexts, the objects no longer represent "African Americans but U.S. racism" (Brown 258). Though Brown's analysis facilitates appropriation of the iconography, it also privileges historical context and authorial intent in determining meaning. In other words, the objects can be palimpsests to

critique hegemonic racism or substantiate the rationales of collectors that the renewed commerce suggests the objects are relics of past beliefs. Saar, however asserts that beneath the Mammy figure lies the potential for subversiveness, for its existence identifies the white racial anxieties that the construct intends to assuage. Sara Kaplan argues that for Saar, black collectibles are "cultural artifacts of idealized white domesticity" that are built upon "aestheticized Black servitude" (Kaplan 35). Since the antebellum, blackness has occupied a liminal space between personhood and property, 3/5ths of a person, whose exclusion from normative gender constructions and heteropatriarchal relations, for Kaplan, "fulfilled the essential function of embodying the not-quite-human against which (white) humanness was created and reproduced" (Kaplan 47).

Saar's pieces preserve the traditional mammy iconography, but reframe the construct to articulate her polemical concerns. For example, in *The Liberation of Aunt Jemima*, Saar builds the piece around a mammy grocery list holder, substituting the pencil that the mammy conventionally held for a rifle. Maintaining the traditional imagery illustrates, according to Doris Witt, that the subversiveness "is already contained within the stereotype and simply awaits activation under the right historical circumstances" (Witt 50). Moreover, ungendering Jemima posits a discrepancy between femininity and physical resistance, which for Saar would signify the very intersectional oppression that catalyzes Saar's vindication of the mammy. In an interview with Cindy Nemser, Saar laments that "even during the revolution" African Americans would "put other blacks down as 'Uncle Toms' and 'Aunt Jemimas'" for that subservient role many blacks had to adopt "protected the youth so that they could grow up and get an education" (Nemser). At one time, James Baldwin would advocate the same reconsideration of these constructs, reminding the black community that before celebrating "the demise of Aunt Jemima

and Uncle Tom…we had better ask whence they sprang, how they live? Into what Limbo had they vanished?" (Baldwin 27). This mix of past and present tense articulates the ambivalence surrounding the expressions of patient, biding, docile blackness (which were oftentimes a necessity for survival) that these tropes encapsulate. In other words, Baldwin questions whether the disappearance of Jemima and Tom, who ostensibly signify a collection of disavowed behaviors, can signify the absence of those abject racial characteristics. For Baldwin and Saar, abjuring Jemima and Tom as stereotypical constructs revises the historical resonances of these figures, and rather than acknowledge the complexities of racial identity, these denunciations parallel the homogenizing of blackness that buttresses dialectic racialization. Though mammy was a woman who "knew and stayed in her place," Saar intended her assemblages "to transform a negative, demeaning figure into a positive, empowered woman who stands confrontationally with one hand holding a broom and the other armed for battle" (Saar 3). Not all critics, however, agreed with Saar's sympathetic reinterpretation of the mammy. Responding to *The Liberation of Aunt Jemima*, Kara Walker felt Saar "was still making Mammy do her bidding," which placed Mammy in "a submissive role relative to the artist" (Walker and Walker). These comments reflect an ongoing conflict between these two artists over their artistic representation of their critiques of slavery. In 1997, Saar would call some of Walker's recent work, a series of cartoonish silhouettes provocatively depicting violent interactions between slaves and masters "revolting" and a "betrayal to the slaves," and began a letter writing campaign requesting Walker's work be destroyed.

The deconstructive elements of *The Liberation of Aunt Jemima* are twofold: Saar seeks to undermine the hegemonic mythologizing and intrarracial dismissals of the mammy by infusing images of resistance within the assemblage. Saar replaces the blank sheet of the notepad

with a vintage postcard of a mammy holding a crying child, but in front of the post is a cut-out of a black fist making the black power salute. In these juxtapositions, Saar articulates the double consciousness beneath this role, intimating the co-existence of both actions. With the background of pop art styled, discontinued Aunt Jemima logos and the contemporary styled foreground of the black fist, Saar obscures the temporal perspective of the piece, implying that these conceptions and constructs of blackness persist, and that the present is "still replete with marketing mammies" (Saar 6). Saar develops this concept of the longevity of the mammy construct in her exhibit *Still Tickin'*, *Someone's in the Kitchen with Dinah* (2014). In these assemblages, Saar merges the functions of a kitchen scale and clock to comment on how "history" is determined. The juxtaposition of items that measure matter and time composes a potent metaphor for the rationale of the continued circulation of black memorabilia. Collecting racist memorabilia is justified as a preservation of "history," presupposing that history has a material element. Saar visualizes this notion in the composition of her artwork. Using a painted watermelon slice as the base of the work, a kitchen scale sits atop it, with another slice of watermelon serving as the weighing platform of the scale. Saar completes the piece with a mammy figurine placed on the scale. The saturation of stereotypical imagery within items presumably objective demonstrates the difficulty of removing these constructs from the racial imaginary. With the components of the scale containing racist figuration, Saar posits the level of entrenchment these constructs have reached, ones which have taken on a material, and to an extent, natural reality.

