THE PERFORMANCE OF BLACK MASCULINITY IN CONTEMPORARY BLACK DRAMA

DISSERTATION

Presented in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for
the Degree Doctor of Philosophy in the Graduate School of The Ohio State University

By

John Rogers Harris, MA

* * * *

The Ohio State University
2003

Dissertation Committee: Approved by
S. Constantinidis
A. Hill
V. Lee

Advisor
Department of Theatre
This dissertation examines how American dramatists in the United States have constructed performances of black masculinity. The African American plays analyzed in this dissertation represent black men wrestling their voices from the negative depiction by white artists and combating negative stereotyping.

Performance often becomes and is used as a prison that captures and fixes representation beyond the historical moment, instead of a liberatory medium for social change. Likewise, racial discourses often collapse faulty historical narratives. This study on the performances of Black male masculinity in theatrical contexts explains how late twentieth century playwrights imagined, created and replicated black men. These texts and contexts not only fix representation in a medium that is replicable, but they also capture the social impressions about Black men which dominate the
popular imagination as well as academic theorizing. This study identifies common themes that explain (1) how artists create imagery that communicates their lived experience, and (2) how artists exemplify specific challenges of racial, gender and national performances in contemporary theatre.
DEDICATION

James Howell Harris
1969 - 1992

William Charles Harris, Jr.
1934 - 2000
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I wish to thank my advisor Dr. Stratos Constantinidis for his stewardship of this project. I especially appreciated the guidance of my dissertation committee members Drs. Anthony Hill and Valerie Lee for their advice and counsel.

Without the kind support of my family, especially my sons Jack and Anderson, this task would have been impossible.
VITA

November 22, 1962  Born - Martinsville, Virginia

1986  AB Speech Communications, University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill

1992  M.A. Speech Communications, University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill

1999  Roy A. Koenigsknecht Graduate Alumni Fellow The Ohio State University

2000  Intensive Summer Arabic Program University of Chicago

2001  Literature in Oxford Summer Program Exeter College, Oxford University, UK

2003-2005  Postdoctoral Fellowship for Faculty Diversity The University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill

FIELDS OF STUDY

Major Field: Theatre
# TABLE OF CONTENTS

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Chapters</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Abstract</td>
<td>ii</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dedication</td>
<td>iv</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Acknowledgements</td>
<td>v</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Vita</td>
<td>vi</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chapters:</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1. Introduction</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. Samm-Art Williams and the Geography of Black</td>
<td>58</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Masculine Performance</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. The Black Female Playwright Construction of Black</td>
<td>86</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Masculinity</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. James Baldwin, Black Nationalism and the Performance</td>
<td>131</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>of Gay Blackness in American Drama</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5. Talking Cures and the Mind: Psychology and Black</td>
<td>191</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Masculine Performance</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6. Conclusion</td>
<td>218</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bibliography</td>
<td>221</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

The purpose of this dissertation is to examine the constructions and performances of masculinity by black men in contemporary drama primarily in the United States and only to a lesser, secondary degree in Great Britain. In both countries, Black men face similar race-related and gender-related social problems, though in the context of different political, social and economic histories. African American and Black British\(^1\) dramatists represent black men by wrestling their voices

\(^1\) In Great Britain, ‘Black British’ indicates a person of color from Africa, the Caribbean and Southeast Asia. For further explanation of the term see *Writing from Black Britain, 1948-1998: An Interdisciplinary Anthology* (Procter 2000).
out of previous white representation by combating negative stereotyping which conceptualizes the problem of the research presented here.

A few working definitions are helpful in setting the parameters for my inquiry. First, performance is initially seen as a set of rituals and practices that enshrine ideology and social meaning (Schechner 1985). Race is seen as a demographic category that refers to cultural practices of a group based on skin pigmentation and it influences wider cultural and artistic expression (West 1993). Gender begins with biologically determined differences and it extends to cultural practices of masculinity and femininity that often include performances of sexual identity (Butler, 1997). Nationality is a metaphysical configuration based on conflicting political and cultural practices involving the archaeologies of history, geography and imperialism (Eagleton 1990).

Such definitions, however, prove inadequate in explaining current cultural, social and aesthetic phenomena, regarding the performances of Black
masculinity especially in the United States. And thus, they become the *prima facie* argument upon which contemporary dramatic theory rests. Performance becomes a prison that captures and fixes representation beyond the historical moment, instead of becoming a liberatory medium for social change. Gender becomes a slogan for the domination of the "gender" discourses by feminists and the polarization of the issues instead of contributing to the solution about how to end domination of one group over another. Racial discourses collapse faulty historical narratives; and nationalisms explain human experience in global political discourses, but provide too broad an analytic frame for investigating the performances of Black masculinity.

My focus on the performances of Black male masculinity in theatrical contexts will explain how late twentieth century playwrights imagine, create and replicate two groups of black men in the African Diaspora. Inasmuch as American culture impacts global cultural production and the politics of representation,
the dramatic text not only fixes representation in a medium that is replicable, but it also captures the social impressions about Black men which dominate the popular imagination as well as academic theorizing. The danger in examining African American male representations is that such critical thinking advances the false claim that African American and cultural attitudes are the arbiters of race and gender performance.

I begin my investigation with this set of national identities because of the existing theatre tradition and the historic relation that theatre practice has had specifically on African American males. By focusing on similar plays from American and British texts, from A Raisin in the Sun (1959) to Sleep Depravation Chamber (1996), I will identify common themes that explain (1) how Black male artists create imagery that communicates their lived experience and (2) how Black male artists exemplify specific challenges of racial, gender and national performances in contemporary theatre. Because my focus is on the construction of the image, not all
of the playwrights selected for this study are African American, Black British, or male.

The range of representations of Black men of the African Diaspora provide an understanding of how Black men survive, manage and challenge social perception about their place in the world. Social expectations of Black masculinity performance create individual challenges in both the public arena and the private sphere.² In public spaces, Black men not only seek economic independence but also fight for physical survival. In private spaces, Black men negotiate sexuality, child rearing, and emotional intimacy. In both instances, innocence and interpersonal naiveté threaten their survival (Majors and Billson 1992;

²According to Martin Anthony Summers, the “ideology of spheres, remained a cornerstone in bourgeois gender construction until the 1920” (Summers 36). For further discussion of Black middle class masculinity constructions in the early twentieth century, see Nationalism, Race Consciousness and the Constructions of Black Middle-Class Masculinity During the New Negro Era, 1915-1930, (Summers 1997)
Madhubuti 1991). By situating masculine behavior at the crossroads of gender, race and nation, I hypothesize that social oppression directly affects performances of Black masculinity. Specifically, American society denies Black men the presumption of innocence. This denial influences the performances of adult masculinity in the United States. Gendered explanations in national contexts provide racial narratives that influence theatrical constructions based in contemporary performance practices from both sides of the Atlantic. This dissertation will investigate the ways in which Black men in the United States perform the trope of innocence in public and private spaces.

In researching men in the African Diaspora, ethnography has been the methodology of choice for most studies. Talking directly to human subjects should be an effective method of documenting and theorizing about Black experience. However, Black men tend to tell white researchers what they want to hear. The result has been a body of theory based on unreliable data.
Mitchell Duneier writes the most damning indictment of his own discipline when he describes what has been written in the name of research on Black men.

Although it is incorrect to say that the greatest ethnographies have challenged many inaccurate stereotypes, reliance on ethnography for an enlightened image concomitantly fosters many of the same inaccurate images that existed for members of the general public before they read the accounts. The limited range of these accounts goes unnoticed as scholars congratulate themselves and their colleagues on their sympathetic understandings. Although each of these books has many positive qualities, as a group they cover too limited a range of ghetto populations. Sometimes these studies even make patently inaccurate inferences about blacks or unfair generalizations from selective samples that reinforce, rather than question, the most basic stereotypes. While the problem is largely one of the ethnographers'
collection efforts, it is also sometimes a failure of individual observation. (Duneier 142)

Caught between social expectation and social trauma, language imprisons Black men and casts them in a never-ending melodrama that crosses national boundaries. Whether on the theatrical stage or the stage of social reality, a black man has performative meaning before he begins to speak. Harry Elam suggests that "the Black performer, visibly marked and read by the audience as "black," enters the stage and negotiates not only the spaces between stage and representation, but also racial definitions and stereotypes, racial misconceptions, and ambivalences of race" (Elam 289). This dissertation will begin with a reinterpretation of theatrical texts that deal with racialized masculinity. Current research on Black masculinity faces two major challenges. On the one hand, researchers tend to focus on the negative aspects of Black male life and their studies give the impression that all Black men live that way. On the other hand, white American performance practice
appropriated the image and experience of Black men in the politics of representation (Gilmore 2001).

The current thinking about Black Masculinity emerges from several schools of thought concerning masculinity. Biological theories address how men are stronger than women physically and therefore offer an explanation for the male social dominance over women. While there is physical truth in this way of thinking, civilized societies do not sanction force through brawn (Gilder 1973). Biological thinking supports a conservative agenda, which fixes men and women in a set order.

A starting point for the discussion of gender is a consideration of biological difference. Men and women have biological differences based on the appearance of reproductive organs. Scientific definitions of gender often cite sexual difference as a guiding principle in creating narratives of gendered difference. Sexual difference indicates the biological functions of male and female procreative activity. Biological theorists create a narrative of male ascendancy over women.
because women have less power if they are taking care of children. In this debilitating state, women need the protection of men for survival. What this explanation evades is the social and political implications of biology. Before emancipation, black people were bred for their children’s labor. In addition to nursing their own children, black women nursed white children. Because of the legal status of slaves, black men were not able to protect black women and children. In a contemporary setting, these historical obstacles have little currency and do little to explain black masculinity and its representation.

Social Biologists look to evolutionary biology to explain social behavior. Stemming from Darwinian theory that the strongest survive, less able people will have fewer children and thus will become extinct. Whereas these theories work with animals in the wild, their narrative unravels when confronted with modern

---

3 For more information about Sociobiology, see On Human Nature (Wilson 1978) and Sociobiology and Behavior (Barash 1982).
civilization. Human beings are thinking, symbol-making animals that ably conceive ways around biologically determined attributes. What works for the breeding dogs and squirrels pales with the economic and political demands of human beings. Using biology to explain American slavery would invoke the white supremacy arguments for the domination of blacks.

Noted sociologist, Michael S. Kimmel makes the distinction between sexual difference and gender difference. Sex is a narrative that describes what happens at the level of cell biology and has reproductive implications. In contrast, gender is a socially constructed narrative that can and does vary in and between cultures. Kimmel's interplanetary theory of gender difference explains the idea of gender inequality. "Gender is not simply a system of classification by which biological males and biological females are sorted, separated and socialized into equivalent sex roles. Gender also expresses the universal inequality between women and men. When we speak about gender we speak about hierarchy, power and
inequality, not simply difference” (Kimmel 1). Kimmel argues for "constructionist" explanation of gender as a better explanation of gender difference than the evolutionary theories of sociobiology. Sociobiologists build their theory of masculinity on Darwinian theory. Because reproduction makes specific demands on men and women, the social roles of men and women develop along similar lines. Kimmel argues is that gender is performative; gender is the action that human beings do. The performance of these actions occurs in relationship to other people, in every situation of human interaction and institutions.4

Since the nineteenth century, Psychology has sought to explain the bonds between parents and children. In her essay "The Psychodynamics of the Family," Nancy Chodorow describes how children negotiate boundaries with their mothers. For female children, the bond is closer and there is less distance

between mother and daughter. Separation of identity does not come until much later, after the child has acquired language. Mother is different but also same.

Because mother and father are not the same kind of parent, the nature and intensity of a child’s relationship to them differ, as does the relationship’s degree of exclusiveness. Because children first experience the social and cognitive world as continuous with themselves and do not differentiate objects, their mother, as first caretaker figure, is not a separate person and has no separate interests.⁵

The boundaries between male child and mother complicate the transition from individual to gendered being. Males learn to separate from the mother and negotiate the relationship with the mother as other. The break causes alienation and distrust that a male

---

child negotiates, particularly in reincorporating the mother into his life. Fathers enter the male child’s life as an other but also with identification affinity. Boys begin to be socializing with the father as an authority figure in their lives.

Part of the socialization of fathers, is to impart cultural values. To the son, the father must teach how to protect house and home. The son must learn how to provide for the family. In the capitalist west, males possess the presumption of power by virtue of their biological sex. As mentioned earlier, under a gender analysis the hegemonic aspects of male authority possess less power. When a force outside of the family, say imperialism or colonialism, is part of the equation, then what is the relationship between father and son during the transmission of cultural value? Colonialism affects the psychology of the father/son relationship because in the eyes of the son it places the mature adult male in an infantile position to the agents of the colonial power.
Feminism has provided many answers to the question of gender relations. However, racialized masculinity undermines the basis of most Feminist inquiry. Awkward attempts to envision the role of Black men within specifically Black feminism, when he calls for a "fuller understanding of the complex formulations of Black manhood is found in many texts and contexts" (Awkward 550). Whereas, such a position has its merits, this dissertation will investigate the efficacy of molding Black men into feminist discourses, which situate Black masculinity within a Womanist tradition. Most of these theorists reach a critical impasse especially when they deal with the African Diaspora. Sherley Williams, Hortense Spillers and Michael Awkward invite Black men to undertake a critical inquiry similar to that already advanced by Black women.

One of the goals of Feminism is to explain the limits of gender inequality. The emphasis on power relationships demonstrates how sex based difference inhibits the free communication of ideas and expression. Writing in this area, women speak of how
their points of view have been silenced in history and without history, women have less power. Kimmel reminds us that when paired with economic and racial identifications, power discriminates in who it empowers. The limit of feminism is that white women and black women experience the world differently and that making all feminisms the same, feminism diminishes its impact. The practice of feminism has turned gender into a code word for women. In reality, men also have gender. The invisibility of privilege does not preclude men from experiencing a gender difference.

In her essay "Performative Acts and Gender Constitution: An Essay in Phenomenology and Feminist Theory, Judith Butler makes the connection between gender construction and theatre. Using the physical body as a nexus for theory, Butler believes that 'gender is constructed through specific corporeal acts" and that "possibilities exist for the cultural formation of gender through such acts" (Butler 1098). Considering that human beings have choices, the physical body is not just an object in nature, but a
material tool through which human beings do “one's body differently from one's contemporaries and from one's embodied predecessors and successors as well” (1098). Expression of a gendered identity is an acting choice that creates its reality through repetition. "That gender reality is created through sustained social performances means that the very notions of an essential sex, a true or abiding masculinity or femininity, are also constituted as a part of the strategy by which the performative aspect of gender is concealed” (1103).

Countering feminist viewpoints are to be found in the emerging field of Men's Studies. According to Harry Brod, "the overgeneralization from male to generic human experience not only distorts our understanding of what, if anything, is truly generic to humanity but also precludes the study of masculinity as a specific male experience, rather than a universal paradigm for human experience” (Brod 1987:40). Men's Studies recognizes the way that hegemonic masculinities obliterate female experience but also foreground male
experience to the point that gender difference is out of kilter and focus. Male experience of gender includes subjects such as employment, fathering and fatherhood rights, relationships and sexuality. In as much as these concerns are the purview of men and demand a male response, the language of feminism helps but cannot give voice to male lived experience.

For over twenty years, American men have addressed these issues at the grassroots level. The mytho-poetic movement is exemplified in the popularity of Robert Bly’s poetry.6 Using archetypal psychology, mytho-

6 For further explanation of the mythopoetic movement, see Iron John and Fire in the Belly. Since the early 1980s, Wingspan has captured the spiritual force of this movement. Whereas the potency of this movement has staying power, it became subject to parody.

In the spring of 1988, I attended a Robert Bly weekend in Raleigh, North Carolina. True to form, Bly’s narratives of wounded manhood were healing words for the men in attendance. However, most members in the audience were middle class white males. The Men’s Center of Raleigh/Wake County provided a scholarship for my attendance.
poetics seeks to explain the deep wounds contemporary men feel as a result of industrialization and feminism. The success of this movement is that what vocabulary to the gendered pain of men. In practice, mytho-poetics is a culturally imperialist paradigm that uses a myriad of practices divorced from historic and cultural context. For instance, drumming and sweat houses have historic contexts with in Native American culture that lose their potency when used by middle class white men.

Promise Keepers is another mass movement that captured the American imagination. With a religious basis to its explanation of American masculinity, the movement had been able to fill football stadiums full of men seeking answers to gendered experience. The message is greater allegiance to Judeo Christian values and the renewal of personal responsibility for the protection of women and children. Under this paradigm, redemption for past indiscretions derives from confession of sin and a state of worthlessness in the eyes of God and society. Again, this philosophy
answers male pain, but from a negative material condition.

In 1995, Reverend Louis Farrakhan organized the Million Man March: A Day of Atonement in Washington, DC. Evoking the national urgency that Martin Luther King’s March on Washington did in 1963, the Million Man March was a rallying call for African American men to solve the social and political problems of black men. Many theorists condemned the event either because of Farrakhan’s politics or because of the obvious exclusion of women. What these critiques missed was the efforts of black men for the grassroots acknowledge, confrontation, and discussion of the racial underpinnings of gender discourse.

As Butler has theorized, bodies perform their gendered positions within a society. Beginning with the biological binary, gender performance expands to include variant practices within gender formulations. Men and women exercise personal expression that can be named, claimed and analyzed. Through this reconsideration of performance as stated earlier in the
introduction, this study will analyze the performance of African American and Black British men. Since the abolition of slavery, Black men and women have been intimately involved with social policy and cultural development of national conceptions of gender and class. The challenges of Black women in ethnic and gender constructs have been an ongoing research project (Hill-Collins, 1990; Williams, 1991; Hooks 1992; Giddings, 1984).

The most significant inheritance from Feminist theory is a language with which to analyze gender relations. Until the reading of phenomena in terms of the feminine, masculine worldviews were a default perspective of seeing and knowing. This practice collapsed inquiry into a mono-linguistic system that assigned half of humanity to a troubled silence. Because of Feminism, the language of gender-based difference has a name, has a history and has a critical future. Because of Feminist thought, knowing based on critical perspectives race, class and sexuality are
vastly expanded because the needs of women complicate and concretize the world.

A provocative question arises when considering the critical landscape greatly influenced by Feminism. For instance, if Feminism examines the discriminatory and pejorative power relations between the sexes, what role do men possess that are not a mirror image of women? If women are socialized in terms of love and care, and Feminism reveals the positive implications of love and care, then can masculine individualism be reinterpreted with a value that does not devalue women? If Feminism has identified communicative strategies that promotes individual agency and emphasizes expressive self-knowledge, is there a similar state that men occupy that has a gender specific integrity, which is not feminine. How has theatre accommodated masculinist interpretations and representations? How do masculinist perspectives operate with theatrical works possessing additional national, sexual and racial ideologies?
(Beverly Guy-Sheftall) identifies some distinguishing features of Black Feminist ideas: namely, that Black women’s experiences with both racial and gender oppression that result in needs and problems distinct from white women and Black men, and that Black women must struggle for equality both as women and as African Americans. (Collins 1990:20)

As a critical system, Black feminist thought consists of specialized knowledge created by African-American women, which clarifies a standpoint of African-American women. In other words, Black feminist thought encompasses theoretical interpretations of Black women’s reality by those who live it (Collins 22). For this system, all black women are black feminists in that all black women experience the deleterious effects of race and gender oppression according to Patricia Hill Collins. For her, this is a legacy from the African American oral tradition.