Saar's *Three Warriors* (1998) examines the ambiguities surrounding the figure of the black washwoman. Both truth and trope, the washerwoman signifies the reification of person and labor. The historical treatment of this figure captures the sympathetic ambivalence that Saar's

pieces communicate—a reverence for her sacrifice and endurance, and indignation at the socioracial conditions that necessitated her abidance. In his essay, "The Negro Washerwoman: A Vanishing Figure" (1930), Carter G. Woodson extols the person/labor, exclaiming that in "the history of no people has her example been paralleled, in no other figure in the Negro group can be found a type measuring up to the level of this philanthropic spirit in unselfish service" (Woodson 137). "In the north," Woodson claims "she was often the sole wage earner of the family even when she had an able-bodied husband" (Woodson 138). Woodson's conflation of individual women and type, his praise of her unselfishness and labor even with the presence of an "able-bodied" husband reveals his own heteronormative perspective. Despite Woodson's reverence for this figure, Maurice Manring wonders if the sentiments suggest that the washerwoman were "in service to a black patriarchy instead" (Manring 30). The work of laundering could resolve the contradictory aims of a black household which sought to fulfill the heteronormative roles that black socioeconomic conditions rendered unobtainable. Saar offers that laundering "became desirable because it was uniquely a task that could combine productive and reproductive labor within the worker's domestic environment" (Saar 6). In these depictions, Saar focuses on the performativity of the roles to vindicate figures who seemingly embodied the complaisant accommodation of white supremacy that perpetuated its dominance.

Throughout her pieces, Saar eschews objects or illustrations of actual women, opting for emblemized portraits of these constructs that emphasizes the artificiality of these types. In the assemblage, Saar uses a vintage washboard and places three small mammy figurines within the handle space. Each of the mammies holds an assault rifle, and below the mammies is written in a militaristic, action italicized font "EXTREME TIMES CALL FOR EXTREME HEROINES." Within the grates of the washboard is printed a verse message:

Oh these cold

white hands

manipulating

they broke us

like limbs from

trees and carved

Europe upon our

African masks

and made puppets (Saar)

Superimposed on faded images of African Americans hanging from trees, the verse asserts the fictiveness of the roles imposed on blacks for survival, using the juxtaposition to present the consequences of noncompliance. Despite these dangers, Saar asserts that the mammy construct still contains an element of resistance. The use of a washboard functions as an ironic reversal of the sanitizing of history, with the remnants of the legacy of violence staining not only the board, but all other things that applied to the board. Arlene Raven views the washboard as symbolic of the "dirty work of domestic service and bodies" used paradoxically "to propagate the intolerance that has soiled the soul of the United States from our beginnings" (Saar 5). From this perspective, the act of sanitizing, or effacing legacies of violence and exploitation, is the very thing that ensures those realities remain on history indelibly.

By leaving the original black collectible intact, Saar's works risk the possibilities of continuing the stereotypical representations of blackness. With this possibility underlying Saar's

work with mammy centered assemblages, critics note the ramifications of this ambiguity. Phoebe Wolfskill (2017) assesses the extent to which Saar "liberates" the mammy. Wolfskill argues that the annotation of stereotypical features, such as "the central figure's girth, which historically functioned to position the mammy as masculine, brutish, and the absolute inverse of demure white femininity, becomes an important asset in this liberation, as it indicates her physical strength and ability to fight back" (150-51). While Saar's appropriation "purports to use a racial stereotype in order to obliterate it unequivocally" (153), Wolfskill questions if this revisionism truly liberates Jemima. For Wolfskill, Saar's work "underscores the politics of respectability that has long surrounded artistic renderings of blackness" (Wolfskill 161). Her figuration intends to negate stereotypical misconceptions, which in the struggle for equality of the post-Civil era, were fundamental to undercutting justifications for oppressive practices. Critiquing Saar's hidebound adherence to the values of a movement reflect the obstacles within her lived experience may be anachronistic and myopic, for the argument could be lodged that the differences (or improvements) in experiences of this emerging generation are the result of these past efforts. Wolfskill claims that for Saar, "the only applicable use of these racial stereotypes is that which attempts to liberate them" (Wolfskill 161), which limits the thematic and aesthetic possibilities for African American artists. These strictures precipitated the divide between Saar and the younger generations of artists like Walker, who in addition to opposing raciosocial conditions, must contend with the intercultural criticism of their artistic expression.

With their provocative, explicit and iconoclastic imagery, and their expressions of ambivalence towards catechistic African Americanist thought, the work of Kara Walker challenges the preconceptions about black artists. Walker confronts the arbitrary deployment of lenses that refract interpretation of her work. For instance, much of the critical attention to her

provocative and grotesque depiction of Antebellum interracial sexual relations in her silhouette series consider the pieces satirical, though other than works' suggestive titles, discerning tone could be both an analytical and affective act. Walker plays with presumed discordance of her racial identity with ostensible messaging of her works—an assumption not only limiting the scope of racial discourse, but also of our critical lens. Despite her divisiveness in critical circles, Walker is a preeminent figure in the art world. At 28, Walker became the youngest recipient of the MacArthur Genius Grant, and her works have garnered international acclaim and criticism over the last three decades. Her current show, *Kara Walker: A Black Hole Is Everything a Star Longs to be*, displayed at De Pont Museum of Contemporary Art in the Netherlands, is a retrospective collection of 600 sketches from her personal archive, which at her age of 52, demonstrates her stature in the art world (a similar exhibit for Betye Saar was not established until 2018-2019, when Saar turned 93). While her work seeks to dismantle racist constructs, it also interrogates conventional black perspectives. Derek Conrad Murray observes that Walker's pieces did not eschew "the mess" in African American politics--"the forms of self-abuse, the intracultural nihilism, and our complicity with antiblackness" (23) which puts her consistently at odds with an older generation of black artists, who abide by "the sacrosanct intracultural demand for racial fidelity" (Murray 23). For Murray, and other critics who advocate postblack perspectives, Walker's art applies a self-criticality that may dissect the resilience of racial oppression and misrepresentation in an ostensibly post-race world. One of the problems with this perspective, however, is that this spirit of inquiry may perpetuate the same exclusions which advocates of postblackness attribute to Black Arts Movement ethics. Like Ralph Ellison, Kara Walker interrogates all notions of essentialism, and her work overturns the traditional dyad that views blacks as passive objects, and instead examines the roles African Americans play in the

continuance of racial misconceptions. Walker's satirical and cynical perspective undercuts this expected thematic imposed by consumers of her art, ridiculing "their fetishistic and racialized desires while simultaneously critiquing her own complicity with this embattled relation" (Murray 30). The explicit, whimsical and irreverent depiction of sexual violence of the Antebellum in her silhouette tableaux, like *The Emancipation Approximation* (2000) feature a play on the Victorian shadow art. In its cartoonish style, it portrays a black girl performing fellatio and romanticized revisions of the atrocities of slavery. Vivien Green Fryd (2019) notes that Walker's work disrupts "conventional American histories and embodies, formally and textually, trauma's capacity to disrupt as a rememory" (225). Another piece, which portrays a black child violently beheading a chicken, reflects on the dehumanization of the institution itself; many black artists regard the representation of this brutish act as upsetting "the dictates of racial obligation" (Murray 29). Jillian Hernandez (2020) describes Walker's art as an aesthetics of excess, a form of artistic expression when producers craft "their own bodies and representations" in ways that may "trouble, seduce, and sometimes capitulate with the desirous gazes of the Euro-American West" (Hernandez 10). Walker positions herself against the conventional and unexamined, and acknowledges the paradoxes inherent to reclaiming tropes and portraying the sexual exploitation of slaves.

Much of the analysis of Kara Walker's art involves attempts at discerning the motives that drive her provocative depictions, as if her race and political ideologies can (or should) refract our interpretation of her iconoclastic and disturbing imagery. Walker simultaneously dismantles racist constructs and questions racial collectivity. Her work critiques the impetuses for unraveling the ambiguities of her perspectives, and links the facile and arbitrary assumptions used to determine her viewpoints to the same essentializing logic that perpetuates stereotype.