Sexuality is socially constructed through the sex/gender system on both the personal level of
individual consciousness and interpersonal relationships and the social structural level of social institutions. (Collins 165)

This study will take into account both race theory and gendered performance. The depictions of Black men in dramatic literature reflect the complex existence of Black life in the West. Womanist theory⁷ suggests that "a thoroughgoing examination of male images" will help end a "separatist tendency of African American criticism" (Williams 222). Historically, race theory concerning African Americans assumed inclusion of both Black men and Black women. Such theory collapsed a gendered perspective in the name of race. By specifying gender, particularly Black masculinity, theoretical explanations shed a brighter light on this kind of experience.

For instance, Spillers isolates a "dual fatherhood" which recognizes "the African father's banished name and body and the captor father's mocking presence" (Spillers 278). Parentage of Black peoples in Britain and America reflect a dual heritage of both African and European influence. Within the paradigm of masculine framework, such discourses reveal the dialectic that Black men face in both cultures.

This study will focus on the performative aspects of "racialized masculine behavior" (Uebel 2). The masculine involves a series of rituals that define men in both public and private spaces. The social construction of racial differences in western society enhances the power dynamics of these performances. Both power dynamics and racial differences influence the way men interact with each other and with women. "Masculinity becomes not the defining quality of men, of their fantasies and real experiences of self and other, but one coordinate of their identity that exists in a constant dialectical relation with other coordinates" (Uebel 4).
While the anthropological bent in performance theory provides a rich insight to human interaction, it somewhat diminishes the original point of departure. In mainstream, western theatrical tradition, the literary text still provides the basis from which performative metaphors arise. Behind what audiences hear and what actors present, is a written text that reflects a social and cultural reality. The play text organizes realities that name what is already in existence. The play is the thing that enables the creative collaborators and the audience to reconsider the everyday construction of reality and authority in a different way.

Academic research of the late twentieth century emerged in such a way that no clear boundaries exist between disciplines (Geertz, 1980). History influences anthropology, which influences sociology - and sociology of course, influences theatre academics as well as artists. The positive implication of the blurred boundaries is that new theories such as Butler’s application of theatrical metaphors to gender
have greater power to explain human interaction (Butler 270). Turner and Schechner were two of the first theorists to combine performance theory and anthropology. Both explored similar paradigms investigating the performative aspects of aboriginal cultures. In addition to the unwritten history of the people, the rituals and their power within the society provided the basis for their inquiry. Performance was not a side issue, but the main concern for their explanation of culture.

The concept of masculinity in America has changed significantly since the founding of the country. Part of that evolution concerns the priorities of survival and the European invasion of North America, while the other parts are concerned with industrialization, modernization, class and race and, how black men construct their gendered reality in what is now the United States. In his work on middle-class Northern white masculinity, Rotundo refutes the idea of manhood being an unchangeable principle. He believes that masculinity is a cultural construct with a history that
changes over time. In the late eighteenth century and early nineteenth century, the mark of a man was his usefulness to his community. An independent man who did not give back to his community, did not earn good standing as ‘a man.’ By mid century, the American gender definitions shifted from community to the construction of the individual. After the Civil War, American men began to improve themselves and define themselves. “Self-cultivation, then, led to detailed self-analysis in which every minute, every impulse, every motive was weighed with improvement of the mind” (25). By the end of the nineteenth century, notions of manhood shifted again from the idyllic self to the physical body. Having command over one’s own body meant that one could control his impulses and by extension the environment around himself. "The

---

standard of manhood shifted in emphasis from service to community and cultivation of the spirit to improvement of the individual and concern from his body” (29).

Part of the reason for the shift is the change of worldview. Previously, people thought of themselves as a part of an organic whole, "a chain of being" that linked God to plants and animals. This is a hierarchal concept of the world, where individual men have a place in the natural and social order. The change in conceptions of manhood, altered this thinking from vertical hierarchy to a more horizontal perception of the world. "People now focused on the individual human and on the differences among people -- differences of human ability, of race, of gender, and, ultimately, of the body" (30). The shift also placed greater emphasis on individual values as opposed to communal values.

If Rotunda's analysis focused on middle-class white men in the Northeastern United States, what was the nature of masculinity in the Southern states, which had larger populations of African American men? Joan E. Cashin compliments Rotunda's research in her
investigation of southern masculinity during the Antebellum Period. White Southern men sought to escape the confines of close family relations of the eastern seaboard. Many of the white men thought that such close family connections soften them with a debilitating dependence that reduced white men to the status of white women and Black people. As these prodigal sons took their inheritance and settled Alabama and Mississippi, they performed their masculinity in terms of cruelty, alcoholism and recklessness.

Both Rotunda and Cashin focus on the evolution and performance of white men who have a certain amount of

---

9 For further understanding of gender relationships in the settlement of Alabama and Mississippi, see A Family Venture: Men and Women on the Southern Frontier (Cashin 1991). Cashin has examined the letters of frontier women to their families on the eastern seaboard. In addition, to document cruelty and alcoholism of white males, the letters document the sentiments of separated slave families. Many of the women would dedicate or reserve whole pages for slaves to communicate about black family members on the East.
power, read here as land, currency or freedom of movement in the country. In contrast, black men were without land, had limited currency and were unable to move. Just as the adaptation to a new land by their African Ancestors, African American masculinity evolved from slavery to freedom.

In America, white masculinity not only conquered and dominated Native Americans, but also amalgamated every ethnicity that periodically ever migrated to the United States. The myth about individuality and independence emerged due to the white male’s escape from the feminizing force of civilization. In contrast, African American men were always in bondage, and established different patterns of masculinity. A good example of the force of Black masculinity in the antebellum period was the Black male leadership exhibited within the Baptist and Methodist churches within Black communities. Other attributes of Black masculinity were distorted by slavery. Sexuality, labor practices and parenting were part of masculinity rituals that grew under the auspice of slavery and yet
were negatively impacted by the adverse power dynamics of white males and females. In total, Black masculinity has had some attribute that grew outside of a white male dialectic.

Historically, autobiography and biography have been instrumental in learning about Black male life (Olaudah Equiano, Frederick Douglass, Langston Hughes) in both the United States and Great Britain. The narratives show the rhetorical strategies of addressing human and civil rights, and asserting individual and collective agency. For the African Diaspora, searching for identity in folk tradition was weighted with the taint of slavery, a description of self within a history of bondage and servitude. Many of the speeches and writings of escaped American slaves bore testament to rhetorical position of Africans as human beings first, and then as a free people.

The relationship of peers between the autobiographer and the audience and the assumption of trustworthiness between peers existed as a matter of course in the white American
autobiographical tradition. The white autobiographer’s letter to the world always had a social, cultural and linguistic sanction, though not always with success. When black autobiographers addressed the white world, however, they could assume no such sanction for their self-affirming literary acts. Many undoubtedly realized that they would have to defend or explain away the same literary egoism that in a white autobiographer might be praised as American pride and self-reliance at best. Knowing that they could not assume an equal relationship with the average white American reader, blacks set about writing life stories that would somehow prove that they qualify as the moral, spiritual or intellectual peers of whites. (Andrews 2)

As more Black men entered the professions, journalism and literature provided another outlook for Black male expression. Nathan McCall, Brent Staples and others have written extensively about their childhood, coming of age and adulthood in a post civil
rights era. Broadening the spectrum created by DuBois, Ellison, Wright and Baldwin, other Black writers such as James Alan McPherson, John Edgar Wideman and Nathan McCall depict Black men in their historical contexts, yet outside binding stereotypes.

This study will discuss specific theatrical texts in the contexts of an already established tradition and will investigate how Black male playwrights invent and represent performances of masculinity and create new models mainly for their African American audiences.

In his study of American drama, Robert Vorlicky demonstrates that although women are absent from the given situation, women still exert influence in men’s lives. Representative of a western ideology, American men use their male spaces -- workplaces, same-sex prisons, educational and religious environments, to define themselves in terms of the “absent women” in their lives. The social agent, who is not present, highlights the gender equality and inequality of the masculine.
Franz Fanon has written about sexual relations between men and women of different cultures and races. When an African woman had a multi-racial child, the implication was that she was raped or gave herself to a white man in less than desirable circumstances. If a European woman gave birth to a multi-racial child, the implication was that she was raped or gave herself as a gift. In either case, the woman was objectified, lost her humanity and became a marker of power between the men discussing her. In this role, women were mothers, wives or courtesans who lost their ability to express their personal or communal needs. In this framework, I argue that not only do absent women occupy discursive space in black male cosmologies, but that men assume the roles of women. The assumption of a woman’s role creates horizons that are beyond homoeroticism and imply a lost nuance of masculinity.

Samm-Art Williams is an African American playwright who has worked in theatre, film and television. Chapter 2 investigates how Williams constructs black male interiority in rural spaces. His
construction of black masculinity rescues the image of an agrarian black male from a minstrel tradition and focuses attention on working class conditions related directly to land ownership. In his plays addressing black masculinity, Williams consciously addresses a relationship with God, a dialectic connection with women and ownership of land. Through these relationships Williams creates a community of men which supports survival for black men.

Whereas black gay men stand at the margins of black culture, their worldview has had great influence. Bayard Rustin was a key organizer of the 1963 March on Washington, and yet was not able to give public voice to his sexualized perspective. James Baldwin's performance of sexuality in his public and literary life was open to criticism by Black Nationalists like Eldridge Cleaver. The sexual politics of black icons like Langston Hughes and Countee Cullen have inspired contemporary artists such as Marlon Riggs, Essex Hemphill and Isaac Julien to claim black gay history as paradigms for black masculine performance in the United
States and Britain. The Black gay male's point of view is related but significantly different from that of white gay rhetoric. Again, the mixing of race, class and sexuality provide a unique personal experience that contemporary society objectifies, “consumes” and silences. Black gay males consciously and continually have sought to make a space for themselves in a hostile social environment.

The African American experience in theatrical practice is an ongoing problem. Existing under the auspice of Western traditions, African American performance struggles to both represent the cultural experiences of a collective and resist interpretation by an oppressive other. While other ethnicities confront similar struggles of expression and representation, few if any are so core to American formulations of national identity, art and history. To deny race existence is to ignore a force that has forged a large body of creative expression. To acknowledge race is to claim the pejorative with the
ameliorative and to do constant battle with stereotypes that obscure the prototype.

   Few texts exemplify the ideological conflicts of race and theatre than Harriet Beecher Stowe’s *Uncle Tom’s Cabin*. The novel created a political polemic that eroded popular support of slavery and ideologically paved the way for the American Civil War. For this reason, the narrative created by a northern white woman holds a sacred place in American literature. Stowe’s book codified existing perceptions of nineteenth century black Americans. Consumption of her politics and ideology assumed a level of literacy and cognitive sophistication that belies class and race. The adaptations of the novel into theatre created a distribution vehicle of Stowe’s cultural mythology unprecedented in western theatre. In comparison, no single Shakespearean work evokes the slippery, evocative cultural power of *Uncle Tom’s Cabin*. Productions of the novel, adapted by a variety of playwrights, existed continuously for over eighty years. Through performance, the productions of *Uncle
*Tom’s Cabin* disseminated the cultural myth of Uncle Tom and created a hermetic barrier to understanding the lives of nineteenth century African Americans. The irony of this phenomenon is that the very ideology that operated to free African Americans has enslaved the representations of a people. No matter the trajectory of cultural growth, the stereotypes created in the performance of *Uncle Tom’s Cabin* remain a barrier to an understanding nineteenth century African Americans, and it is a starting point for understanding twentieth Century African American performance traditions.

Race continues to be the one attribute that guides American life. Because of the mediated images that we see and hear race has an impact on every American’s life. Whereas, race can be a unifying force in its power to connect people of a shared history, race can also divide and destroy the connective tissue of American life. In “Race,” *Writing and Difference*, edited by Henry Louis Gates, Jr., the contributors explore racial dichotomies concerning Native Americans, African Americans, Women, and the peoples of the Middle
East. In the opening essay, Gates investigates the role of race in literary criticism. For him, the study of “literature,” “Western literature” and “comparative literature” is a study of texts written for and about Eurocentric men (Gates 2). The essay seeks to find the historic notions of the racial concepts. He argues that race is a function of language that separates the non-white male from the white male hegemony. The effect is a silencing and marginalization of difference in a human activity (literature) which is supposed to celebrate individual and collective experience (culture). Gates states:

Race has become a trope of ultimate, irreducible difference between cultures, linguistic groups, or adherents of specific belief systems which -- more often than not -- also have fundamentally opposed economic interests. Race is the ultimate trope of difference because it is so very arbitrary in its application. The biological criteria used to determine “difference” in sex simply do not hold when applied to “race.” Yet we carelessly use
language in such a way as to will this sense of natural difference into our formulations. To do so is to engage in a pernicious act of language, one which exacerbates the complex problem of cultural or ethnic difference, rather than to assuage or redress it. This is especially the case at a time when, once again, racism has become fashionable. (Gates 5)

As Cornel West’s book implies, race matters. West problematizes black leadership in its ability to deal directly with the social and cultural problems of African Americans. He writes how “racial reasoning” effects both the colonized and the colonizer and how cultural taboos about black sexuality inhibit discourse in the age of Aids. West also comments on how a true discussion on race rests on the ability of Americans to recognize historical injustices and stereotypes. In as much as some discourses are greeted with a genteel silence, black responses will continue to be nationalist.
To engage in a serious discussion of race in America, we must begin not with the problems of black people but with the flaws of American society – flaws rooted in historic inequalities and longstanding cultural stereotypes. How we set up the terms for discussing racial issues shapes our perception and response to these issues. As long as black people are viewed as “them,” the burden falls on black to do all the “cultural” and “moral” work necessary for healthy race relations. The implications is that only certain Americans can define what it means to be American – and the rest must simply ‘fit in.’” (West 3).

According to West, the cultural work to change the damage of racial stereotyping is the work of all Americans, not just African Americans. In as much as West understands the cultural component to healing racist thinking and the cultural causes of racist ideology, he is well in his mindset of how to address problems based on American notions of race.
Anthony Appiah has focused on the African American contemplation of the term by making W. E. B. DuBois the object of his critical gaze. Some of his writings on race were in reaction to the scientific notions that DuBois offers in his own topology which based racial distinctions on regional differences such as "Slavs, Teutons, English (both in Great Britain and America), Negroes (of Africa and, likewise, America), the Romance race, Semites, Hindus and Mongolians.)" (Appiah 23). DuBois believed race to be a grouping of people who share "common blood and language, always of common history, traditions and impulses" (Appiah 23). Therefore, the race of Africans in the Diaspora is the history of oppression and domination.

What DuBois shares with the nonwhite world is not the insult but the badge of insult; and the badge without the insult, is the very skin and hair and bone which it is impossible to connect with a scientific definition of race" (Appiah 35). Appiah’s reading views DuBois’ arguments as an attempt to “minimize race distinction” and a
denial of difference. He takes DuBois to task because there is a partial acceptance of scientific reasoning. However, instead of a hierarchical dialectic, DuBois tries “to rotate the axis, to give race a ‘horizontal’ reading.” When all the assumptions of race are closely analyzed, particularly the existence of axis in the “space of values,” the argument fails for lack of presuppositions. (Appiah 36)

Another way to view race is as a national drama. On the stage that is the United States, race is a tragedy without a hero. Although the antagonist is often the white male hegemony, the black hero is a victim that seldom wins or if he ever does his victory is often pyrrhic. Claiming victimization is not a way of winning dignity. In her essay, “Hill, Thomas and the Use of Racial Stereotype,”¹⁰ Nell Irvin Painter reviews how the fixed notions of racial stereotype

block American culture from reevaluating the performance of race and gender. Painter believes African American men and women fall into roles inscribed in American culture through literature and history. Black men wear the role of black-beast-rapist. This trope implies a highly sexualized being that seeks to use sex to dominate women. This stereotype implies a black man as victim since the accusation of rape usually comes from a white woman. The end of the story is his death by lynching. Since the Scottsboro boy's case in which the accused black men were later found to be innocent, this stereotype has changed in that a lynched victim is presumed innocent (Painter 209). Again a pyrrhic victory in the sense that black men regain their innocence through victimhood.

In her article “Doing Things with Words: ‘Racism’ as Speech Act and the Undoing of Justice,”11 Claudia

---

11 Lacour, Claudia Brodsky. “Doing Things with Words: ‘Racism’ as Speech Act and the Undoing of Justice”, Race-ing
Brodsky Lacour takes a linguistic approach, speech act theory, to understand race. According to Lacour, language has more than the power to describe. Language has the power to act in that "language can also make things happen, bring previously nonexistent states of affairs into being" (Lacour 134). For Lacour, a speech act not only states an idea, but also performs an action that may compliment or contrast the thought spoken. Toni Morrison advances the notion that speech acts contain action. In her work, *Playing in the Dark: Whiteness and the Literary Imagination*, the Nobel Laureate questions the ways African Americans have impacted American letters. She defines the literary presence as Africanist, as:

The denotative and connotative blackness that African people have come to signify, as well as the entire range of views, assumptions, reading and misreadings that accompany Eurocentric learning about these people. As a trope, little

---

restraint has been attached to its uses. As a disabling virus within literary discourse, Africanism has become, in the European tradition that American education favors, both a way of talking about and a way of policing matters of class, sexual license, and representation, formations and exercises of power, and mediations on ethics and accountability. Through the simple expedient of demonizing and reifying the range of color on a palette, American Africanism makes it possible to say and not say, to inscribe and erase, to escape and engage, to act out and act on, to historicize and render timeless. It provides a way of contemplating chaos and civilization, desire and fear, and a mechanism for testing the problems and blessings of freedom.

(Morrison 1992:6-7)

For Morrison, the Africanist presence is not an isolated phenomenon in the United States. British, French, South African, Germanic and Spanish literatures share this presence in its uses of black people as an
“othering” device. Their difference with the American Africanist constructions is to the extent that “the process of organizing American coherence through a distancing Africanism became the operative mode of a new cultural hegemony” (Morrison 8).

With the demise of chattel slavery in the United States, Black men have had to define physically their place in the country. Is it better to stay on the land and transform a history of bondage into a positive tradition or flee from the physical place of bondage in hopes of a better world? Chapter 2 examines how Samm-Art Williams orchestrates one man’s journey through the geography of palatial identity.

Most contemporary African American dramatists depict either poor or working class black men. Chapter 3 will examine the construction of black masculinity by black women. Beginning with Hansberry's Walter Lee Younger, Jr. and ending with David Alexander, these black men demonstrate a yearning for patriarchal authority and power. Because of the personal nature of private interaction, the presence or absence of women
in these plays becomes a defining moment. These plays demonstrate how Black men negotiate relationships with mothers and female partners in addition to friendship with other men.