Critical reactions to Walker's art reveal efforts to concretize a thematic, political position that correlates with the expected viewpoints of an African American female artist. Susan Gubar (2003) defines this artificial bifurcation of interpretation as "tension between authorial agency or intentionality, on the one hand, and textual ambiguity or reception history, on the other" (Gubar 619). For Gubar, critics approach Walker's silhouettes pondering whether the work intends "to deconstruct, denaturalize whiteness—or has it merely reinscribed the brutalities of a racist past that continues to demean real black people in the present?" (624). Rebecca Peabody (2016) asserts that the tendency to excavate Walker's personal views from her work undercut "its collaboration with public, shared stories of national importance—a collaboration that has occasioned some of her most incisive and troubling cultural observations" (1-2). Peabody explains that the interplay between these narratives and those that consume them expose how this dynamic contributes to our ongoing project of race. I argue that the need to politicize her work to account for its explicitness enervates the dialogue Walker's work seeks to initiate.

Walker's silhouettes bring the complexities of Antebellum interracial sexual relations into collision with romanticized revisions of that history through her use of the seemingly inconsonant media of Victorian silhouette art. Walker confronts the act of revision itself—both the Lost Cause sanitization of interracial harmony, and the assumption that the history of interracial sexual relations was exclusively a history of rape and exploitation. Phillip Brian Harper (2015) examines the composition of the silhouettes to deconstruct the conventional interpretative expectations that art must convey social reality. Harper explains that many critics feared Walker's appropriation of stereotypes "would serve to confirm those ideas rather than to combat them" (27), and the expectation that these pieces must disclose a historical accurate rendition of the past may be part of Walker's larger critique. Harper concludes that Walker

"altogether eschews the mode of positivist representation" (24), opting instead for an abstractionism that could expand "our sense of political possibility, in that it opens unrestricted onto the world at large and invites us to imagine what we might do to transform it" (Harper 25). Though historically, this mode of portraying blacks has been particularly deleterious to the conceptions of African Americans "constituting them as a dehumanized generality thus eligible for enslavement (among other things) and underwriting an exalted generic national personhood from which they have typically been excluded" (Harper 62), Harper asserts that abstractions can expand the sense of "political possibility," for "it opens unrestricted onto the world at large and invites us to imagine what we might do to transform it" (Harper 25). By employing abstract depictions, Walker can engage with the multitude of factors that contribute to the misrepresentations of blackness, one of which is the conventional method of negation through positivistic counterexample. Like Ellison, Walker recognizes the potential dangers of totalization that this focus on social realism and collectivity can have on individual subjectivities and artistic expression.

For Walker, fusing reception, reaction and piece is the art, and her *A Subtlety, or the Marvelous Sugar Baby, an Homage to the unpaid and overworked Artisans who have refined our Sweet tastes from the cane fields to the Kitchens of the New World on the Occasion of the - demolition of the Domino Sugar Refining Plant* (2014) encapsulates this interplay. In May 2014, the public art fund Creative Times presented Walker's first large scale piece of public art at the defunct Domino Sugar Refinery in Brooklyn, New York. The installation was a massive, 75-by-35-foot sugarcoated sculpture of a nude black woman in mammy kerchief, poised in the position of a sphinx, surrounded by smaller, molasses and resin figures of laboring black children. In the sculpture, prominent breasts, buttocks and vulva of the gigantic mammy undercut the portrayed

asexuality of the construct, that in concert with its stark whiteness and ironic composition out of the palliating medium of sugar intimate the expedience of the mammy construct for the white psyche. Carol Becker (2019) noted that Walker's use of these "enormous proportions" empowered this mammy figure by portraying it as "potentially treacherous and eroticized, as a familiar yet unfamiliar reincarnation of the past" (Becker 74). With its posture connoting the sphinx, the mammy is both human and beast, representing slavery's dehumanization of the black bondswoman as domestic chattel and commodity. Walker plays with the metatextual associations of the sphinx, its mythological origins as the creator of a riddle, undercutting the notion that the installation has a singular import or meaning, but rather, the interplay of audience, setting and image compose a wider meditation on the mechanisms used to preserve presumably ephemeral constructs.

By choosing a space designated for redevelopment into upscale office spaces, retail businesses and "affordable" housing (the renovations are currently underway), Walker imbricates her critique of revisionist history, layering images of the romanticization of the exploitative experience of the black bondswomen in the figure of the mythologized mammy atop the sanitizing, dehistoricizing effects of gentrifying the factory, a space in which legacy of exploitative labor practices in sugar refining and the notorious brutality of slave conditions in its harvesting intersect. "The Domino Sugar Factory is doing a large part of the work" explains Walker, as she intended the juxtaposition of the sculptures and setting would articulate the multivalent thematic aims of the piece—the reification of the laborer into commodity and other "assorted meanings about imperialism, about slavery, about the slave trade that traded sugar for bodies and bodies for sugar." Though referred to as "subtleties," these confected sculptures and figures historically were the opposite considering sugar's luxury. According to Natalie

Hopkinson (2018), the subtleties "were ostentatious displays of the host's clout" but could also be mediums of subversive messages, like "rebukes to heretics and politicians" (Mintz 89). Walters posits that the choice of refined sugar over its natural, unrefined brown form, "signifies the ideal or cultivated representation of white womanhood" (Walters 180). The significances of sugar, from its colonial exploitation, and symbolic overtones, and its different reactions point out the positionality of the audience. As Hopkinson explains, "we don't just remember the sexualized horrors of plantation life; We are participants, coconspirators, and consumers" (Hopkinson 69). Moreover, its composition of sugar highlights the supposed temporality of romanticized constructs, and the ephemerality of the installation itself becomes a comment on historical moments that continue to be recast and reinvested within a palliative form, extending concepts that should have expired.

Despite its staggering size, and layers of signification, the work of *A Subtlety* is not limited to the statues, but encompasses its apropos setting, and the visitors to the installation. Viewers were encouraged to photograph their visit to the piece, and post their reactions and photographs to social media using the #KaraWalkerDomino hashtag. The resulting postings, however, captured visitors making obscene gestures, simulating lewd acts, and writing sexually-explicit comments about the statue. A significant portion of the initial reviews of the piece included, in addition to critiques of Walker's composition and artistry, dismay at the behavior of visitors. Yesha Callahan (2014) imputed the offensive behavior to the white patrons, for whom "the black woman's body seems to easily garner laughs and mockery, even if it's made out of sugar" (Callahan). Callahan laments "History has shown us time and time again how a black woman's body was (and sometimes still is) objectified" (Callahan). Cait Munro (2014), however attributes the behavior to "the intellectual lowest common denominator's inability to deal

maturely with something that might make them uncomfortable" (Munro). Munro asserts that these reactions exemplify "the very reason we need art projects like this one, that probe at our perceptions of race, gender, and sexual orientation—topics we often like to think are 'no longer a problem,' but very clearly are" (Munro). In addition, Munro criticizes Creative Time for their complicity in this behavior, contending that publicizing an official hashtag "opened the door for this kind of infantile engagement." Walker, however, hired a film crew to record the reactions to her installation, and the resulting film called *An Audience*, features 28 minutes captures evaluative and analytical conversations about the statues, as well as the sexually-exploitive remarks and lewd selfies. Walker's film, as Vivien Green Fyrd notes, subverted the white masculine gaze by making the spectators' "performances" a part of the artwork itself, "marshalling a series of gazes—the viewers', the artists's, and the sphinx's—in order to expose the way in which some viewers 'performed' the role of sexually violating the monumental sculpture" (261). The footage in *An Audience* intimates the virulence of the treatment of the black body, that, contrary to antebellum romanticization and postracial, color neutral declarations of color-blindness, remains a part of a collective racial consciousness. Tracey Walters notes that the video substantiated this assessment, showing that "the black woman's body was subject to fetishization and visual consumption by audiences who were just as eager to participate in witnessing the highly sexually objectified body" (Walters 178). Hopkinson argues that Walker's installation uncovered sedimented beliefs only thinly veiled by revisionist versions of history, making the slave woman's history and "our still troubling reactions to them exuberantly public. Far from gone, the basic carnal impulses that drove her exploitation are never far below the surface" (Hopkinson 81). Contrary to Callahan's observations, Walker's video shows that women and African Americans engaged in the sexual mocking of the statue. The footage

deconstructs several unexamined and accepted narratives about the production and resistance to racist imagery and sexual exploitations, and undercuts the simplified binaries that refract our interpretation of dynamics. Walker intervenes in the conventional narratives of progressive sexual and racial politics, which uncritically attribute exploitative sexual behaviors to males, and racial haranguing to whites. Though it can be argued that Walker's viewpoints resonate with characteristics of postblackness and postfeminism, the ambiguities her installation intimate make her personal ideologies elusive, which encourage, as opposed to foreclose, an exploration of the thematic significance(s).