James Baldwin's rhetorical vision of black masculinity was founded on one's ability to construct himself in an hostile social environment. According to Baldwin, "to become a Negro man, let alone a Negro artist, one had to make oneself up as one went along. This had to be done in the not-at-all-metaphorical teeth of the world's determination to destroy you."\(^{12}\) Chapter 4 seeks to connect the preeminent gay black theorist with the cultural nationalism of the Black Arts Movement. The cultural nationalism of Black Power aesthetics contains homophobic elements that at first glance do not balance with Baldwin's vision. However, Baldwin's writing in theatre and non-fiction creates a rhetorical space for Black Nationalism. Because of

Baldwin, dramatists such as Baraka, Bullins and Neal created men in the mouth of the lion.

Chapter 5 will examine Black men in public spaces. According to Robert Vorlicky, realistic male cast drama generally depicts men in the workplace or institutions like hospitals, schools or prison. In public spaces, the emphasis is on social imperatives and expectations. Black men tend to be at risk and are deemed threatening to social order. Within this public space where survival is more than emotional, Black men negotiate the threats to their existence. Black men operate in a constant state of trauma that permeates the creation of character in action. Tom Cole’s Medal of Honor Rag demonstrates the internal and external policing of the psyche that many Black men face. The play reflects varied subject positions but they provide crucial commentary on cultural practice in each society.
Samm-Art Williams, born in 1946, is an African American playwright who has worked in theatre, film and television. His construction of black masculinity rescues the image of an agrarian black male from the minstrel tradition and it focuses attention on working class conditions related directly to land ownership. Williams has made the depiction of working class black men the center of his artistic output by writing about black men who are seeking to be themselves. His male characters exist within a community of men, make honest connections with women and they express a communion with God. All of these relationships take place on farmland,
the contested ground from which economic survival and political strength spring.

This chapter examines the implications of black masculine performance in *Home* and *Woman From the Town* by Samm-Art Williams. In his plays addressing black masculinity, Williams consciously addresses the relationship of African American men with God, their connections with women, and their ownership of land. It is these relationships, which according to Williams, create a community that supports the survival of African men in the United States. William's vision of Black masculinity demonstrates a community whose cultural transmission of values transcends social expectations. By equating land with masculinity, Williams reveals how the landownership tempers the performance of black masculinity. His characters make choices, which not only negate the preponderance of black urban masculinity, but also give dimension to black rural male experience.

*Home* is Williams most celebrated work. Nominated for a Tony Award in 1980, *Home* depicts the life of Cephus Miles, a black farmer from North Carolina. *Home* went through workshop productions and premiered at St. Mark's
Playhouse, December 19, 1979. It moved to Broadway at Cort Theatre, May 7, 1980 and was a Pulitzer Prize finalist in 1981. Eventually, Samm-Art Williams became one of the most successful playwrights to emerge from the Negro Ensemble Company in New York. The central themes of the play are the black masculine response to the Vietnam War, connections to other black men within the community, their tenuous relationship to the community, and issues of land ownership. Williams extends this theme in Woman From the Town, which opened in New York in September 1989. Continuing the themes of black masculine performance, the second play demonstrates the wages of black masculinity within family and community boundaries.

Home covers approximately twenty years in the life of an African American man, Cephus Miles, who self-destructs because of a higher principle, but ultimately finds himself in the values taught by his family and community. Whimsical and entertaining in its sampling of homespun wisdom, Cephus Miles tells stories about his life and community in the opening scenes of the play. The community raised Miles and literally beat Christian values into him. His subsequent attempts to control his
destiny in the military, the social service system and
the street, have little effect in changing his attitudes
about war and home place. When Cephus Miles loses his
land and refuses the Vietnam War draft, the life of this
young farmer spirals out of control. He then migrates to
a northern American city, enters the social services
system, and he eventually lands at rock bottom. However,
with the help of a mysterious benefactor, Cephus regains
his land and control of his life, and manages to live the
life that he originally envisioned.

Born in the small fictional community of Crossroads,
North Carolina, Cephus Miles wants to follow in his
ancestor's footsteps and to live the life of a farmer
like his grandfather and his uncle. He also wants to
marry Pattie Mae, his childhood sweetheart. Pattie Mae
abandons him to get an university education. Meanwhile,
the US Army drafts Cephus Miles for the war in Vietnam.
Cephus objects to the draft for religious reasons, and
the society brands him a traitor, puts him jail and
destroy his innocent, idyllic world. During his
imprisonment, his family loses their land due to unpaid
back taxes. When Miles is released, he migrates north to
find work. His "bad" paper does not help him get a
decent job, and he slides into poverty and the social
service system. He becomes a victim to unemployment.
Things improve for him when his mysterious benefactor
pays off the taxes on the Miles family land. Cephus
returns home and to the life that he had always dreamed
about. He finds out that his benefactor is Pattie Mae,
who has become rich, but jaded.

In contrast to the redemptive masculinity of Home,
Williams offers a different perspective of masculinity in
Woman From the Town. Like Cephus, the Wilson family of
Town believes in family, god and country. However, these
values prove to be detrimental to the unity of this
African American family. Robert Wilson casts out his
daughter, Lila, for having a child out of wedlock. His
other daughter, Laura, stays on the farm despite her
dream to open a beauty shop. Both daughters hold their
mother responsible for letting their father run their
lives. When the parents die in an automobile accident,
the two daughters unite over an inheritance dispute of
the land and the farm becomes the cause of Laura's
bitterness in the play.
Lila, on the other hand, becomes a successful real estate agent, while raising her daughter alone. When she returns to the farm, she plans revenge on the men who had ostracized her. However, when she arrives to her hometown, she finds only a community of widowed women and their farms on the brink of foreclosure. Her nephew, Buddy Johnson, sees the land as a site of redemption. He wants to farm and reconstruct a mythic land where he can start a family and reclaim his family’s heritage. His masculinity is conceived in redemptive terms because it will presumably alleviate the pains of past generations. Buddy assists Lila in getting the land, but only as a ploy.

Geography provided the crucial ingredient for the definition of African American identity in these plays. The geography of the farm provides black masculinity a structure on which to traffic. The culling of black lives from Africa, the terrors of the Middle Passage and the centuries of servitude in the Americas echo throughout these plays. In Place in Literature, Roberto Dainotto comments on the 'the multicultural utopia of a
coexistence of different cultures" in a single geographic space. Such concurrent arrangements bracket away "the question of hegemony." According to Dainotto, "as nationalist 'Grand Narratives' are no longer capable of accounting for the diversities of such modes of cultural identification as class, gender, or race, a 'regional' outlook at the very 'structure of literature' remains the only alternative to the 'imposed' cultural unity of national literature." (4 - 5).

In seventeenth century America, land ownership insured the African American men's ability to provide for their families and communities. Without any money, farming enabled them to eat and have a place to call home. During slavery, black men received provisions from white men, establishing a pattern of paternalism. In The Free Negro in North Carolina, 1790-1860, John Hope Franklin relates how freed slave often stayed on the land


14 Ibid., 4-5.
of their former owners. Free blacks owned property and even had Supreme Court cases decided in their favor (Franklin 1995:151). According to Franklin, property rights were sacrosanct even if the property owners were Negros. With Emancipation in 1864, this responsibility fell to black men. However, when black men became merchants, the Ku Klux Klan stymied their efforts (Giddings 1984). When black peoples migrated to the northern cities to gain employment in industry, both industry practices and unions blocked their job advancement and inhibited their accumulation of wealth. For those families that remained in the south, tenant farming and government policies again were obstacles. Considering these challenges, the survival of black families is a remarkable feat. Wallace described how the environment framed black men in public spaces. Such framing inhibits "black man's potential for transcending the chasmed otherness of race" (Wallace 2002:8). Wallace isolated for examination

That identity as one articulated by the ways in which the mimetic architectures of black male inhabitation -- closets and cabinets, houses and
homeplaces -- project a material form of self and repeat, in their materiality, the abstract linguistic function of the epistemological closet foregrounded by Sedgewick. (Wallace 2002:111)

The plight of black farmers has contributed to their stereotypical image in the popular imagination, of both black and white middle and upper class folk. By the 1980s, a black man in overalls was a marker of "racial authenticity," an essentialist notion. The preferred "fictive" (sentimental, melodramatic, etc.) stereotypical depiction was that of the idyllic My Kentucky Home, Carry me back to Ole Virginia, which was shared by both black and white Americans. However, this shared image of past and future America is rife with the inequities of the Jim Crow public policy and the specter of racialized vigilante justice. Now as in the past, a black farmhand is an Ellisonian Invisible Man who can be seen, but cannot be heard as he dispenses wisdom through rheumy eyes. Whether at church, the schoolhouse or the courthouse, black men have been at the center of a white male gaze.

To be so visible, and yet to be so ignored is a
central theme of Ellison's novel. This pain motivates the black narrator in Ellison's novel to perform his masculine self as a starting point of resistance. Even though Ellison's narrator is still in the basement, he has gained an awareness of the way that he wants to live his life. In his anthology *Contemporary Black Men’s Fiction and Drama*, Keith Clark states that "in America’s deformed and deforming perspective, black men are denied an interiority, an emotional and psychic complexity" (Clark 203-4). It would seem that within the black male worldview, the 'emotional and psychic complexity' derives from a deep yearning to find a place in American society.

Black men have a complicated interiority that reflects both gender and racial specificity. Both the man and his community at times have the expectation of male privilege, in which a man protects his home and family. Examples of violated male privilege inhabit the history of black men and create a climate for innovation and variation. The community of black people has internalized popular opinion and in many ways has contributed to the negativity. Likewise, Williams makes rural blacks visible by representing them in his plays.
He has a profound respect for their work, which he infuses in his descriptions of both sexes in his writing.

I grew up plowing with mules. Nowadays it's mechanized, but my granddaddy had one mule I just detested. And that mule hated me, too. One time I decided to ride him, just because everybody said I couldn't do it. Well, he threw me so high and so hard, the fall broke my arm -- just two weeks before I started college! And he came over to where I was lying by a tree and I swear, that mule laughed at me. But growing up like that gave me a lot of respect for farmers. Farmers and roofers -- they have the hardest jobs in the world. Up at 5 a.m., it's 105 by noon, and you're at work. Backbreaking work. And the farm women? They work just as hard as the men do. I have all the respect in the world for people who work like that. (Newmark 2001)

According to Williams, land ownership and social ascent are interrelated. His depictions of rural blacks are in sharp contrast to black depictions of the urban poor. Although the Black farmer's standard of living may not match the market driven consumption of American
society, a black man with land is always "rich" because he has steady work and can feed himself and his family. In rural North Carolina, the definition of black masculinity is not a complicated formula. Rural Black masculinity is seen as a mixture of Protestant work ethic and male paternalism. Williams found a true prototype for Cephus Miles in his corner of eastern North Carolina, where black men like Cephus abound. For those who did not go to the shipping ports of Wilmington, the promise of better jobs in the North or the New South industrialization of the Research Triangle (Raleigh-Durham-Chapel Hill), the land remained the place where they formulated and performed their humanity. Cephus regenerated his life on that land.

What you have to understand is that you have urban America and rural America. People in the South are poor. What makes the difference is that you can own your own house, you can own your tractor and a hundred acres of land, and you are still poor. Because you still have to eat what you grow. It always involves economics, which plays a major part in these peoples lives. History and heritage is to
be accounted for, too. Most of us could not do what farmers do six days a week. (Williams 2002)

In the unpublished Conversations on a Dirt Road, Williams has two brothers fighting over inherited land. Speaking from his experience of land speculation and ownership in eastern North Carolina, Williams’ knowledge of land is the basis of family stability or crisis. "Nobody expected land to be as expensive as it is now. In my hometown, a lot sells for $15,000. Now, people will shoot and kill to get that land. It is worth a fortune. In the South, we always took land for granted. It was just land. Now, it has gone through the roof and families are being torn apart about it."15

Cephus Miles’ challenge is the American social reality for the microcosm of Black farmers. Land ownership by Blacks has been a barometer of African American economic life. The U.S. government's record in dealing rural black farmers has been abysmal. The 1999

consent decree signed by Judge Paul Freidman in Pigford et al. v. Glickman was a pyrrhic victory for African American farmers. In court, the farmers proved that the discriminatory practices of the United State Department of Agriculture had a negative influence on their ability to keep their land and way of life. With the lawsuit came the realization that, since 1910, the amount of black owned land dropped from 17 million acres to 3 million. The court recommended an award of $50,000 per farmer, if and only if, the farmer could prove that there was a pattern of discrimination.

The judges' ruling created a larger bureaucracy than what existed before the decree (Sheppard 2000). During the course of the twentieth century, black farmers dropped from 20% to 4% of the small landowners in the United States. The causes that brought about the decline are the consolidation of the farming industry, the unstable farm prices and the discriminatory practices of
the federal government. As the focus of the civil rights movement shifted attention to the inner city in the 1960s, rural blacks continued to make out their meager existences and to maintain their traditional values. Agrarian myth may have glorified their suffering and struggles, but mythical and "dramatized" representations are window dressing of a life long shunned by middle-class African Americans.

Although Cephus Miles knows the life he wishes, American social and political policies and practices block his ability to command his destiny. Despite his best efforts, he becomes a victim of circumstances. Williams offers land ownership as a redemptive safeguard against helplessness. By reconnecting with the land, Cephus is able to reclaim self-respect and self-reliance. His initial dream was correct but it took him over twenty years to replicate it. The wisdom that he gained was the degree of misery American Society could inflict on a

Black farmer. Williams constructs a character whose life depends on land ownership. He shows how the young man grew up on the farm and learned the occupation from his grandfather and uncle. Cephus’ anguish when both relatives die results in a promise that he will build his life in their image. His efforts to stay on the land are in direct conflict with American foreign policy. He refuses to go and kill other farmers in Vietnam, a country he does not even know its geography.

The act that causes Cephus' life to fall apart is his refusal to fight in Vietnam. His decision should have earned him a conscientious objector status. As a man without the economic resources to defend his choice, Cephus loses control of his life. Williams’ depiction of black masculinity defying the American call to arms evokes two of the most significant African American men of the twentieth century: Martin Luther King, Jr. and Muhammad Ali. Both men were adamantly opposed to the war and the carnage it inflicted on African American men.\footnote{Of all the men and women who served in Vietnam, 275,000, or 10.6\%, were black. The remaining 88.4\% were Caucasian. At the time of}
Despite the moral struggles to dismantle racial discrimination, black men were often denied the full measure of American citizenship. The draft culled black men twice as frequently than white men. African American men found themselves as cannon fodder for foreign wars from Vietnam to Desert Storm\(^{18}\), victims of economic disenfranchisement and partners to black women, who often felt alienated from both racial and gendered liberation struggles. Behind the statistics that speak of the pathology of black men are the millions of individuals who negotiate race and gender.

In his study of Martin Luther King, Jr., *I May Not Get There With You*, Michael Eric Dyson credits the civil rights leader's anti-war activism emerging "from his belief that gospel calls individuals and nations to

\(^{18}\) Participation in frontline fighter units became an issue during Operation Desert Shield/Desert Storm. To date, the issue of black soldiers in contemporary Middle Eastern conflicts have not come to surface.
repent of their sins and to serve humanity as best they can” (Dyson 2000:52). Of the many motivations that prompted King's response to the Vietnam War, a "strong antiwar sentiment in poor black communities fueled King's powerful protest against Vietnam, eliciting strong rebuke from many middle-class blacks and the white establishment” (52). According to Dyson, the draft sent twice as many blacks to the war as whites. Considering the escalation of the war and the lowering of the educational standards in order to enlarge the eligible soldier pool, black participation in Vietnam War grew in alarming rates.

Many African Americans examined Ali's fall from grace with mixed emotions. When others were dying for legal and civil liberty, why was the titan of African American manhood refusing to serve his country? Had the heir to Joe Louis disappointed the little boys who would later, join the struggle? Ali went to jail, relinquished his fighting titles and lost the respect of white America. After experiencing the repercussions of his actions, he went back to work to resurrect his family, his career and his good name.
Cephus refuses to join and fight in the Vietnam War because he is needed at the farm and he objects to the killing of Vietnamese people. As a civil rights leader, King's avowal of non-violent resistance grew from opposition against government sponsored civil discrimination to opposition against national imperatives in Southeast Asia. In 1966, heavyweight prizefighter Muhammad Ali refused military service in the war due to his conversion to Islam. Williams aligns Miles' performance of masculinity with two black icons of the civil rights era. King's assassination essentially silenced national black critiques of the American war policy. The discourse concerning African American participation in foreign wars would not come again until Operation Desert Storm. Ali brought legal action against the military and the Supreme Court exonerated him in 1972. The flamboyant and eloquent fighter reestablished his good name as both a fighter and a man of principle, not only in America but also around the world. In 1967, Mohammad Ali refused the draft because of his moral opposition to the Vietnam War. After a recent conversion to Islam, Ali publicly stated that the war was immoral.
and refused to fight on religious grounds, even though he
did not register himself as a conscientious objector.
Ali was sent to jail in 1968. He appealed and the United
States Supreme Court overturned his conviction in 1971.
The prizefighter that embodied the aspirations of many
African Americans, took a moral stance against his
government in the name of both Christian and Islamic
beliefs. Not willing to kill other brown-skinned
peoples, Ali muddied the one-dimensional image of black
man who fights from pent-up race rage. As cultural icon,
the prizefighter's performance of black masculinity was a
skilled disciplined enactment of race and class struggle
borne of American oldest set of inequalities. At the
height of the Civil Rights Era, Ali projected an image of
black masculinity that merged rhetoric with muscle, style
with gravitas. Ali’s performance combined Martin Luther
King’s philosophy of non-violence with Malcolm X's “any
means necessary."

While images of urban and rural black men populate
American drama, few plays demonstrate the movement from
north to south as effectively as Samm-Art Williams's
Home. Born in the eastern North Carolina town of Burgaw,
rural life tempered Williams' sensibilities. The region contained small farms, which focused on raising tobacco, hogs and soybeans. Free from the confining spaces of northern cities, Williams knew from an early age the relationship between landownership, race, and masculinity. The play's critique of American society is very telling. However, the character's life supports a different view of black men living on the land. Cephus Miles is not playing up to the stereotypes of unemployed blacks who seek instant gratification from drugs and alcohol. Instead, Cephus seeks to raise crops, livestock and a family.

In many West African societies, the most important performance of black masculinity is the griot. Griots are living historians in that they remember and record the experience of a community. In addition to the content of the tale, the Griot is responsible for telling the tale in interesting ways. In Home, William carefully constructs Cephus Miles as the Griot of his community, thereby providing a connection between the past and the present in a stylized narrative format. In a dramatic mode, Cephus tells of his family members and interacts
with a few of them (i.e. Aunt Hannah). However, in an alternating epic mode, Cephus also tells about the community of men and of his thoughts and feelings for them. In the beginning of the play, Cephus portrays himself as the young griot of his community. He tells stories about different characters in his town. At times, these stories are fantastic folk yarns befitting of the African American folklore tradition. "Telling lies" is a form of entertainment that also has a moral message. In terms of black male connections, Cephus demonstrates his relationship to his father, uncle and grandfather. Absent from his tales of early life are any trace of pathology or race anger. Miles is portrayed as a simple man with simple wants.

In *Home*, Samm-Art Williams uses the epic mode to describe a community of men. The community of Cephus Miles has both men and women, but through his storytelling, a strong sense of male community evolves. There are many types of black men in his community. His Granddaddy and uncle are the closest to the land and make the land and religion the backbone of their existence. In contrast, Williams surrounds Cephus with men with
different motivations and values. As models for manhood, each example is dialectical in the way it presents its worldview.