Though *An Audience* uncovers the complicity of surrounding culture in reiterating sexual and racial traumas, the consideration that Walker entraps her audience, and effects the same exploitation is not lost on her critics. The social media posts and captured footage "confirmed Walker's detractors in their belief that her images actually do provoke a response of white racism," however such reactions "could never have been monitored so extensively before the existence of the internet" (Becker 77). *A Subtlety* and her extensive silhouette tableaux have fortified a growing discord between Kara Walker and a number of black artists. In 1997, Betye Saar initiated a letter writing campaign shortly after Walker's reception of the Genius grant. In several interviews, Saar has expressed her distaste for Walker's installations, charging that "Walker consciously or unconsciously seems to be catering to the bestial fantasies about blacks created by white supremacy and racism" (qtd. in Als). Beyond the provocative and irreverent treatment of slavery, Green Fryd suggests, class and generational issues lay at the heart of the conflict between Walker and her detractors, whose sensibilities were influenced by their upbringing during the civil rights era and involvement in second-wave feminism. Walker, however, possesses a conception of racism and sexism "grounded in postmodern and third-wave

feminist ideologies" (Green Fryd 228), and her work has been influenced more by postcolonial, diasporic perspectives than conventional African American political concerns. For Walker, the "race pride" and feminine uplift that are the hallmarks of Saar's aesthetics (Green Fryd 228) are subjected to Walker's critiques.

Alternatively, Carol Becker intimates a personal impetus for the criticism, starting with the volumes of attention Walker's art generates, which critics suggest is the result of her art's "appeal to the racist fantasies of a predominantly white, Eurocentric art world, which, they believe, is more comfortable with work by African Americans that reflects negatively on black people than they are with work that challenges white racism" (Becker 74). Howardena Pindell (2009) would join Betye Saar in the censuring of Walker, setting up a blogspot for artists, critics, and audiences to share their opinions of Walker's work. Pindell would impute Walker's success to validating the hidden racist ideations of a white audience, stating that having "a person of color give you those images as if to say that they agree with your imprinted gaze, makes the work hypnotically enticing for whites" (Pindell). In a piece for *The New York Review*, Zadie Smith (2020) seeks to contextualize the conflict and articulate the ramifications of such fissures in the Black Arts world. Citing Saar's characterization of Walker as "a black artist who obviously hated being black" who creates works for the "amusement and the investment of the white art establishment" (qtd. in McEvilly), Smith concludes that the criticism represents "a terrific double bind—a rope thrown by one black woman to constrict another, that surely ends up constricting them both" (Smith). According to Smith, the characterization eliminates the possibility of debate, for this bind concludes that the black artists is "either unconsciously giving 'them' what they want (self-hatred)" or "consciously doing so (self-and-community-betrayal)" (Smith). For Smith, the ambiguity of Walker's art facilitates an open discourse on the endurance

of racist misconceptions in the imaginary, but the aesthetic tools that produce it--caricature and stereotype--carry the risk of misunderstanding. Greater damage is caused, however, when the imaginings "are allowed to sink into invisibility, to appear 'natural' or 'inevitable'" (Smith).

Though Smith refers to Walker's appropriations of racist images, allowing any viewpoints to sediment, even the foundational values represented by Saar and Pindell, can replicate a similar, hegemonic control of black racial discourse. Conversely, dismissing the ethics of a movement that seem discordant with the current historical moment disregards the legacies and virulence of past racial conditions to affect the present. The conflict between Walker, Saar and critics of black aesthetics movements bring us full circle to the similar debates surrounding Ralph Ellison and his diverging political and aesthetic aims. Walker extends her appropriation of black ephemera and stereotypical imagery by employing the mode of artistic abstraction originally (and presently) used to propagate racial fictions; by inverting its gaze from the African American object to the hegemonic producer of the stereotype, Walker can examine the psychical motivations that precipitate subordinating the black image. The danger in this uncanny exhuming of past stereotypes and constructs is the recommencement of their circulation, and the illustration that these tropes can be re-signified to substantiate political positions. Simultaneously, the palimpsestic plasticity of these objects reconfirms their status as objects, or empty signifiers that depend on the historical and social context surrounding their use. Despite their ideological differences, both Saar and Walker recognize that the power of these racist artifacts depend on a complex interplay of authorial intent and interpretative lenses of the consumers.