Miles' community of men extends beyond his blood kin. Through his tall tales, Cephus tells of other men and how they cope in a hostile society. He tells of One Arm Ike, a musician who lost his arm by stealing hogs. The tale is fantastic with only a small grain of truth. With Ike’s help, Cephus learns to cuss. He has the musician play the notes for each word. Miles is in a world of black men who survive adversity thanks to music and the spoken word. He also tells of Ole Chief, a man who claims both Native American and African American heritage. When Ole Chief did not want to communicate, he would start to speak "Indian." When Miles threatens violence, his actions gain him respect among men. By challenging Ole Chief for a debt, Miles stopped his friends from making fun of him and demonstrated to the community that he could take care of his own affairs and that he is no longer a child. He also tells of John Smith, a capitalist who reveres the value of the dollar, is willing to bend the law, and provides Cephus with a
model for dealing with women. Regardless of his beliefs, Smith manages to live with Hattie, a righteous woman.

As a character, Cephus appears alone in most of the play. However, Williams allows Cephus to remember the male influences in his life. With the remembrance of his father and grandfather, he is never alone. In keeping with African belief, the ancestors are never far away from the living. Miles’ father died early, so Miles was raided by his uncle and grandfather. However, the uncle and grandfather do not appear onstage.

A central topic in the plays written by black men is the relationship of male characters with female characters. As black feminists have rightly articulated, the struggle for racial equality is not the exclusive activity of African American men. The racist realities that constitute living in America affect both men and women. However, the experience of their realities is extremely different. Within a patriarchal society, the expectation of masculine behavior leaves little space for introspection let alone conversation. The result of such miscommunication is a lack of common ground. Gender difference becomes a gender divide in broadened by race
and class differences.

In the post civil rights era, black men and women had overcome the legal obstacles to full citizenship. The depiction of African American masculinity changed from protest drama to an exploration of interior lives of black men and this depiction of black man privileges the pain of struggle more than the anguish of protest. Black men made choices based on their material conditions. In farming communities, women stand beside the men, raising children and sharing some common values and actions. Like the men, women have lives of hard work and singular aspirations. For those black women who want something beyond the farm life, they must leave home in order to fulfill their dreams. Williams displays the interconnections between men and women as they pursue their conflicting dreams. Not only do they dream of lives within and outside of farm life, but they reconnect thanks to the consequences of their choices.

What is significant is that Williams presents these characters without falling into the trap of a traditional gender war. Women play an important role in the construction of black masculinity. Women raise their
sons and give them the first lesson on how to interact with women. In *Home*, Williams constructs a complex world where women are always present. Pattie Mae is the central female character in *Home*. A strong woman, she forces Cephus to go to church before beginning their relationship. A smart woman, she excels at school and dreams of a life beyond Crossroads. Miles' first moment of strife arrives when his girlfriend Patty-Mae goes to college. He experiences a rupture his sweetheart leaves him behind to enter the world of knowledge and privilege. He will especially lose her to a man with legal aspirations, because Patty Mae yearns for a life that is more intellectually challenging than the life on the farm and forsakes the love of a simple man like Cephus. Pattie Mae denies his affection. Cephus approaches women with honorable innocence, seeking tenderness instead of conquest. His vision for their future family life includes farming and teaching. When, Pattie Mae goes to college, he says “I’ll never love another girl. Not in my whole life. . . . Alone I stop to pray, God. Bring her closer to me. She’s my soft summer day” (Williams 20).
Williams rewrites the character Patty Mae in *Woman of the Town*. Like the heroine in Friedrich Dürrenmatt’s *The Visit*, Lila Wilson comes back to her hometown with revenge in her heart. Lila seeks to take the land from the men and combat them with their own game. Her change of heart occurs when she realizes that all the people who wronged her, most of whom were men, are now dead. Instead of wrecking havoc on the women, she decides to take care of those that were left behind.

In both of these plays, Williams constructs woman as a positive, revitalizing force. Patty has a tremendous sense of self. As Trudier Harris observed, "these traits might seem more like virtues than symptoms of disease, until we consider the price the women paid spiritually and emotionally and that, in addition to detrimental effects strength had upon them, it was equally if not more harmful to others--the children, husbands, and other relatives of these women" (Harris 1995:111). The women are strong enough to know themselves and identify their needs.
In terms of religion, Williams’ women defer the blind allegiance of Ruth for the personal agency of Jezebel. However, Williams is careful not to overly sexualize his female characters without diminishing their femininity.
CHAPTER 3

THE BLACK FEMALE PLAYWRIGHT CONSTRUCTION

OF BLACK MASCULINITY

My little boy would never
be as mean as you.

He would never leave
without a kiss or two.

You're making eyes at me
and that's an old familiar sign

I guess, you're mine.

Whose Little Angry Man Are You?

Raisin, The Musical (1975)

Because of its notoriety in both public and academic
audiences, A Raisin In The Sun provides a critical nexus
with which to explore the tradition of black women
playwrights writing black masculinity. The tradition of
cross gender writing has generated many of the most
interesting black men of American Drama. Beyond the
general praise received from writing under adverse social
conditions, Black women playwrights provide a deep
understanding of black male challenges and strategies of
survival. Whether as social protest or arts-for-arts-
sake expression, the tradition dispels attacks of gender
difference. By its actions, the world has little sway
for either black women or their children, and thus
staging black women lives is a rhetorical trap. However,
as metaphor, an African American female playwright is
fair game for analysis because she comes into the
creative process. The 'black She' can name everything
within her phenomenological world, and thus be
accountable for her construction of self and other.

In the opening scene of Lorraine Hansberry's A
Raisin In The Sun, Travis Younger snores serenely on the
couch of his family's apartment. Ruth Younger, a young
mother who is rapidly aging with the stress of her
working poor life, will rise and desperately attempt to
get her son to school and her husband to work. In a
quiet moment, she cooks her husband's eggs and watches
her son eat his cereal. Travis asks about the insurance
check that the family is expecting from his grandfather's death. His teacher has asked that each student bring fifty cents to school. The Youngers do not have money to spare, and Ruth admonishes her son for his persistence in asking his father or grandmother for the money. Sulking he makes his bed, gathers his book and prepares to leave the house. Ruth, realizing that she has not touched or loved him that morning, takes a comb from her purse and says "'Bout to march out of here with that head looking like chickens slept in it" (17). Travis continues to stomp around the house and as he opens the door, he says "Oh, Mama makes me so mad sometimes I don't know what to do! I wouldn't kiss that woman good-bye for nothing in this world!" (18). In the stage notes, Travis "allows her to embrace him warmly but keeps his face fixed with masculine rigidity (italics mine). She holds him back from her presently, and looks at him and runs her fingers over the features of his face. With utter gentleness: ) Now -- whose little old angry man are you? (18)"

With great subtlety, Hansberry stages how Ruth is raising her son. Ruth insists on governing his actions, but recognizes that her little boy will grow into a man.
The loving relationship between Ruth and Travis is a pivotal image in that it highlights the abortion decision Ruth faces later in the play. She feeds him, cares for him (his hair) and yet she cannot give him fifty cents. If life is this hard with one child, Ruth knows it will not get any better with another child. Her subtle chiding of his masculine rigidity reinforces her power as mother while recognizing the budding power of her "little old angry man." The mother/son dynamic in this early innocent moment foreshadows the stormy confrontation brewing between Lena and Walter Lee, Jr. over Walter Lee Sr.'s insurance funds. *A Raisin In The Sun*, whose cultural icons sometimes elide its revolutionary power, provides a departure point for understanding gender relationships. Specifically, black male characters born of women playwrights demonstrate that the performance of black masculinity is a community activity.

Hansberry's *A Raisin in the Sun* is perhaps the most well known play about twentieth century African American life. The play deals with contemporary issues like housing, race relations, interpersonal and family communication, African colonialism and abortion.
Demonstrating how families communicate, handle complex social problems and interpret the past are perhaps the most enduring lessons the play has to offer. In addition, the play asks intriguing questions. When fighting societal problems, how do black men and women communicate? How do working class black families love, especially when the struggle to live freely is so intense in terms of economics and public policy? How are the struggles of American Blacks similar to Black freedom struggles around the world. Who has a right to "a dream deferred?" 19

Why has A Raisin in the Sun become a classic? The answer resides in complex artistry of Hansberry’s storytelling. Set in the idealist world of an Eisenhower America, the play revealed that the promise of the American Dream was not a reality for working poor African Americans. In addition to the Cold War concerns that all Americans of that generation faced, racial prejudice in

employment, housing and education were reasons for the lack of economic resources that would have enabled a better life for the Younger family. The weight of racial oppression has the ability to wear away at such support structures as family love, tradition and an understanding of history. However, the characters were able to find dignity and personal growth despite the odds. By asserting their humanity, the characters were able to fight for their right to dream, to prosper and to live free. Hansberry tapped into the cultural stories of African American life and wove a tapestry revealing pain, humor and love. Unfortunately, the problems that the Youngers faced are still with us, therefore the play speaks with the same resonance it had forty years ago.

Hansberry knew the cultural and intellectual history of African Americans. The philosophies of W. E. B. DuBois, Booker T. Washington, Ida B. Wells and Marcus Garvey were essential to her growth as an artist. She realized the failed promise of freedom gained by African Americans after the Civil War. Growing up in the Southside of Chicago connected her to migration of southern blacks that came to the North looking for
economic, political and social freedom. When her father bought a house in a restricted Anglo American neighborhood in 1938, Lorraine Hansberry experienced first hand the rage of an angry mob. Carl Hansberry would eventually take his case to the Supreme Court and win a victory with NAACP assistance. However, the hollow victory did not hasten change and he died trying to move his family to Mexico. His daughter would show the world how black people fight for freedom, maintain dignity, preserve hope, and dream of a brighter tomorrow. In this spirit, *A Raisin in the Sun* foreshadowed the Civil Rights Movement and the rhetoric of Martin Luther King and Malcolm X.

In this chapter, I argue that the gender and race of the playwright provides context, form and structure for understanding contemporary black masculine performance in American Drama. For instance, the trope of mother-son relationships establishes an apt metaphor for the material and emotional resources that an African American female playwright provides. Recognizing the utility of black feminist theory for deconstructing racial and gender privilege, the plethora of theoretical works
written with the last twenty years creates a framework with which to analyze African American male characters in the black female playwright tradition. Beyond the identity politics inherent in this criticism is the understanding of writing across difference, albeit race, class, or gender is a political act, a cultural product of its time. As Robin Wiegman has noted, the axis of difference creates embodied asymmetries beyond the binaries of black and white, man and woman (Weigman 1995). Can Travis Younger say or do anything other than "make eyes" at the mother who made him. Travis' performance of his masculinity may be the literary foil of the greater dynamic between Walter Lee Jr. and Lena. However, his subjectivity and his reaction to the nihilism the family faces reflects not only him as a male character, but also his maker.
Examining Dreams Deferred

For the artist examined here, race and gender provide the material circumstance from which the artist creates a character whose speech acts and actions challenge the dominant ideology. In her essay, "Mama’s Baby, Papa’s Maybe," Hortense Spillers discusses the over-determined ways that American society portrays African American women in public discourse. Since the seventeenth century when Virginia laws determined the status of slave children to the mother, the agency of black women have been tied to legal discourse. African American life can be viewed as a displacement of motherhood from the flesh. Black children are inheritors of a dual fatherhood, "set in motion, comprised of the African father’s banished name and body and the captor of father’s mocking presence" (Spillers 80). Spillers argues for a re-conceptualization of "traditional symbolics of female gender, and it is our task to make a place for this different social subject. In doing so, we
are less interested in joining the ranks of gendered femaleness than gaining the insurgent ground as female social subject" (Spillers 80). Spillers’ vision is centered on a female subject and sees a day when African American women occupy a public space beyond the parenthetical inferences of history. Postcolonial theatre shares this vision, particularly in its representation of masculinity. In her framework, I would further problematize the dual fatherhood notion.

Biological fathers leave the mark of racial difference, whether white or black. In the realm of fatherhood, who “fathers?” Cast as a method of loving and caring for younger males, father becomes symbolic of cultural inheritance, gender power and interpersonal agency. Caught within the postcolonial moment, biological fatherhood can give ground to “pseudo-fatherhood,” emblematic of race, culture and ideology. Inasmuch as postcolonial theatre represents a transgressive fatherhood, do the plays establish insurgent ground for a new male social subject?

As Joan W. Scott states “(Experience) is a historicizing that implies critical scrutiny of all
explanatory categories usually taken for granted, including the category of ‘experience’” (Scott 26). The creative output of African American women has emphasized experience as a central strength. Experience provides the vantage point of subjectivity in which a black woman provides commentary on her surroundings. The contexts for creative works by black women however, are not limited to a world of women. These universes, in which black women are center, contain others who do not have the experience of black women and yet are subject to the same critical scrutiny.

The imagination that creates a black woman speaking also entering a dialogic relationship with the character and others. However, the question about how to construct characterizations that are not a part of one's experience. In her essay “The Problem of Speaking for Others,” Linda Alcoff addresses an important question concerning people who live under different types of cultural hegemony. If you do not have a discursive voice from which to fight for your political and social needs, then who is to speak for you? Here Alcoff, compliments the theorist for having the political will and
intellectual capital to speak for those less fortunate. However, what would be the situation when a people have the resources and discursive shrewdness to speak for their own subject position? In this case, does speaking for others become another exercise in domination?

For in both the practice of speaking for and the practice of speaking about others, I am engaging in the act of representing the other’s needs, goals, situation, and in fact, who they are, based on my own situated interpretation. In poststructuralist terms, I am participating in the construction of their subject positions rather than simply discovering their true selves. (Alcoff 100-101)

The difference in perspectives between Alcoff and Morrison highlight the tension of African American women creating black masculinity and its performance in African American Drama. Despite recent controversies, pitting black men and women against each other, cross-gendered writing has been intrinsic in recording black masculinity in twentieth century drama. Specifically, black women playwrights have written a wealth of complex male
characters that capture much of the breadth and depth of the black male experience.

The recent controversies concerning black women writing about black men have centered on Michelle Wallace's *Myth of the Black Superwoman* and Alice Walker's *The Color Purple*. Both of these texts are misunderstood, because each text attempted to isolate the experience of African women. In doing so, both texts demonstrated the abuse in black female lives at the hands of black men. Wallace attempted to understand the construction of black womanhood in the twentieth century. Drawing on the historical record, Wallace saw black women as the whipping post of American history. In *The Color Purple*, the depiction of black men is negative. Their representation stems from institutional self-loathing, which the culture nurtures. Mister does abuse Celie and Harpo is equally abusive in his measure. The purposes of these depictions were not an attack on black men, but a condemnation of misogyny performed by black men. To ignore or gloss over their abuses is to silence black female agency, particularly the ability to analyze social abuse. By isolating the negative and investigating its
effects, Walker attempted to write into existence a better vision of what black men could be.

Modern African American women dramatist playwrights have similarly constructed an image of black men. In *A Raisin in the Sun*, Walter Lee Sr. is a presence in his household, although his death begins the actions of the play. Considering that he died within a year of the play's action, Walter Lee Sr. had lived in the house with the rest of his family in a crowded apartment. The conflict between Walter Lee Jr. and Lena Younger is not a fight over his manhood rights, but a result of a power vacuum stemming from Walter Lee Sr.'s death. Having worked on the railroads, Walter Lee Sr. brought his paycheck and his affection to his household. Lena speaks of his hell raising, but also notes his aspirations for his family. Her comments both praise and criticize his behavior, yet in keeping with the complexity of a human character.

Mama: Honey, Big Walter would come in here some nights back then and slump down on that couch there and just look at the rug, and loot at me and look at the rug and then
back at me -- and he was down then -- really down. (After a second very long and thoughtful pause; she is seeing back to times that only she can see.) And then, lord, when I lost that baby -- little Claude -- I almost thought I was going to lose Big Walter, too. Oh that man grieved hisself! He was one man to love his children.

Ruth: Ain't nothing can tear at you like losin' a baby.

Mama: I guess that how come that man finally worked hisself to death like he done. Like he was fighting his own war with this here world that took his baby away from him.

Ruth: He was a fine man, Mr. Younger.

In his article, "Black Male Subjectivity Deferred?", Keith Clark's questioning of Walter Lee Jr.'s subjectivity ignores the presence and impact of the father on the son. According to Clark, Walter Lee Jr. is
"an archetypical decentered black male subject" (98). As an amalgamation of other's dreams and desires, the grown Walter Lee Jr. is a man-child searching for identity through the ideologies of other. Clark specifically notes the black middle class notions represented by George Murchison, the college educated suitor of Beneatha Lee. What is missing from Clark's analysis that the son has been living in his father's house for thirty years. While the play stages the dominant ideology (Murchison's black bourgeoisie attitudes and Willie Harris' capitalism), working class values with an emphasis on labor, love for children and family come through Lena Younger's remembrance of Walter Lee, Sr. Critics such as Clark ascribe this viewpoint only to the mother, and seem to erase the presence of the father. Hansberry construction of dead Walter Lee Sr. is a vision of black masculinity that is patriarchal, without being domineering.

Mama: Crazy 'bout his children! God knows there was plenty wrong with Walter Younger -- hard-headed, mean, kind of wild with women. (With an edge of bitterness)
Plenty wrong with him. But he sure loved his children. Always wanted them to have something -- be something. That's where Brother gets all these notions, I reckon. Big Walter used to say, he'd get right wet in the eyes, sometimes, lean his head back with the water standing in his eyes and say -- (straightening, head thrown back, looking off in re-creation of the robust voice, the poetry and pride of the man) "Seem like God didn't see fit to give the black man nothing but dreams -- but He did give us children to make them dreams seem worthwhile." (She smiles.) He could talk like that, don’t you know. (33)

Through Lena's recollection, Walter Lee Sr. is not a perfect man. Not only does he challenge her with his "hardheadedness" but he also is philandering with other women. Lena recognizes that there is "Plenty wrong with him." With all of his faults, Walter Lee Sr. managed to come home every night and still love his family. In addition to the power of his meager paycheck, he also
gave emotional and moral support. I contend that the father taught his son to dream because as Lena remembers, "he could talk like that, don't you know."

In discussing Zora Neale Hurston's Janie from Their Eyes Were Watching God, Awkward attempts to understand the relationship between a female protagonist and a black male other. Tea Cake is at first very loving toward Janie. After being bitten by a rabid animal, a sick Teacake turns on Janie and she must kill him in self defence. As a black woman, she must kill the black male other, which she loves intensely, or else allow him to kill her. Rather than viewing this relationship as annihilation of black masculinity, Awkward sees Janie as a 'reconciliation of formerly disparate dimensions" (105). By the coalescence of voice and action, Janie is able to "confl ate physical and spiritual into a single interactive, interdependent system and, thus, to resolve a double consciousness into a unified, black sensibility" (105).