Conclusion

On June 17, 2020, Quaker Foods North America announced that the company was discontinuing the Aunt Jemima trademark. Vice president and chief marketing officer Kristin Kroepfl explained the decision to return the products to the original Pearl Milling Company branding, concluding" that "Aunt Jemima's origins are based on a racial stereotype," and though "work has been done over the years to update the brand in a manner intended to be appropriate and respectful, we realize those changes are not enough." That summer, Pepsico would launch a 400-million-dollar program to counteract systemic racism, uplift black communities and increase diversity in their workforce, and decommissioning the 130-year-old brand would be the first step of the initiative. The announcement spurred other brands to reconsider the ramifications of their trademarks, with the Mars Food corporation following suit by changing the branding of Uncle Ben's products to Ben's Original, and removing the image of the elderly black man from its packaging. Later that year, *Saturday Night Live* parodied these events in a sketch dramatizing the firing of both Aunt Jemima and Uncle Ben. When Jemima (portrayed by Maya Rudolph) demands to know what she did to be fired, one of the executives (played by Alec Baldwin) replies "it's not what you did, it's how you make us feel about what we did." In this rationale, the ending of two culturally insensitive images, ones that have taken root in the American imaginary and become internalized images of an accommodating, complaisant blackness for African Americans, and revisionist emblems of harmonious historical race relations, are in the service of assuaging white racial melancholia. This reasoning encapsulates one of the central claims of "Jemimas, Jockeys and Jolly Banks:" the impetus for eliminating a construct that sought to naturalize conceptions of black inferiority/white supremacy springs from the same racist source that created such contrivances.

This project sought to trace this observation through an examination of black collectibles. Throughout this dissertation, I expanded the definition of the collectible, and viewed textual and filmic representations of these objects, which as I hope my work demonstrated, took on lives of their own as stereotypes and marketing strategies. Central to my project was an inquiry into the justifications of the continued circulation of the objects and the tropes that accompany them: for many of the collectors, for example, "preserving history" was a common refrain, and one that I sought to deconstruct. The concept of historical preservation through items, and the zeal with which this privilege was asserted, intimated the idea that the racism and white supremacy embedded in the objects was about perpetuation as opposed to preservation. The appearance of black collectors of these items, however, complicates any stable, unequivocal readings of the practice of collecting. However, this problematic position presupposes that African Americans view their collections as counternarratives, and look to reclaim or resignify the objects, though arguments about the defunct signification of the objects made by white collectors are viewed skeptically. Though several African American critics—Henry Louis Gates, Jr., David Pilgrim—collect memorabilia, and have written pieces about their experience with the objects, none has delved into the psychological impetus and fascination with these grotesque objects. The preoccupation with the ephemera, which I share, beyond the visceral reaction to the imagery, or the general interest in the figurines, was never adequately explored in the texts. I look to my own small collection of the items, and recall my captivation with a replica Mammy cookie jar I found at the UCLA African Marketplace when I was a sophomore at the university. The rudely painted, coal blackness of her smiling face, and her stereotypical rotundity did not repel me, but instead, I was more awestruck when contemplating how individuals could conceive of these demeaning images that incontestably differed from actual African Americans, and nevertheless construct,

sell and display such figures. My initial reaction to the jar has not differed much from now, since "Jemimas, Jockeys and Jolly Banks" views the black collectibles as symbols of the contradictory drives and psychic compensations propelling white supremacy. Having moved out of the dorms and into a single apartment that summer, I felt I could buy and even display the jar without the fear of reprisals from curious floormates. The jar would accompany me from apartment to apartment until, on the birth of my first child, I felt it prudent to discard it. Some of my other items, a well-preserved iron Jolly Nigger Bank, and an old Mammy coin bank remain on a lower rung of a bookshelf, out of the line of sight of my children or guests. Even as I bring this dissertation to a close, an examination of my own attraction and understanding of it eludes me (or I elude it).

The references to collectibles in American literature, though surprisingly rare, served to enhance discourses of race made in the individual works. Despite the expanse of literary periods, and differences in genre, artistic aims and philosophies, the works shared a common exploration of racial differentiation. Though the references to lawn jockeys and collectibles varied from brief to substantial, the inclusions were juxtaposed with musings on race. The full significance and symbolic import of the allusions, however, became clear when viewed from the lens of material culture. Rather than viewing the space as an incidental "natural" element of the urban landscape, the American lawn can constitute a discursive space. With a history of distinguishing socioeconomic status in the racial/spatial imaginaries, the presence of racialized ornaments is inextricable from efforts of naturalizing and reifying class standing through material objects. Interdisciplinary readings of the objects were central to this project, and were the means of uncovering the nuances of their appearance in literature, and of their continued circulation in the marketplace. Lawn jockeys, jolly nigger banks, ceramic kitchen utensils, and other ephemera are

more than artifacts of remote, historical attitudes on race; with contentions over their signification and continued circulation differentiating positionalities, the objects seem to analogize the problematics of racial discourse. When establishing his Jim Crow Museum of Racist Memorabilia at Ferris State University in Michigan, David Pilgrim felt the items would spark a conversation, and with the visual, material evidence of racism on display, charges of hyperbolizing or dismissing racism would be negated when confronted by the tangible objects themselves. Even this enterprise, when considering the fluidity of signification of the objects, could, and have been used to substantiate either position of the debate.