Literary feminist criticism is explaining uneven power relationships inherent in gender relationships in literature and society. As Valerie Smith has indicated,
critics have "ignored the more muted achievements of female protagonists" (370) of black female writers until their value in the academy bestowed worth. Recent studies have centered the motivations, narratives and experiences of black women. The plays by black women center the black female subject and make all non-black and non-female character, "the other." Within the universe of American Drama, black women construct a 'black, masculine other' that mirrors their own complexity. These plays are in keeping with the tradition of black women playwrights from earlier in the century such as Georgia Douglass Johnson, Mary Burril, Zora Neale Hurston, and Marita Bonner. Most of these plays combat lynching activity in the nation. They show the aftermath of black male death on the women who are left behind and the challenges of black men facing their deaths. The annihilation of black men is a nihilistic vision that makes mockery of logic because a black man is

damned both for his actions in some cases and for remaining inert in others cases.

Cornel West believes that nihilism is a "threat to the very existence" of black America (12). In Race Matters, West describes nihilism as a "monumental eclipse of home, the unprecedented collapse of meaning, the incredible disregard for human (especially black) life and property in much of black America" in which current discourses of conservative and liberal politics do not address (12). The contemporary landscape of black masculinity would fit this description, but arguably, key aspects of black male life have not changed since the Reconstruction period of the 1860s. During Reconstruction, black women fought desperately to control the perception of their sexuality in addition to African American suffrage and anti-lynching campaigns. Vigilante band of mainly white southerners would indiscriminately round up black individuals and mutilate their bodies either by hanging, burning or castration. Black men were most often the victims, but the vigilantes also targeted black women. Lynching stifled black economic activity and terrorized all levels of black society, particularly
those few blacks who owned land. Without immunity, all blacks despite economic or educational aspirations were subject to the rope. From this sense of terror arose the legacy of early twentieth century black female playwrights. Most of the women were middle-class, had college educations and wrote of black experience as it affected them as women. The plays of this period dealt with lynching and the impact on the women. African American women playwrights recorded popular beliefs of early twentieth century black masculinity.

Deborah E. McDowell comments on white male sexual desire when she states, "the white slave master constructed an image of black female sexuality which shifted responsibility for his own sexual passions onto his female slaves" (141). Respectability, with its echoes of class-consciousness, was a concern of black women at the turn of the century. (See Giddings 1984) These women were definitely interested in the conversion of nihilism into a positive vision for African American people.

Like alcoholism and drug addiction, nihilism is a disease of the soul. It can never be completely
cured, and there is always the possibility of relapse. But there is always a chance for conversion -- a chance for people to believe that there is hope for the future and a meaning to struggle. The chance rests neither on an argument about what justice consists of nor on an analysis of how racism, sexism or class subordination operate. (West 18-19)

African American female playwrights have a distinctive standpoint for which to record African American life and specifically black masculinity. As women, they have the capability of giving birth and mothering children. As wives to black men, they are part of the community that faced the sociological changes in the United States as the young country changed from a slave state to a free nation. As African Americans, they are subject to the terrorism of white America. African American female playwrights, as a group, represented the intersectionality of being black, female and artistic, and as such infused their art with the complexities of their experience. As participants in the creation of black masculinity, the women created representations
reflecting how black men dealt with nihilism, subjectivity, and voice.

Feminist criticism of American drama has concentrated on how women playwrights have privileged the hidden stories of women. Although women have appeared early and often in American Drama, the subjugation of their stories stems from higher, values attributed to the lives of white men (Keyssar 1999; Brown 1999). In this analysis, women are relegated to playing the roles of mothers, concubines, and wives. Black women are often jewelry to be worn or to indicate debauchery (Gilman, 1985). In his essay "Black Bodies, White Bodies: Toward an Iconography of Female Sexuality in Late Nineteenth-Century Art, Medicine and Literature," Sander L. Gilman describes how images of black women and white prostitutes became a medical and literary convention of a sexualized woman, "an iconographic function in the perception and the representation of the world" (225). At the beginning of the twentieth century, black women were aware of the negative implications of their imagery. While the images of black women were the primary concern, black women throughout the century created multifaceted depictions of
black men. Always critical and engaging, the representations of black men by black women went beyond the simple rhetoric of "can't we all get along." As I will describe, the black male characters of black women's drama have the depth of feeling befitting world-class literature.

The Tradition of Black Women Playwrights

Mine Eyes Have Seen, the first published play by an African American female playwright, depicts an African American man who must choose to defend his country or take care of his family. Chris is the second son of an upwardly mobile family. Because the family worked hard and had purchased a home, the local white community killed the father and ran the rest of the family out of town. After heading north to an all black settlement, the mother dies of disease and the older brother Dan is injured in a factory accident. The younger man, Chris must work to support his older brother and sister. Alice Nelson-Dunbar contrasts the needs of an individual family
with the needs of the nation. The sister is caretaker for the brothers and has no aspirations for career or marriage. Chris, the youngest brother, takes responsibility for their family, but is wary about the future.

Chris: -- And me, with a fragment of an education, and no chance -- only half a man. And you, poor Little Sister, there's no chance for you; what is there in life for you? No, if others want to fight, let them. I'll claim exemption.

Dan: On what grounds?

Chris: You -- and Sister. I am all you have; I support you.

Dan: (Half rising in his chair.) Hush! Have I come to this, that I should be the excuse, the woman's skirts for a slacker to hide behind?

Dan and Chris are at odds over their interpretations of masculine identity. Bound by his wheelchair, Dan is not able to provide for himself and his sister. However,
he clings to a masochistic notion of masculinity. Chris has more insight into his family's situation. He does not care about how participation in a war frames masculinity. For Chris, his dead parents' legacy is to care for his family.

Chris: *(Clenching his fists.)* You call me that? You, whom I'd lay down my life for? I'm no slacker when I hear the real call of duty. Shall I desert the cause that needs me -- you -- Sister -- home? For a fancied glory? Am I to take up the cause of a lot of kings and politicians who play with men's souls, as if they are cards -- dealing them out, a hand here, in the Somme -- a hand there, in Palestine -- a hand there, in the Alps -- a hand there, in Russia -- and because the cards don't match well, call it a misdeal, gather them up, throw them in the discard, and call for a new deal of a million human, suffering souls? And must I be the Deuce of Spades?
Dan continually corrects the record by reminding her of the shared victimage that their generation inherited. Providing nuance is the performance of black masculinity. The father died trying to defend his house. Dan's damaged body is the result from working in a northern factory. Chris' participation in the military draft is the moment of family crisis. In the depiction of early twentieth century community, Dunbar-Nelson raises questions of patriarchy, but masculinity as well.

Chris' choice is particularly difficult because his masculinity is in question. Fighting for the homeland is at the nexus of western masculinity. His father has died for his home, even though the lynch mob burned it down. Dunbar-Nelson uses the Homefront as a larger metaphor for which young black men should die. Dan reminds his brother of black kin who fought in the American Revolution, the War of 1812 and the Civil War. His implication is that World War I should not be different. For Chris, the survival of his immediate family is a larger threat than what happens in Europe. His sense of reality fails to withstand his brother's doubt of his masculinity.
Lucy: Yes, we do, Chris, we do need you, but your country needs you more. And, above that, your race is calling you to carry on its good name, and with that, the voice of humanity is calling to us all -- we can manage without you, Chris.

Chris: You? Poor little crippled Sister. Poor Dan --

Dan: Don't pity me, pity your poor, weak self.

Chris: (clenching his fist.) Brother, you've called me two names today that no man ought to have to take -- a slacker and a weakling!

Dan: True. Aren't you both? (Leans back and looks at Chris speculatively.)

Chris: (Makes an angry lunge towards the chair, then flings his hands above his head in an impatient gesture.) Oh, God!

At the end of the play, Chris resolves himself to serve in the military and that his family is willing to
sacrifice him for patriotic reasons. Dunbar-Nelson's play demonstrated the conflict between patriotism and responsibility in African American life. Although the family chooses patriotism over survival, the play highlights the struggle of family responsibility and national obligation. Chris chooses patriotism, even though he knows that it will mean the destruction of his family.

Alice Childress was one of the most prolific African American women playwrights of the twentieth century. In her play, *Wine in the Wilderness* (1969), playwright Alice Childress presents an African American male attempting to interpret his understanding of African American Womanhood. Bill’s task is to create a triptych depicting three visions of black women. The first panel is a little girl in her Sunday best: ribbons and patent leather shoes. He calls her “Black Girlhood.” The next panel is a depiction of perfect black womanhood. Childress’ stage directions describe her as “cold, but utter perfection, draped in startling color of African material, very “Vogue” looking.” Bill calls her, “Wine in the Wilderness” ... Mother Africa, regal, black
womanhood in her noblest form.” The final panel is blank, waiting for Bill’s commentary on the contemporary state of black women. His description of African American women demonstrates his misguided interpretation of black women.

She’s gonna be the kinda chick that is grass roots, . . . no, not grass roots, . . . I mean she’s underneath the grass roots. The lost woman, . . . what the society has made out of our women. She’s as far from my African queen as a woman can get and still be female; she’s as close to the bottom as you can get without crackin’ up . . . She’s ignorant, unfeminine, coarse, rude, . . . vulgar . . . a poor, dumb chick that’s had her behind kicked until its numb . . . and the sad part is . . . she ain’t together, you know, . . . there is no hope for her. . . . A chick that ain’t fit for nothin’ but to . . . to . . . just pass her by.21

21 Alice Childress, “Wine in the Wilderness”. In Wines in the Wilderness: Plays by African American Women from the Harlem Renaissance to the Present. Edited by Elizabeth Brown-Guillory.
In this example, Childress shows a black man struggling with his notion of black women and how he will artistically render them. During the play, his impressions are contested and reformulated by his experience with a black woman. After his dialog with Tommy (Tomorrow-Marie), what he wants to say about contemporary black women is forever changed. As black women continue to formulate and articulate their experience in the United States, the image of black women in an artistic imagination has had to change to engage the changing reality. Just as Childress’ male artist changed his mediated representation of black womanhood, so must contemporary artists, who are not black women, re-conceptualize their interactions. *Wine in the Wilderness* is a dramatization of a situation that happens every day. A closer look at how an African American man mediates concepts of black women can reveal a snapshot of the discourse between black men and women. The goal of this ongoing conversation is creating a discursive space where black men and women share meaning about each other and their place in American society.
At school, Childress was encouraged to write about great African American leaders. Although the reason for the assignment was to encourage excellence, the unintended consequence is that of fostering feelings of second-class citizenship. The assignment sought to accentuate the noble heroic efforts of great black leaders. In praising such heroics, the assignment missed the necessity of recognizing the courage of everyday people. According to Brown, Childress emphasis in her play was to "representing and revising the notion of what is 'ordinary'" (132). Her efforts recognized that ordinary people suffered from racism and sexism and were not always so successful in overcoming obstacles. Both Tomorrow Marie and Bill Jameson are ordinary people. Tomorrow had been shopping for groceries before a riot and a rainstorm prevents her from getting to a safe place. In her haste, Tomorrow does not bother with the societal expectations of femininity. She wears no makeup and did not wear stylish clothes. In her everyday activity, she finds herself in a middle of a riot, which is a disruptive vision of her world.
Bill sees the riot and her outer accoutrements as her everyday mode of operation. The vision supports his warped notion of black women's lives. Bill, an artist, is delusional in what he thinks about black women. His thinking is wrong and misguided. In her construction of black masculinity, Childress has Bill react to information that directly challenges his interpretation of black women. After Tomorrow sheds wet clothing and wraps herself in a blanket, Bill begins to see the inner beauty of the woman before him and begins to change his mind.

Calling attention to Bakhtin's notion of heteroglossia, Sharadha draws attention to the dialogic relationship between consciousness and subjectivity. "If language for Bakhtin is an expression of social identity, then subjectivity is constituted as a social entity through the role of the word as the medium of consciousness" (Sharadha 21). Based on this notion, black women playwrights filter their expression of African American life through their experience as women. Childress has a vision of black masculinity stemming from his being "walking wounded," specifically where the
"black male struggles to free himself and others from oppressive forces" (Sharadha 130). The way for black men and women to achieve wholeness is by working together and joining forces and resources (130).

Sense making and Chaos: Reading David Alexander

David Alexander appears first in the Adrienne Kennedy's *She Talks to Beethoven*. The year is 1961, and Suzanne Alexander is writing a play about Beethoven while she is residing in West Africa. Revolutionaries have abducted David Alexander, and the audience never sees his body on stage. Through ongoing radio commentary, his voice speaks the words of Franz Fanon. Kennedy reprises David in *The Ohio State Murders*. Suzanne gives a lecture to OSU student in an explanation of the violent imagery in her work. Towards the end of the play, David appears, offering her love and understanding while she copes with her daughters' murders. Again, David does not speak, but his presence is everywhere. He listens to her, provides her with monetary and emotional support. Kennedy refers
to David Alexander in the other plays of the Alexander cycle, The Film Club and The Dramatic Circle.

Beginning with the earliest slave narrative, which spoke of the horrors of slavery, African Americans have fought to express themselves without the assistance of others. At first those narratives had a rhetorical strategy of saying, "I am," with the implication that a justification of humanness must be made to even speak. As the form developed, African Americans were not only able to state their humanity, but also to narrate their lives in America. With good intention, the black person speaking her own tale would be co-opted by the work of Harriet Beecher Stowe and George Aiken. Beginning in 1852 publication of Uncle Tom’s Cabin and the subsequent theatrical productions which lasted continuously for 80 years, African American have had to contend with subtle echoes of a shadow voice – the voice of someone speaking for them.

In Sleep Deprivation Chamber, written by Adam P. Kennedy and Adrienne Kennedy, David Alexander finally speaks. The police have stopped the son, Teddy Alexander, for a broken taillight. The incident occurs
in the front yard of the Alexander residence, where the youth is brutally beaten in front of his father. As a reoccurring character in Adrienne Kennedy's recent dramas, David Alexander personifies a reading of Kennedy's idea of black masculinity. He is a successful scholar and diplomat who works for the common good of the Diaspora. And yet, he has no voice. He is representative of the fractured psyche indicated by Frantz Fanon, through Ralph Ellison.

His subjectivity is in question, because he rarely has personal agency. In *She Talks to Beethoven*, he returns to Suzanne Alexander, but his lack of corporality belies his ability to express inner complexity. In *The Ohio State Murders*, he rescues Suzanne from herself. In his voicelessness, he performs the "perfect black man," always providing and protecting. In *Sleep Depravation Chamber*, an unseen lawyer interrogates David Alexander. The voiceless body controls the situation by the tenor of the questions. The lawyer asks about his military service, his knowledge of handguns and whether anyone else could corroborate his story.
In her article, “This Disease Called Strength: Some Observations on the Compensating Construction of Black Female Character,” Dr. Trudier Harris examines black women in African American literature by casting light on the darker side of black women’s strength. Citing works such as Lorraine Hansberry’s *A Raisin in the Sun*, Alice Walker’s *The Color Purple* and Toni Morrison’s *Song of Solomon*, Harris articulates the ways that black women exhibit strength to the detriment of their families and themselves. For Harris, strength loses its value as a virtue and gains the definition as a disease.

Seldom have we stopped to think, however, that this thing called strength, this thing we applaud so much in black women, could also be a disease. Yet the very virtue so praised historically has, in African American literature, become its own form of ill health. Strength frequently perpetuates dysfunction in literary families, where the strong characters and actions of black women become malignant growths upon the lives of their relatives. Unaltered and uncontained, the virus of strength becomes its own reason for being for these women,
and no matter how compelling the reason, the illness still dominates their lives. (Harris 1995:110)

Unfortunately, the survival techniques exhibited by some fictive black women obscure their ability to show compassion, vulnerability, love and care. In being strong against in adverse conditions, black women may seek to protect others instead of protecting self, thus creating misplaced compassion and diminishing personal vulnerability. The protection of family, that inner strength would ordinarily imply, has the possibility of inhibiting the personal growth and safety of loved ones. Strength is one of the best safeguards against a devaluation of self in American society. As social beings, black women have a variety of other virtues, emotions, behaviors and motivations that interact, support and enhance their ability to display strength. When strength dominates other human attributes, it can be detrimental to a black woman.

In keeping with much of Adrienne Kennedy's plays, *Sleep Deprivation* expressionistic structure invites a free interpretation when performed. Nevertheless, like jazz music, where the musicians improvise at will, the
interpreter who is well versed in the specificity of African American experience. In a technological world, where the media instructs the society nightly that "open season on black men" is a fun spectator, an ethical dimension exists as to how to stage the inner torment of a middle class black woman and the institutionalized violence routinely practiced on black men by the police.

The recent Ohio State University Department of Theatre's production of the play provides a case in point. The production showcased how gaming technology works as a performer in a live production. While the premise of collaboration between the theatre department and The Advanced Computing Center for the Arts and Design (ACAD) was promising, the idea of computers staging brutality of the police on black men was reminiscence of the 1960s epitaph "electronic nigger." Two

_________________________


23 According to a 1971 New York Times article by John Nordheimer, the term "electronic nigger" refers to black people who
technological images from the production highlight a perpetuation of violence toward black men and thus miss the meaning of the written text. A police photo of Teddy Alexander is projected on the theatre wall. Without conceptualization, the image is the equivalent of a "Federal Bureau of Investigation Top Ten Most Wanted" posters. The paradox is that black men are not wanted, but are hunted down for an imagined threat.

The other troubling image was the staging of the police violence. Onstage, the actors performed an intricate choreography, which reiterated the horror of the inflicted violence. Onscreen, the same scene ran, taped with David Jr.'s camcorder. As an audience member, I watched a scene that haunts every adult African American male -- the very real potentiality of police brutality.

are programmed by white people. Ed Bullins uses theme in his play, Electronic Nigger (1967).
The director of the production, Lesley Ferris has written about the staging violence against women\(^\text{24}\). In addition to citing the record of theatrical excess, Dr. Ferris mentioned not only her professional horror of watching women (a self image) cruelly beaten on stage, but also the personal horror of having her daughter look to her and say, and I quote "Are they all just going to stand there and watch? And do nothing? (31)" The production invites the audience to watch Teddy beg for his life saying, "I cant breathe, I cant breathe. I am an American citizen and I cant breath." (Sleep Depravation Chamber 33)" In these final moments, the textual force of the play is overcome by a stronger narrative of televised violence, enhanced with technology. Gone is the anguish of David Alexander's anguish. Overshadowed is Teddy's struggle for breath, life. Did the performance challenge the notions of what the audience already knew? Or did the performance

rehearse, reinscribe, and inculcate the audience into an ideology the text was meant to challenge? Had the performance taught that beating up black men is ok? Ferris ignores her own advice:

Could this image be read as a mover toward understanding, toward reconciliation? Or is it more like that the penile sword presents a troubling image of sexual desire combined with murderous violence? If the latter is true, then it is sobering to locate within the cultural origins of Western art a precursor of the snuff movie. And if theatre is an art of repetition and memory, are we doomed to keep playing these images, these songs, these dramatic moments over and over again. (Ferris 40)
"The form in her plays inexplicably links to the content. The nightmarish, detritus objects that comprise the props of her plays represent the fragmentation of Blacks induced by forced racial migrancy" (Brown-Guillory 2002:184).

Parks' drama, like Adrienne Kennedy's, is difficult to understand. In her plays, the language is surreal with sound and images colliding in the text. According to critic Elizabeth Brown-Guillory, Parks writes "nonlinear representations that challenge audiences to decipher experiences and identities of Blacks working toward agency in a world in which their subjectivity is subordinated by hegemonic discourse" (Brown-Guillory 2002: 184).

The characters in her plays are grotesque, much like those in Flannery O'Connor's short stories. Instead of seeking salvation, the black men in Parks' play seek the ability to understand themselves. If a stilted image of
self in history is an ongoing problem of African Americans interpreting history, then black people would have difficulty understanding themselves. Black people are taught to read the absent self. The continuous death and rebirth of the black men in her plays, force "the past back into the present" (Brown-Guillory 2002: 191).

One sees Fanon's ideologies reverberating in Parks's characters, particularly when circling back to Fanon's comment that 'to speak a language is to take on a world, a culture' (Black Skin, Black Mask 38). Parks's characters refuse to participate in the discourse of dominance -- to take on the culture in totality -- for that would reinforce dominance. They speak the language of the liminal. Suzan-Lori Parks has chosen to create her own howl, one which allows her to reinscribe value upon the black psyche. (Brown-Guillory 2002:196).

Essentialism has caused a crisis in American Black theatre. Whenever an artist innovatively renders an experience, the commercial forces of theatre wish to fix it meaning and replicate its rhetorical significance into dollars. Ryder praises Baraka for his inventiveness but
questions the characterization of men as "romanticized pimps, "idiot savants or fraudulent clergymen" or the women as "brutalized 'ho'" (244). She captures the class differences within African American audiences by isolating the bourgeois idealism, which seeks positive representations, and everyday black folk who see entertainment with a black sensibility.
CHAPTER 4

JAMES BALDWIN, BLACK NATIONALISM AND

THE PERFORMANCE OF GAY BLACKNESS IN AMERICAN DRAMA.

Before the gay intifada in front of the Stonewall Inn, James Baldwin's life and works focused on gay sexualities in American literature. Whether fighting for civil rights or challenging the white literary appropriations of black life, Baldwin provided paradigms for many performances of black masculinity that defied expectation of both white and black America. This chapter investigates Baldwin's legacy of a transgressive black masculinity based on a progressive racial and sexual consciousness. In the civil rights era, definitions of black masculinity coalesced around male models such as Martin Luther King, Jr., Malcolm X, Sidney Poitier and Mohammad Ali. In their individual arena,
these men set a progressive agenda of fighting racism in American culture, while working toward individual aims. The unquestioned sexuality of the individual celebrity masked the cultural fronts of agency, identity and representational transformations. Outside, inside and around the meaning making activity of nation, were marginal lives living in a marginal culture. James Baldwin's varied articulation of black male sexualities pushed boundaries and laid the foundations.

The gay, bisexual, and heterosexual black men in Baldwin's fiction demonstrate an innocence and sensitivity that was denied to black men in "American" fiction, such as Poe, Faulkner, Mailer. Vestiges of their representation appear in an unlikely drama of black nationalists such as Amiri Baraka. The renaissance of gay theatre of the 1980s virtually ignores the groundbreaking representations of Baldwin's fiction. According to plays such as *The Normal Heart* and *Angels in America*, all gay American men are white males, who must decide whether their sexuality precludes the American norms of male sexuality. Such representations reduce non-white male characters to auxiliary ciphers without
interior lives, agency or motive. As shadow characters, non-white, and black gay characters are the blank slate on which white dramatists project white sexual anxiety. In contrast, Baldwin brought gay black men 'from margin to center,' thus developing a forum to examine, exorcise and evaluate specific problems created by the intersections of race, class, gender and sexuality.

I argue that American Drama has relinquished Baldwin's legacy of black masculine transgression to other medias: poetry, the novel, and film. Because of its neglect, the performance of gay black masculinities remain hindered in the medium most responsible for popularizing gay sensibilities. With the advent of the Aids crisis of the 1980s, American Drama was in the forefront of bringing public attention to the plight if thousands of men and women who died of this disease. The unintended consequence of the explosion of Aids plays was the equating of gay life with disease. Gay black life found expression in the poetry of Essex Hemphill, the novels of E. Lynn Harris, and the films of Marlon Riggs and Isaac Julien. In these mediums, African American and Black British artists evoked historical models of caring
between same-sex lovers and connections between the individual and the greater community. Gay black male sexualities are an always already condition which either supported or furthered the agenda of other black freedom struggles. The rhetorical power of these works in contrast with American drama reveals conceptual gaps in understanding and representing gay sexualities in the African American experience.

This chapter investigates the role of black masculine innocence in contemporary black drama. Much like the biblical state of grace before the apple, innocence is a time in human experience free from moral indictment or sin. Innocence gives emotional room and psychic space to learn and grow in relative safety. I do not imply that white males automatically receive innocence or specifically gay white males emerge from innocence energized to meet life's challenges with world knowledge gained in a state of grace. In American drama, the innocence of white male characters often comes at the expense of the black male characters. I specifically focus on black homosexuals because of the group's literary presence in the twentieth century (See Thurman
Current discourses over identity politics has highlighted the necessity of oppressed groups to safeguard group representation, particularly when representation is a coded marker for hegemonic anxiety. Missing in coded representations are the interior lives of characters, which would have resonance with the social materiality of the real group. Recent writing about gay life in theatre (Vorlicky 1995; Savran 1999; Clum 2001) have had the unintended effect of privileging white male bodies and experience, while relegating nonwhite male bodies to prop and set pieces -- sacrifices on the altar of contemporary queerness. Although the representational roots of black male innocence (particularly gay black innocence) had quickened during the Harlem Renaissance, the modern critical stance of "quare theorizing" was fermented in the writings of novelist and social activist James Baldwin. Unlike other black men in the turbulent sixties, James Baldwin paved a different path. As a witness to the civil rights struggle, he gave testimony to the material effects of racism in America (Miller 332). Whereas, Martin Luther King Jr. and Malcolm X
provided a vision of a better world or exhorted millions
to take appropriate actions to change their lives, James
Baldwin wrote narratives that encapsulated the pain of
millions.

Inasmuch as his writing addressed both racial
inequality and sexual difference, Baldwin was the most
preeminent African American examining race and sexuality
in 1960s America. A complicated man who never dismissed
his sexuality as an intrinsic attribute of his identity
and public persona, James Baldwin created a legacy of a
transgressive black masculinity based on a progressive
racial and sexual consciousness. However instrumental it
has been in combating homophobia, contemporary American
Drama has had the worst record in substantiating racial
divisions within queer representations. Baldwin's legacy
contextualizes the motivations of gay black men in
American letters. By combining a review of Baldwin's
theories of black sexuality through the lens of quare
theory, I argue that contemporary American Drama has
missed an opportunity of following Baldwin's legacy and
by extension stands guilty of the theoretical indictment
which Quare readings of American drama might provide.
Quare Fellows and other theorizing

Performance critic, E. Patrick Johnson describes gay black male experience as Quare Theory. Based on the lived circumstances of what gay black men perform both behind the bedroom door and in public spaces, Quare Theory excavates the intersectionality of race, sexuality, gender and class within a community of men who emotionally and sexually express their affections for other men. "'Quare' offers a way to critique stable notions of identity and, at the same time, to locate racialized and class knowledges" (3). Carnal knowledge and race consciousness educates black men to the intrinsic power of human bodies. When society reads a body as male and gay, the death of innocence becomes a discursive site from which maturity, responsibility, and care either grow into fertile self-love and community acceptance or self-loathing and rejection from the community. Understanding gay black masculinity balances on understanding innocence as a transient state where the
individual learns the rules of the game. In America, race and heterosexuality are the master narratives to which gay black men learn to engage, negotiate and challenge. As with all narratives that involve the realm of personal choices, each person makes the story work with their individual life experiences. Johnson draws on the black vernacular of his grandmother’s life “to devise a strategy for theorizing racialized sexuality” (3).

Johnson challenges queer theory, as it has developed in recent years, because it has a tendency to homogenize and erase the differences in the class and race of American homosexuals (3). Specifically, he contends “queer theory has often failed to address the material realities of gays and lesbians of color” (5). By “theorizing the flesh,” Johnson’s analysis recognizes the divergent ways black gays, lesbians and bisexuals live while dismantling racism and classism.

The deconstructive turn in queer theory highlights the ways in which ideology functions to oppress and to proscribe ways of knowing, but what is the utility of queer theory on the front lines, in the trenches, on the street, or anyplace where the
racialized and sexualized body is beaten, starved, fired, cursed – indeed, where the body is the site of trauma. (5)

Ralph Ellison's *Invisible Man* captures the essence of how black bodies work in the world. His protagonist is invisible because others refuse to acknowledge his existence. "Like the bodiless heads you see sometimes in circus sideshows, it is as though I have been surrounded by mirrors of hard, distorting glass. When they approach me they see only my surroundings, themselves, or figments of their imagination -- indeed, everything and anything except me" (7). Johnson combines Ellison's description with Judith Butler's notions of performativity in his theorizing black gay bodies. "The body, I believe, has to be theorized in ways that not only describe the ways in which it is brought into being, but what it does once it is constituted and the relationship between it and the other bodies around it" (Johnson 10). Quare Theory claims the intersection of racial (African American) and sexual (queer) experience as its starting point for analysis. Careful not to replicate the shortcomings of other queer theorizing, Quare Theory includes the entire
phenomenological field including the import of class and internal racism into its narrative. Internal racism among African Americans indicates the ways in which black folks among themselves discriminate against each other because of their skin color. Within gay communities, a similar racism exists. According to Johnson, "Failure to ground discourse in materiality is to privilege the position of those whose subjectivity and agency, outside the realm of gender and sexuality, have never been subjugated" (12).

Theorizing the social context of performance sutures the gap between discourse and lived experience by examining how quares use performance as a strategy for survival in their day-to-day experience .... Moreover, quare theory focuses attention on the social consequences of those performances. It is one thing to do drama on the club stage but quite another to embody a drag queen identity on the street. Bodies are sites of discursive effects, but they are sites of social ones as well. (13)

Johnson further explains how traditional queer theory concentrates its gaze on the discursive affect of
experience rather than the corporal (7). As an example, he sites a speech given by black gay poet Essex Hemphill which criticized Robert Maplethorpe’s photographs of nude black men. In his critique of Robert Maplethorpe's photography of African American male bodies, Kobena Mercer raises difficult questions concerning representation and the performance of a gay black reality. According to Mercer, Maplethorpe represents white male ability to control "the gaze." In doing so, a white male agenda governs what is desirable, who is desirable and when the occasion for contact occurs. Black male bodies relinquish agency and become objects of consumption in the marketplace. Another implication of the photographs is how the images reduce black men to their body parts. Traditionally, the nude highlights the beauty of the human body. Maplethorpe staged his photographs that emphasized black penises. Instead of the human being inside, a black male is the sum total of his penis. Mercer identified “the myths about the violent, aggressive and ‘animalistic’ nature of black sexuality were fabricated and fictioned by the all-powerful white master to allay his fears and anxieties as
well as to provide a means to justify the brutalization of the colonized and any vestiges of guilt" (Kobena and Julien 1994: 194).

Within the black homosexual communities, the controversy concerning Maplethorpe's photography highlighted masculinity and representation issues of race, gender and sexuality. The highly stylized images intended to express the beauty of black male bodies had the unintended consequence loudly proclaiming the colonizing gaze of white male sexuality. According to Hemphill, the photographs captured the colonizing look of white gay male desire and the representation robbed him and his community of self-expression and communicative power. The incident raises the question of how do black men, particularly gay black men communicate the most intimate of personal attributes in a society that feeds on those attributes without understanding the value of what is consumed. During the speech, he was overcome with emotion, which some critics took as a “politics of tears” which trumped an unemotional and reasoned response. For Johnson, the effect of a black man crying in public is a
strategy of “not only talk(ing) of the body, but through
the body as well” (italics in the original) (7).

American cultural life consumes black gay
contributions to the cultural landscape as if their
struggle for self-expression were snack food. “But
although gays derived inspiration form the symbols of
black liberation – Black Pride being translated into Gay
Pride, for example – they failed to return the symbolic
debt, as it were, as there was a lack of reciprocity and
mutual exchange between racial and sexual politics in the
70s” (Kobena and Julien 1994: 192). As an example, white
gay activists like Andrew Sullivan, former editor of the
New Republic, have demonstrated such colorblind amnesia
when Sullivan states "Our civil rights agenda, then,
should have less to do with the often superfluous
minority politics of the 1991 Civil Rights Act and more
to do with the vital moral fervor of the Civil Rights Act
of 1964" (Smith 17).25 As Quare Theory demonstrates, the

25 For further discussion of the tensions between the Civil
Rights Movement and the contemporary Gay Rights Movement see also
Alisa Solomon, "Nothing Special: The Specious Attack on Civil Rights"
richness of black gay life is more than its packaging in mainstream literature. James Baldwin alludes to this dimension when he wrote "It is still true, alas, that to be an American Negro male is also to be a kind of walking phallic symbol: which means one pays, in one's own personality, of the sexual insecurity of others. The relationship, therefore, of a black boy to a white boy is a very complex thing" (Black Boy Looks 290).

James Baldwin and the performance of Quare

James Arthur Baldwin was born in Harlem in 1924. Despite his humble beginnings, Baldwin wrote six novels, two plays, numerous essays, short stories and reviews. Baldwin spoke often about racial injustice and inequity and in the early 1960s advised federal officials on racial issues. By the end of the 1960s, his influence diminished because he refused to pigeonhole his message in Dangerous Liaisons: Blacks, Gays and the Struggle for Equality ed. by Eric Brandt, New York: The New Press, 1999: 59-69.
to the confining ideas of white liberals or black nationalists. He continued writing and bearing witness to the spectacle of racism in America. After a friend's suicide in 1948, Baldwin became an ex-patriot in France, although he still made frequent trips to the United States.

Baldwin remains a paradox, because of the communities of which he was a part. As an African American, Baldwin was the public intellectual whose pen was the sword to match the rhetoric of Martin Luther King, Jr. and Malcolm X. As a gay novelist, Baldwin took gay blacks and whites from the pages of pulp fiction and exposed their complicated lives to an unwilling American public. James Baldwin lived an unabashed gay life, but was ambivalent about speaking about sexuality. As a man of his time, Baldwin represented the incongruence of America's dirty little secret: the inability to talk honestly about the intersections of race, gender and sexuality. Because of his artful constructing of the issues, Baldwin caused American society to talk about gay concerns before gays and lesbians had organized their own defense. Despite his accolades as a gay writer, Baldwin
thought of himself as an African American man, who happened to be gay instead of a gay man who happened to be black. This subtle interpretation of identity is the basis for gay black sexuality to be the primary model for a transgressive black masculinity.

Ironically, Baldwin's view of homosexuality is, in some ways, more similar to that of the black nationalist who blasted him than the white gay community, which has fully embraced the 'gay' aspects of his work. Baldwin sees African American identity as both prior and more grounding. The same-sex disposition for him, not so much an identity as it is a variation within and among the bedrock of racial identity. (Ross 505)

A charge leveled against same-sex desire that it is unnatural and a sin against God. In his essay "Preservation of Innocence," Baldwin refutes that argument by turning the mirror on male/female relationships. He questions the proposition that homosexuality is base because procreation is not a result of same-sex sexuality. If procreation is the problem, Baldwin asks what is to be done with the "unmarried or
poverty-stricken or the feeble" (Innocence, 28), especially since so much guilt is heaped upon the shoulders of homosexuals like "the sea piles seaweed and wreckage on the shore (28)." His issue with the procreation argument is his refusal to take responsibility for the rise and fall of birthrates. "When the race commits suicide, it will not be in Sodom (28)." For Baldwin, sexuality, whatever its type is a part of the natural order of things. "If we are going to be natural then this (homosexuality) is a part of nature; if we refuse to accept this, then we have rejected nature and must find another criterion" (29).

Baldwin continues this theme in "The Male Prison," an essay that comments on the sexual politics of Andre Gide. Baldwin believed that Gide characterized homosexuality as aligned with "dead, great men" and "vanished cultures." He writes, "if he were going to talk about homosexuality at all, he ought, in a word, to have sounded a little less disturbed. (Male Prison 102)" Baldwin states, "It does not seem to me that nature helps us very much when we need illumination in human affairs. I am certainly convinced that it is one of the greatest
impulses of mankind to arrive at something higher than a natural state (Male Prison 102).

The really horrible thing about the phenomena of present-day homosexuality, the horrible thing which lies curled like a worm at the heart of Gide's trouble and his work and the reason that he so clung to Madeline, is that today's unlucky deviate can only save himself by the most tremendous exertion of all his forces from falling into an underworld in which he never meets either men or women, where it is impossible to have either a lover or a friend, where the possibilities of genuine human involvement has altogether ceased. When this possibility has ceased, so has the possibility of growth. (Male Prison 104)

Although Baldwin is critical of Gide's merging of sexuality and politics, he follows his example and uses Gide as a blueprint in Giovanni's Room.

What emerges from Baldwin's essays is a discourse that directly addresses the construction of gay black masculinity. He develops an identity that contains his
sense of race consciousness that is always aware of corporal desire. He derives a strength built on an honest assessment of self and personal power in the world. Baldwin writes, "My revenge, I decided very early, would be to achieve a power which outlast kingdoms" (Black Boy Looks 298). His ideology prefigures the constructionist identity arguments that would structure queer theory of 1990s. "What my friend meant was that to become a Negro man, let alone a Negro artist, one had to make oneself up as one went along. This had to be done in the not-at-all-metaphorical teeth of the world's determination to destroy you. The world had prepared no place for you, and if the world had its way, no place would ever exist" (298).

Baldwin created the framework for a transgressive black masculinity in three novels, *Giovanni's Room* (1956), *Tell Me How Long the Trains been Gone* (1968) and *Just Above My Head* (1979). In these works, Baldwin wrote situations in which he directly criticizes same sex relations. The gay, bisexual and heterosexual black men in Baldwin's fiction demonstrate an innocence and sensitivity that was denied to black men in American
fiction. Vestiges of their representation appear in an unlikely drama of black nationalists such as Amiri Baraka. The heyday of gay theatre of the 1980s virtually ignores the groundbreaking representations of Baldwin's fiction. Because of its neglect, the performance of gay black masculinities remain hindered in the medium most responsible for popularizing gay sensibilities.

In Giovanni's Room (1956), Baldwin uses several rhetorical devices to make his commentary on race and sex in America. David is a white American tormented by self-doubt over his sexuality. The opening pages of the novel are a coming out narrative in which David acknowledges his sexuality by remembering his first homosexual experience. The two young men unite after an overnight stay.

It seemed, then, that a lifetime would not be long enough for me to act with Joey the act of love.

But that lifetime was short, was bounded by that night -- it ended in the morning. I awoke while Joey was still sleeping, curled like a baby on his side, toward me. He looked like a baby, his
mouth half open, his cheek flushed, his curly hair darkening the pillow and half hiding his damp round forehead and his long lashes glinting slightly in the summer sun. We were both naked and the sheet we had used as a cover was tangled around our feet. Joey's body was brown, was sweaty, the most beautiful creation I had ever seen till then. I would touch him to wake him up but something stopped me. I was suddenly afraid. Perhaps it was because he looked so innocent lying there, with such perfect trust; perhaps it was because he was so much smaller than me; my own body suddenly seemed gross and crushing and the desire which was rising in me seemed monstrous. But above all, I was suddenly afraid. It was borne in on me: But Joey is a boy.