This dissertation sought to account for the continued presence of these items in their material form as commodities, and as stereotypical constructs that engaged, and even buttressed definitions of race. Viewing the interaction with these objects as methods of compensating for different manifestations of racial melancholia complicates the stabilization of their signification. The objects function melancholically for both whites and blacks alike and revolve around several levels of the uncanny: for whites, the presence of the objects that symbolize black inferiority simultaneously reinforce feelings of dominance while invoking shame over the artificiality of the means that establish it. For blacks, the objects bifurcate one's racial subjectivity, in which one's sense of blackness has been established dialectically, and embedded within that racial definition are charges of inferiority. For the African American subject, the objects, and the racial stereotypes such as the mammy become internalized others against which racial subjectivity can be established. This interpretation of the items, however, demonstrate their symbolic fluidity, which by default would substantiate arguments about the possibility that they are mere emblems of history.

The idea that the signification of these objects has been fixed or frozen due to their discordance with the postracial, color neutral rhetoric that has developed out of the post-Civil Rights era, and that notion rationalizes the continued trade and display of black collectibles has been examined throughout my dissertation. Though I linked the simultaneous attraction to the object/disavowal of its import to the paradoxes of white supremacy, I came across a number of stories about an incident that further complicates a definitive analysis of the connection to racist artifacts. During the summer of 1979, suburban residents of Hartford, Connecticut noticed that their lawn jockeys began to be missing. By August of that year, over 20 jockeys were reported stolen, often with notes left behind signed by the "Black Jockey Liberation Army" whose mission, according to their missives, were to "wipe clean the face of the earth and remove all forms of bigotry" (NYT). A West Hartford detective explained that some homeowners began painting their statues white to prevent possible theft. By the end of the month, however, 27-year-old William Butchon, a canvasser for Connecticut Citizens Action Group, was arrested and charged with larceny. Butchon explained that his group "consisted of young Caucasians" and that the groomsmen "kind of rub us the wrong way" (qtd. in Spencer). With the gains of the Civil Rights era presumably substantiating a movement into a new era of racial equality, the outrage over the loss of a defunct, obsolete hitching post and the national media attention the case garnered suggests that the objects are more than antiques, but continue to fulfill (or compensate) some psychic needs. The attempts at painting the jockeys white to discourage their theft reveals an awareness of the racism embedded in these ostensible relics, but raises the question why such alterations were not made prior to the events of the summer. The scenario seems to illustrate dual drives of white racial melancholia—the need to efface a history of exploitation and hegemony to

expiate white guilt, and on the other hand, a dependance on an emblem of black inferiority to solidify white racial anxieties.

When the existence of these images reveals the contrivances (and confirms the adventitiousness) of white superiority, eliminating such practices demonstrates that the establishment of white subjectivities still flows through the black body. Dialectic racialization renders the black subject an empty signifier, a vessel through which contrary characteristics can be assigned to affirm conceptions of whiteness. Christian Sharpe (2016) observes that the "Black being appears in the space of the asterisked human as the insurance for, as that which underwrites, white circulation as the human" (110). From this lens, black subjectivity appears inextricable from a sense of DuBoisian double consciousness—an awareness of the fissure between one's (mis)perceived identity and internal sense of selfhood, a subjectivity which may or may not correlate with communal blackness. In the multiple responses to and appropriations of black collectibles, and the struggle to dismantle racism, intraracial differences have been historically deemphasized or deprioritized as ancillary concerns. The conflict between black artists like Kara Walker, and the post-Civil Rights artists like Betye Saar and Howardena Pindell uncovered an exclusionary dogma that continues to dominate African American collective agenda. Derek Conrad Murray (2016) notes that values espoused by black cultural nationalism were not only "artistically stifling" for artists like Walker or Faith Ringgold, but were also "repressive in its marginalization" African American identities that appeared "antithetical to a hetero-patriarchal value system" (7). My work raises the possibility that the perspectives of postblackness, ones that account for a variety of lived black experiences, may be a necessity in the efforts of dismantling racism.

The social unrest of the summer of 2020 spurred a dialogue, albeit a cursory one, surrounding racial representations. The theater of equity and inclusivity that has ensued since the protests of those months seemed to indicate that this nascent awareness could begin a process of deracinating white supremacy, but as Michele Alexander notes, the adaptations to Jim Crow technologies ensure the continuance of white supremacy with the capability of concealing its machinery even from itself; time will tell if this moment is indeed transformational, or just another iteration of nominal shows of equity that characterize Jim Crow.

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