Joey's dark body symbolizes strength and power, which overwhelms David. He feels that his body is gross and outrageous in the presence of Joey's body. Baldwin's novel demonstrates a white male who fears all that a black man can be. By depicting David's gaze at Joey, the novelist makes David a metaphor for an American society ill at ease in its body and actions. David avoids Joey
and any type of connection. He begins a flight from reality that will eventually end in Giovanni's destruction.

I saw suddenly the power in his thighs, in his arms, and in his loosely curled fists. The power and the promise and the mystery of that body made me suddenly afraid. That body suddenly seemed the black opening of a cavern in which I would be tortured till madness came, in which I would lose my manhood. Precisely, I wanted to know that mystery and feel that power and have that promise fulfilled in me. The sweat on my back grew cold. I was ashamed. The very bed, in its sweet disorder, testified to vileness. (12)

As the passage continues, Baldwin demonstrates a particular indictment of projected white male anxiety. Not only is David ashamed of his sexuality and the funkiness of sex, but he projects his fear on the “darkness” of his lover. Joey’s body becomes the blackboard for which David works through his algorithms of sexual distress.
A cavern opened in my mind, black, full of rumor suggestion, of half-heard, half-forgotten, half-understood stories, full of dirty words. I though I saw my future in that cavern. I was afraid. I could have cried, cried for shame and terror, cried for not understanding how this could have happened to me, how this could have happened in me. And I made my decision. I got out of bed and took a shower and was dressed and had breakfast ready when Joey woke up. (13)

The next morning, David pretends the night before did not happen and in subsequent meetings becomes increasingly violent toward Joey. Years later, the pattern is repeated as Giovanni faces the death penalty for murdering his employer. "And because of David's own personal dilemma, which seems ostensibly to be about homosexuality, but is in reality about the consequences of self deception, the problem of homosexuality becomes not a motive for protest in the novel, but rather a metaphor for society, in the form of social injunction, of what one is not, at all costs, to be. (Johnson-Roullier 2000:139)"
In *Tell Me How Long The Train’s Been Gone* (1968), James Baldwin tells the story of Leo Proudhammer, an aging African American actor who has suffered a heart attack. As Leo recuperates, he attempts to understand his relationships to Barbara, a white actress, Caleb, his brother and his life in the theatre. Between his profession, poor upbringing and sexual orientation, Leo Proudhammer enters each stage of his life with great innocence. He arms himself with a conviction to be true to himself, while not succumbing to incapacitating fear and self-loathing. In this novel, Baldwin begins to further expand his theories of manhood, which encompass his thoughts concerning race, masculinity, sexuality and surviving the American social landscape. The novel is epic in its scope, and yet captures Baldwin’s concept theatre with the main themes of his writing.

Born in Harlem, Leo has working class parents who have migrated from the Caribbean. His father turns his memories of home into a mythology of freedom and innocence that will elude his sons, Caleb and Leo. His mother fears for the men in her life, and overcomes it with a wealth of understanding. She navigates the
hazards of her environment by using her dignity as a weapon. Caleb is the older brother who often treats his brother badly, but steadfastly looks after him in their neighborhood. Because of this connection to his brother, Leo thinks of his family as loving and in his childhood innocence holds his family in high esteem. As he grows older, the family makes greater demands of his love and time. In fear of mortality and the despair of failed lives, each member of the family invests Leo with a dream of their deferred dreams and attempts to withdraw more emotional capital than what was ever invested.

In the sections of the novel that address Leo’s early life, Baldwin writes the life of youthful black innocence. Part of child’s growing process is listening to his parents' talk of the world outside the front door. With his father’s complaining about the plight of black men in America, the erosion of Leo’s innocence is the foundational theme upon which the novel rests. While shopping with his mother, Leo carefully notices how she evades creditors and maneuvers around demanding landlords.
To escape loneliness that comes from the rougher boys in the neighborhood and the reluctance of Caleb to have his brother around him, Leo escapes to the movies and develops a critical eye that is beyond his years. On one occasion, Leo returns from the movies too early and goes into an abandoned house to evade the rain. In the house, he sees a couple having sex. The couple writhes in violent ecstasy and frightens the young Leo. When he escapes the house, Caleb finds his brother shivering and wild with fear. This incident cements their relationship in combination with an incident during which the two youths are stopped by the police. They solidify their relationship despite their previous brotherly antagonism. In each circumstance, Leo is an innocent gaining knowledge inappropriate to his age. Leo thinks deeply about each moment where his innocence is lost and each occurrence is portrayed through the frame of remembrance of an older, sickly man. As he reaches young adulthood, Leo becomes more cosmopolitan than his peers are. In contrast to the life lessons of the street, such as hustling money, stealing for profit (or survival) or looking for sex, Leo is different than the other young
men growing up in his neighborhood. His introduction into the art of theatre comes later, but his homework in suffering, particularly the loss of his innocence had been completed before he arrives on stage.

Baldwin paints Leo as a bisexual man who loves people on the basis on personality rather than gender or race. While working at a theatre workshop, he has sexual relationships with two different white women. The first is an actress in the company with whom he flirts and eventually has a sexual relationship. Their relationship is brief and has the promise of something more than sexual release. However, the police detain him after a neighbor complains of a black male being in the wrong place at the wrong time. Again, he loses his innocence in that he cannot freely express his sexuality without social pressure. By the time he becomes involved with Barbara, he is aware of social pressure and yet he forges ahead. When they are together, the two lovers are kindred spirits who question what life will hold for them and what strategies they will use to conquer the world. Yet, when the young black man and white woman travel through the town or perform their scenes, they encounter
more than the challenge of traveling from place to place or the intricacies of acting. The meaning of their skin and sex inform their experience. As a white woman, Barbara negotiates attacks on her morality for sleeping with a black man and sheltered upbringing in Kentucky. No matter her challenge, she continues to have the safety net of white female privilege. In contrast, Leo’s experience is always more dire in that sleeping with a white woman has deathly implications on his life. His initial forages into theatre offer him possibilities without dimension. His relationship with Barbara ends with a lifelong friendship and the basis for other relationships, although none of them will ever measure up to this one.

Most of Leo’s relationships with men are short and fleeting. He has one with a young man who has fallen in love with him, but the relationship has little influence on his life. Baldwin gives another example of a male actor who inappropriately fondles Leo onstage during the run of the show. Leo gets the final revenge by grabbing the man’s testicles in a vice grip during the last show. He also has fleeting relationships in movie houses, where
he allows men to have access to his body. These scenes function to display Leo’s insistence on new experience and open sexuality.

The most deeply sensual and meaningful sexual interchange in the novel happens between Leo and his brother Caleb. After being released from prison for a larceny charge, Caleb comes home to Harlem a broken man. He realizes that whatever few options he had before prison, they are now gone, and he must somehow start life anew. At this point in his life, Caleb does not have homophobia and does not condemn a sexuality that is part of Leo's life. He is disturbed when a guard threatens rape while Caleb is in prison. In conjunction with the other realities of prison, Caleb has experienced a deep hurt that only his later conversion to Christianity alleviates. During this moment of desperation, he reaches for his brother. Although they had shared a bed from childhood, apparently this is the first instance of sexual exploration between the brothers. Their mutual gratification is removed from the power games of conventional sexual relations, homosexual or otherwise. It is an exchange of love, whose foundation is a lifetime
of interchange. Although incestuous, the brother’s encounter only happens once and is never discussed later in the novel.

Baldwin tries to understand the American character through his speculations on sexuality and manhood. During medieval times, North America was a shadowy place whose unknowns reflected the insecurity of the times. The maps of the time depict North America as the place where "Here be dragons." His analysis supports the notion that what is unknown and misunderstood looms as a dangerous creature within human understanding.
Sexuality, nationhood and the expression of both, reside in the human imagination instead of scientific fact. Sexuality, particularly American male sexuality, is undetermined with blank spaces that indicate the dwellings of dragons. Baldwin calls the indeterminacy an androgynous site, which male and female gender formations reside. However, love between a man and a woman, or love between any two human beings, would not be possible without availability of spiritual resources in both sexes (814).
In American jurisprudence, those accused of crimes have a presumption of innocence. No matter the suspected crime, society confers on individuals the state of grace, that must be impugned by state power. Under this philosophy, the burden of proof is on the state. With its considerable power, the state is responsible for gathering evidence, which substantiates the allegation of guilt. With the plethora of television courtroom shows that have proliferated American television, this notion may seem to be a given. However, many black men feel that this basic right is not theirs to exercise.

Another angle on innocence is the degree of one's knowledge. In what circumstances is naiveté and ignorance interchangeable? Naiveté is a pure state of not knowing. Babies and small puppies are naive in that any adult expectations beyond cuteness are an exercise in futility. Ignorance is dangerous in that irrational fear becomes a rational choice of action. Governor Wallace standing in the shadow of the schoolhouse door displays ignorance. He knew what he was doing and consciously decided not to understand its effect.
The American ideal, then, of sexuality appears to be rooted in the American ideal of masculinity. This ideal has created cowboys and Indians, good guys and bad guys, punks and studs, tough guys and softies, butch and faggot, black and white. It is an ideal so paralytically infantile that it is virtually forbidden -- as an unpatriotic act -- that the American boy evolve into the complexity of manhood. (815)

Baldwin's article, "Freaks and American Ideal of Manhood" (1985), is a coming out story written many years after he had become the most famous African American homosexual of his time. Referring to his adolescence/young adulthood, Baldwin frames his story as one of complete innocence. "There were no X-rated movies then, but there were, so to speak, X-rated audiences. For example, I went in complete innocence." (819). He speaks of an older man who cared and listened to him when others at home and church did not. The institutions, which were supposed to alleviate his adolescent angst, were against Baldwin because he was a stepchild at home and a child evangelist at church. "And though I loved
him, too -- in my way, a boy's way -- I was mightily
tormented" (819). His sexuality blossomed amongst
predatory men viewed Hollywood movies in the middle of
the afternoon.

While attending the movies, Baldwin remembers "a
combination of innocence and terror prevented me from too
clearly apprehending the action taking place in the
darkness of the Apollo -- though I understood it well
eough to remain standing a great deal of the time"
(820). It becomes his introduction into the world of
men. "This cunning stratagem failed when, one afternoon,
the young boy I was standing behind put his hand behind
him and grabbed my cock at the very same moment that a
young boy came up behind and put his cock against my
hand: Ignobly enough, I fled, though I doubt I was
missed" (820).

Far from rape narratives or the tenderness-of-loss-
of-virginity narratives, Baldwin's experience underscores
the argument for the innocence of black men. In the
context of attending a motion picture, a context of
fantasy and inner contemplation of the bright screen and
dark theater, the young black man experiences a loss of
innocence. His initiation into the sexual world is with strangers, most of whom are older white men. "There were all kinds of men, mostly young, and in those days, almost exclusively white" (820).

Baldwin has created a discursive space for black men by imagining a man that ignores social restrictions. His personal life as a homosexual taught him that being unmoored is a place from which to operate. An aspect of Baldwin’s fiction is its ability to destabilize gender and sexual identity constructions, which in Degout's point of view are the basis of hegemonic patriarchy (Degout 129). Racism and sexism are distinct characterizations of human behavior but are inextricably linked. While Judith Butler envisions sexuality as performative of the self, Baldwin, in contrast, theorizes that sexuality is formulated through “the ‘eye’ of another (i.e. one’s parents, one’s lover). Through which the sexual is linked to the Self and because of which one’s sexuality is defined by the direction of one’s own gaze" (Degout 131). Degout discusses the placelessness of Baldwin’s situation.
Within some Black communities, Baldwin was ostracized because he was gay. In gay communities, he was ostracized because he was black. He did not understand either community’s animus towards women, considering that he did not discriminate friendship on the basis of sex or sexuality. Baldwin’s vision is a universal construction of a global community where such identity politics are secondary to the interconnectedness of people (132). The way Baldwin re-envisions notions of gender and sexuality and debunks conflations of this viewpoint with other identity signifiers ultimately deconstructs the (American) ideal of masculinity (or manhood) as it affects and is critiqued through characters presenting a range of genders and sexualities (Degout 134).

Racialization proceeds from the ideas of an African American as an individual to the idea of the African American as an indistinguishable racialized and sexualized (de-sexed) black body, a body identified not only in its nudity but also through the very act of castration (139). Baldwin thus constructs a variety of narratives that chronicle the process of maturation and
highlight ideological disruptions in it. This narrative recurrence draws the reader’s attention to Baldwin’s critique of indoctrination into American mythology (141). By Baldwin's recollection, alienation from masculinity is due to his being menaced by it. According to Shin and Judson, "A legacy of the antebellum South, celebrated by 1920s primitivism and consumer culture, this cultural mythology was perpetrated in the 1960s by the radical black left and white liberals like Mail and Norman Podhoretz" (Shin and Judson 24). Shin and Judson reject the similarities in feminist and black consciousness movement of the 1960s and 1970s. In his fiction, Baldwin displaces "autonomous, middle-class, white-male body with the erotic feminized black-male body" (Shin 249).

In *Blues for Mister Charlie*, James Baldwin reworks a familiar story of Southern violence. Richard Henry, the African American son of local minister Meridian Henry returns home after living in New York. While in the North, Richard became the ultimate hipster and thoroughly rejected his southern beginnings. Besides lifestyle, his main contention with his father is the mysterious death of his mother. Having experienced greater freedoms in
New York, Richard insists on buying a coke in a local store. The store owner Lyle Britten believes that Richard has propositioned his wife and murders Richard. The local newspaper editor, Parnel James investigates the murder and quickly deduces Britten’s crime. James becomes paralyzed by the conflict between justice for Richard’s death and racial tranquility in the town. Baldwin stages this conflict with James’ conversations with Britten and Rev. Henry which indicate the failure of southern white liberalism. In these interchanges, Baldwin develops the intricacies of male bonding. The conversations are heartfelt and meaningful, yet unproductive.

In Richard, Baldwin breaks the rules of appropriate black masculinity of the time. Richard rejects the restrictions that his hometown has placed on him. He does not go to school or marry the hometown girl. As a musician, he does not teach or sing songs in church, but instead pursues the life of an artist. As ultimate hipster, Richard exercises his right of choice and sometimes making bad ones: a life of drugs and the hedonist use and abuse of women, particularly white
women. He stands in relief to his father, who fits neatly into the stratified racist society. The father preaches, ministers to his folk and attempts to make life better for his community. He demonstrates a long-suffering strength that benefits survival of the community, but does little for his personal agency.

American Drama

James Baldwin had a disdain for theatre. He only published two plays, and had workshop production of *Giovanni’s Room* with the Actor’s Theatre in New York.

All roles are dangerous. The world tends to trap and immobilize you in the role you play: and it is not always easy -- in fact it is always extremely hard -- to maintain a kind of watchful, mocking distance between oneself as one appears to be and oneself as one actually is. (Black Boy Looks 291)

Black homosexuals occupy all spaces of African American life, from the pulpit to the battlefield.
Leonard Patterson was a gay black minister who attended the Ebenezer Baptist Church. Reverend Joseph Roberts who replaced Martin Luther King, Sr. asked Reverend Patterson to leave because of his white lover (See Nero 408). Perry Watkins was a soldier who informed his chain of command that he was gay. When the Army finally refused to reenlist him, a federal judge ordered the service to reinstate him (Shilts 424).

However, black gay representation is a cultural performance divorced from the materiality of the men who create and live black gay experience. Marlon B. Ross comments that for gay African Americans, "integrating same-sex desire within the self meant finding a way to remain integrated with the home community while remaining true to one's desire" (Ross 2000:504-505). Gay black male sexuality finds a comfortable place in many black communities if the man can protect himself. Ross comments, "the swish is admired for his daring testing of the waters" (Ross 2000: 516). Ironically, Baldwin's view of homosexuality is, in some ways, more similar to that of the black nationalist who blasted him than the white gay community, which has fully embraced the 'gay' aspects
of his work. Baldwin sees African American identity as prior and grounding. The same-sex disposition for him, is not so much an identity as it is a variation within and among the bedrock of racial identity (Ross 505).

Ironically, the image of African American male heterosexual performance found nurture in the writings of a gay black man. Baraka has acknowledged his debt to Baldwin's *Blues for Mister Charlie* as being the start of the Black Arts Movement. The purpose of this movement was the raising and validation of an African American consciousness. While Baldwin had always been supportive of the Civil Rights Movement, he could easily have been labeled an integrationist by his need and reliance on a Eurocentric gaze for his writings. However, Baldwin has always written truth to power, and thus resisted easy labeling. He built his vision for black people and black men specifically on a love and nurturing ethos. Within such a frame, black men love the people they care about and enable them to create discursive space in a hostile society. The love ethos is the basis of black homosexual love, desire, and practice, but it is limited to the body

163
politics of white gay aesthetics. For Baldwin, you can love your brother and his difference.

The spaces for black men in African American writing has been either to proclaim humanity or to fight for the rights and privileges under existing conditions. The fight for humanity is tenuous at best, but the goal continues to be the rights and privileges of a corrupt system. The identity quest that so often encapsulates discussion of black male literary characters is moot when there is no place to be somebody. How can a black man guard his innocence long enough so that wisdom guides his life choices. Baldwin's legacy to contemporary drama is the creation of discursive space for a black man to occupy. In these spaces, men are “quare” and heterosexual in addition to practicing same-sex, heterosexual, and cross-racial sexualities. In this discursive field, communication happens betwixt and between. This performance highlights Johnson’s reading of “quaredom” a theorizing of bodies “brought into being.” While it is important to recognize the political implications of black gay rhetoric and aesthetics in contemporary imaging of black masculinity, a sexual
litmus test should not be the price of admission. Mutual respect seems to be the hallmark for coexistence.

Homosexuality was counter to the Black Nationalist agenda. Race consciousness and black political activism rested on a platform of controlling black patriarchy. Under this ideology, black men would achieve full parity with white male privilege, with its undercurrents of misogyny and homophobia. Black men could not be gay because it would be "race suicide." Race suicide implies the elimination of African Americans and their experience by intermarriage, abortion or homosexual acts. Homosexuality is then the ultimate self erasure in that individuals would emphasize carnality as opposed to procreation. To love each other or non-black men was seems as the supreme brain washing of white supremacist propaganda because it ignored the emotional connections that men can experience.

In Boys in the Band, Mart Crowley describes a birthday party where a group of gay men discuss love and life. Michael is gay, but does not want to be, and from this position of self-loathing makes all of his friends miserable. Donald is his best friend. He is as neurotic
as Michael is, but not as mean-spirited. Hank and Larry have been lovers for the past two years, but are having problems with their expectations of their relationship -- Larry being a free-love artist and Hank having left his wife and children to be with Larry. The rest of the characters are Emory, a very effeminate pun-spewing guy; Harold, the guest of honor and a hustler, Michael’s birthday present to Harold. A former college friend of Michael, Alan, crashes the party and sends everyone into a frenzy of self-examination.

John Clum has written extensively about the isolation of the play's depiction of a "gay self." He writes, "the boys in the band know that they are gay, alone, and unhappy -- that they would be happier if they were straight" (255). Clum is particularly critical of the unquestioned psychological analysis presented in the play. For him, the play stages the dangers of a closeted gay existence for which extreme isolation is the only solace. Despite his ability to praise another man for his good looks, athletic ability or winning personality, Alan denies that a physical relationship ever existed. The party is shock therapy for Alan, who decides that a
loveless life with his wife is better than an isolated gay one.

The party ends on a variety of notes that signal the isolated closets where each gay man exists. Michael seeks salvation in the catholic mass. His hope is that the physical exercise and prayer will alleviate the horrendous case of nerves he will experience the next day, and the rest of his life. Donald seeks solace in a book and a bottle of brandy. His isolation is alcohol and knowledge, while others make love upstairs. In the upper room, Hank and Larry reunite in what would be a parody of heterosexual marital bliss. They have fought publicly and their reconciliation with its counter thrust to Michael's game is very public. Harold leaves with his hustler, who tries "to show a little affection -- it keeps me from feeling like a whore" (125). Emory takes Bernard home, insulting him all the way by saying "Oh Mary, you are a heavy mother" (125). By the end of the play, every gay man goes to his quiet closet of loneliness.

The lone African American at the party, Bernard, is a circulation librarian. Bernard's presence on stage
gives an implicit promise of interrogating the hyphenated identities of American gay life. Whether the man is gay and Jewish (Harold), gay and upper-class (Michael and Alan), gay and white (Donald) or gay with children (Hank), Crowley's boys all make some statement about living gay in a pre-Stonewall New York. Bernard is gay and black and as such remains the ultimate outsider, serving as a mirror to white male (and gay) neurosis. He functions as comic foil for several of the men, particularly Emory. In addition to calling Bernard, "the queen of spades," Emory tells him that he would "look divine in a hammock, surrounded by louvers and ceiling fans and lot and lots of lush tropical ferns" (32). With this entrance, Crowley cast Bernard as the tropical other and pigeonholed him into the worst of racial stereotypes.

Michael:  Emory.  I'm going to need some help with dinner and you're elected.  Come on!

Emory  I am always elected.

Bernard:  You're a natural-born domestic.
Emery: Said the African Queen! You come on too - - you can fan me while I make the salad dressing. (43)

Bernard contributes to his own domination when he serves. While the other men continue to claw at each other, Bernard's story is lost among the chaos and his presence is reduced to "that gay black guy on stage" who suffers the insults of his supposed friends.

The possibility of interracial love among gay men is not the issue for early contemporary gay plays. Bernard's loss of innocence is unmarked in the plot and unnoticed by the other characters on stage. He has neither the race consciousness nor defense mechanism of a Baldwin character. The resulting scene is character lacking self-respect inhabiting a black body, surrounded by white characters whose self-discovery is the center of the action.

Bernard is the first to play the game, which eventually derails the party. Each man is to call the first person with whom he fell in love and confess his affection. A point system will determine who will.
Bernard had fallen in love with the son of his mother's white employer. Along with his counterparts, he plays the game and loses thereby reinforcing his outsider status within this constructed queer world. As Baldwin reminds us, "All roles are dangerous. The world tends to trap and immobilize you in the role you play; and it is not always easy -- in fact it is always extremely hard -- to maintain a kind of watchful, mocking distance between oneself as one appears to be and oneself as one actually is" (Black Boy Looks 291). How had Bernard managed his sexuality through the Civil Rights Era? Knowing the existing apartheid operational in American society, what more does Bernard think or feel about loving a white man? What action, if any, did the white object of desire provide Bernard to think of the possibility of reciprocity? In the aftermath of a childhood incident, what other lovers have entered Bernard's life, thus negating or generating a racial consciousness that surely would have coalesced into his black life? Indeed, Crowley misses the opportunity Bernard provides. Within Crowley's drama, Bernard is window dressing for gay white male depravity. Following a demeaning seventeenth
century legacy, black bodies are the marker for white depravity. While attempting to say, "Look how progressive we are to have black friends," Bernard's character is a smoky mirror, which reflects but communicates its own depth of meaning.

Despite their avowed homophobia, Black Nationalist playwrights such as Amiri Baraka infused their black male characters with the innovation, determination and verve that characterized Baldwin. In contrast, gay American theatre has abandoned Baldwin in its construction of black masculinity. Gay Black male characters have graced American stages in the decades since the publication of Baldwin's first novel. Gay characters from Boys in the Band to Angels In America and Six Degrees of Separation do not have the complexity of Baldwin's characterizations. The progression or evolution of a gay black male subjectivity suffers from gay racism. In his survey of gay theatre, Mark Gevisser provides a review of the most popular plays of the 1980s. In his attempt to write a manifesto of what gay theatre is, he alludes that what exists has nothing to do with the materials condition of gays and lesbians of color.
Rites of definition occur in communities that do not consider themselves already defined or that are discontent with the way they have been defined by others. There is obviously no annual WASP Pride Day; there's no funky little theatrical space way up in the East 80s called the Straight-Boy Café where men can gather together to define and redefine a collective identity, because every commercial theater is a Straight-Boy Café; every proscenium north of 14th Street frames a stable heterosexual white male identity that has been set in stone for centuries. (Gevisser 47)

Black Nationalism emerged as one by-product of the Civil Rights Struggles of the 1960s. In the fight for racial equality, the Civil Rights Era had an implied vision of racial integration into the existing American culture. At the preeminent civil rights leader, Martin Luther King represents this point of view. An alternative view of integrationist ideology was the economic freedom of Malcolm X. Basing his rhetorical vision on the tenants of Islam and the economic determinism of Marcus Garvey, Malcolm X rejected the
notion of joining white America. For him, black people needed to fend for themselves without the assistance of white America. Whereas Malcolm X adjusted his views after his pilgrimage to Mecca, he personifies the contrary view of African American political thought at mid-century. In the midst of these two ideologies, grew the Black Power movement, which benefited from the political gains and grassroots organization of both philosophies.

Central to Black Nationalist Thought is the notion of a unified cultural history of African American. This cultural history assumes a pristine cultural past from a pre-colonial Africa. The result of a unified vision of a shared cultural past created a pride in a common national consciousness and identity. The downside of the Black Nationalist vision was the exclusionary rhetoric, which rejected many African Americans. An African American from Wyoming is very different from an African American from North Carolina, California or Vermont. In addition to creating classes of blackness with the African American populous, Black Nationalism viewed black women as auxiliary to the cause.
Eldridge Cleaver's "Notes on A Native Son," is perhaps the most vociferous attack on James Baldwin. Tracing his argument from a creation myth of the Reverend Elijah Mohammad to the musing of Norman Mailer, Cleaver uses Baldwin's homosexuality as a rationale for his attack. He attempts to emasculate Baldwin's legitimate examination of pan-African efforts to envision postcolonial black identities. The bleakness of Baldwin's fictive characters gave support to the psychosis with which Cleaver attributed to "Baldwin's own psychic ills" (Schrero 99).

Cleaver's supposed project was to critique Baldwin's "Princes and Powers." The essay is an account of the 1956 Negro-African Writers and Artists Conference, in Paris France. Alioune Diop, Leopold Senghor, Aimé Cesaire, Jacques Alexis and Richard Wright were just a few of the writers/presenters at the conference. In his essay, Baldwin goes through each presentation and he engages his counterparts in debate. This was not the strategy of Cleaver. Cleaver equated black same-sex desire as a racial death wish, compounded by an inability to have a white man's child (Cleaver 100).
difficulty arises in that the reader is never sure with whom Cleaver is upset: black homosexuals, white men or anybody who does not agree with Cleaver's point of view. What Cleaver misses in Baldwin's writing is a race consciousness that always trumped the vicissitudes of sexual identity politics. Indirectly, Baldwin would have an unlikely supporter in Huey Newton, the founder of the Black Panther Party. Newton had his hang-ups about homosexuality, but he fully supported a man's right to his own body. In effect, he saw gay liberation struggles as revolutionary as black liberation. According to Newton, "The terms 'faggot' and 'punk' should be deleted from our vocabulary, and especially we should not attach names normally designed for homosexuals to men who are enemies of the people like Nixon or Mitchell. Homosexuals are not enemies of the people" (Manifesto 2001:91).

In The Toilet, a group of boys stages a fight in a school restroom. The setting is a public place, where men take care of basic bodily functions. While the content argument has sexual content and the scene can be construed as having a sexual context, it does not.
Within Baldwin’s coming of age narrative, it is the dark places of the movie theatres that are the spaces for the manifestation of sexual desire. The toilet is a physical place for handling penises. In this place, the boys have permission as it were, to touch their genitalia without sexual desire. Against this backdrop, Baraka stages a war for tenderness and recognition. The victim has written a letter professing love and affection for the group leader, Foote. Because other gang members have already beaten him, Foote attempts to end the confrontation. The kid insists on fighting. He calls Foote by his real name, Ray.

Beating up Karolis is an act of hyper masculinity, a communal action where the other is exorcised. Group becomes jury and the sentence has the potential to become lethal. Much like the lynch mobs that killed men for their potential sexuality, here the boys are unmasked but retain their lethal potential. The boys have a dilemma as to whether to kill the outsider or to exorcise the gay demon within their mist. Ray/Foote has committed the double crime of not only feeling for another male but a white at that. The beating he receives is his penitence.
However, grace remains illusory because it is never revealed if Ray/Foote receives Karolis’s love.

Foote: (moving around with his hands up to fight. They both move around each other and FOOTS seems to get momentarily, a change of heart): Look now, Karolis. . .you’re just gonna get your head blocked.

Karolis: (as if he didn’t hear): No. You have to fight me. I sent you a note, remember. That note saying I loved you. (The others howl at this.) The note saying you were beautiful. (Tries to smile.) You remember that note, Ray?

Foote: Goddamn it, if you’re going to fight, fight you cocksucker!

Karolis: Yeh. That’s what I’m going to do Ray. I’m going to fight you. We’re here to fight. About that note, right? The one that said I wanted to take you into my mouth.

FOOTS lunges at KAROLIS and misses.
Did I call you Ray in that letter...or Foots?  *(Trying to laugh.)*  Foots!
*(Shouts.)*  I’m going to break your fucking neck.  That right.  That’s who I want to kill.  Foots!

Even in this early play of Baraka’s we can see the intermingling of the quare and the performance of innocence.  In this interstice, characters fight for agency; purity contrasts filth and the community bears witness to and polices the bounds of behavior.  Within the interior world of boys becoming men, sexuality is fought for, neglected and staged with a multiple of masculinities on display.

KAROLIS:  No, no his name is Ray, not Foots.  You stupid bastards.  I love somebody you don’t even know.

*He is dragged to the floor.  The crowd is kicking and cursing him.*

The main characters in this play stage the battle of wills so endemic to race relations within the sexual
gender minefield. In contrast to Baldwin’s assertion that Nobody Knows My Name, Karolis is familiar with the object of his desire. By reverting to the truthfulness of the naming convention, Karolis rejects extemporaneous accoutrements. Instead of taking his name or reinventing Ray as Foote, Karolis calls him as his parents have named him, raised him and educated him. By calling him by his real name, the white male is demonstrates the privilege of seeing as a person. Karolis see more and experiences more of the particularity of Ray’s being than the young black men know and experience of Foot. The phenomenological entity of a young black male with same sex desire for a white male becomes divided between a person who can experience interracial love or a person with a race consciousness but limited by group bigotry. Karolis agrees to fight Foots, in order to kill off the group member. He fights in order to come closer to Ray.

Tener believes that the play is a coming of age play, a ritual that displays the movement from boyhood to manhood. He frames his argument as "the ideological drift from the sense of what is a boy to the sense of what is a man" (148). Baraka's image of black man is
that of a black male as conflict between a black intellectual and the community of black men in a white society. By being in a white society, heroes and idols "determine not only their psychological awareness of self but also helps shape their daily behavior" (149). Trying to imagine self in a surrealistic world, "the reel is running out" of a Lone Ranger trailer (150). In his analysis, Tener cast Karolis as the gay outsider who symbolizes "demoralization and confusion of standards for behavior within the white system" (151). Conflicting with this depiction is that Karolis see Ray for his humanity and is willing to fight for this vision.

Both Baraka and Baldwin fall under the Quare Rubric. Each understands the materiality of lived experience of gendered and raced individuals. The writing of both men specifically address the methods of survival for gay black men of their time. For Baldwin, the performance of sexuality is a continuous process by which each informed the other. Baraka did not understand black homosexuals per se, but he did know enough not to ridicule what he did not understand. In The Toilet, a bond exists between the two boys that Ray does not understand. He is torn
between his group affinity with the other boys and the leadership he must demonstrate and his feelings for Karolis. Modern Drama in America forgets the path that performative black masculinity has already tread.

Pomo Afro Homos were an African American performance collective that challenged directly the negative images of African American gay men in the 1990s. Their performances engaged specific depictions from stage plays and television and voiced an opposing view. The productions also proposed views of gay black life, not so easily consumed by American culture. According to David Román, Pomo Afro Homos were able to "continually shift the tone of the performance, disturbing an audience's expectations both formally and thematically" (Román 1998:165).

The depictions of gay black males have been more prevalent in film and television. *Looking For Langston* (1988) is a cinematic fantasy of black gay sexuality in the Harlem Renaissance. Isaac Julien creates a world where black male sexuality and gaze are central to the film.
Filmmaker, Marlon Riggs defended his place in African American life in his films and criticism. Riggs takes heterosexual black masculinity to task for its selective memory of African American history. Before he died of AIDS, his videos *Tongues Untied* (1989) and *Black Is, Black Ain't*, (1995) Riggs documents the multifaceted nature of gay Black life. Gay Black men become a scapegoat in African American communities so that heterosexual black men have "an essential Other against which a black men and boys maturing, struggling with self doubt, anxiety, feelings of political, economic, social and sexual inadequacy -- even impotence -- can always measure themselves and by comparison seem strong, adept, empowered, superior. (Riggs 1995:471)"

The television show *In Living Color*, (1990) created a cultural and media sensation with its "Men on Film" sketch. Producer, Keenan Ivory Wayans had created a sketch comedy show that parodied every aspect of American life. In "Men on Film," two effeminate gay black men who gave film reviews infused with sexual word play. David Alan Grier and Damon Wayans played the characters who introduced 'clutch the pearls' and 'two snaps in a Z-
formation' into the national vocabulary. Not since Flip Wilson's 'Geraldine,' had the gay or transsexual black sexuality been on national television. Critical response to the reoccurring segment was a mixture of adoration and condemnation.

James Baldwin's private and public life is a framework for quare theorizing. He was able to combine the materiality of his sexuality and his racial consciousness into his fiction and non-fiction. This sensibility also influenced his writing of heterosexual characters. Baldwin's example influenced Amiri Baraka. Baraka's early play, The Toilet, continued an exploration in the worlds of racialized sexuality. In the last twenty years, the commercial American theatre has stages a plethora of plays dealing with homosexuality that privileges the white gay male body as normative. While few efforts such as theatre troupes like Pomo Afro Homos have attempted to stage Quare experience, other mediums such as film, television, fiction and television have had a greater degree of success in tackling this subject.
In a recent episode of the HBO miniseries, Six Feet Under, David and Keith go to couples' counseling. Keith, an African American ex-policeman, is suffering from aggression problems. David, a white funeral director, is a passive aggressive, and has trouble negotiating his gay identity. During the session, the psychologist asks David to explain how he feels when Keith speaks to him, specifically in anger. David provides a litany of troubles, which substantiate a feeling of lessening value in Keith's life. The interchange is honest, intense and tests the ability of the couple to withstand interpersonal pressure. The psychologist turns to Keith
and requests a reaction. Keith responds, "Sounds like a lot of whining to me."

In a psychologically therapeutic context, Keith's behavior is common among modern American man regardless of race. He is uncomfortable, guarded, frustrated and very angry. His own feelings prohibit him communicating with the one person who most cares about him. However, Keith is African American and in the politically charged realm of American television (network and cable), the representation of black men remains connected the well of anger. Despite his sexuality, his altruism, Keith performs both his gender and race with a dismissive comment that barely hides the bifurcation of the selves that he experiences. His response raises several issues relating to the performance of black masculinity. Does talking really cure the pain of divided mind, which Franz Fanon diagnosed fifty years ago? The colonialization of the mind and the fragmentation of self prolonged through denial.

I use this popular television show in this chapter to introduce the broader issue of African American male relationships to the world of psychology. Since arrival
to North America, African Americans have had to negotiate what they already knew to the expectations of the society in which they found themselves. The negotiation involved creating meaning from their cultural lives in Africa to harshness of New World slavery, situating Western notions of freedom into lives not yet free and forging continued cultural expression in the rapidly shifting meanings of modernity.

During the Middle Passage, many threw themselves off the ships to avoid the worst of yet to come. For those who remained, the challenges were physical, economic and psychological. With skin color being the mark of difference, the mind becomes the battlefield of meaning making. The questions around performing self with a gender and racial consciousness concern the creation of value in the shifting contingencies of world economies, the maintenance of the authentic self in a changing world, strategies of survival that include suicide. The mind is the site of conflict and therapy is the stage which the performance of racial, gender and national selves enact conflicting narratives of self.
This chapter explores the notions of value, authenticity and suicide in two plays featuring men of the African American Diaspora. Central to both plays is the role of psychology and the idea of communication, the sharing of meaning. The talking cure tests black male performativity in its ability to communicate subjectivity and interiority. In *Medal of Honor Rag* by Tom Cole, an African American Vietnam veteran faces his demons while attempting to maintain his psychic self. The battle waged within therapy is but a microcosm of the war he faces in the society. I will argue that Dale Jackson's choices, which Cole based on historical facts, stage greater issues facing African American men. The play proposes that psychology can help the circumstances of a black male, while staging the challenges of black male performativity in the United States.

As elaborated by Barbara Herrnstein Smith, "all value is radically contingent, being neither a fixed attribute, an inherent quality or an objectively property of things but, rather an effect of multiple, continuously changing, and continuously interacting variables or put another way, the products of the dynamics of a system,"
specifically, an economic system" (30). Indeed, economies of value are a reoccurring issue in black masculine performance. In slavery, the physical strength and resistance to disease made black men a valuable asset. The value of the man accompanied him from the field to the bedroom, where his ability to impregnate black women and maintain the workforce also enhanced his status. Having survived the inhumanity of modern slavery in the United States, Reconstruction not only attempted to rebuild the society, but also 'reconstructed' black masculinity. With the new economy of value, black men became superfluous to the entire society just as the agrarian basis to an industrial. Contingencies of value then, create boundaries of experience, which have material consequences. As Lindon Barrett notes his consideration of value in African American life, "Understood at its simplest, value is an arbiter among disparate entities – however, an arbiter seeking to naturalize its very process of arbitration to the point of sublimination and fetishization" (Barrett 12).

The shifting of values has created a hidden rage among African Americans or what Ellis Close call the
"excruciating pain" of African American peoples, especially the middle class. As he noted in *The Rage of a Privileged Class*, America's most serious problem is not the color line, but "the problem of the broken covenant, of the pact ensuring that if you work hard, get a good education, and play by the rules, you will be allowed to advance and achieve the limits of your ability" (Close 1). The covenant of possibility, of individually defined valued is the slippery slope for African American men. There is the internal struggle to create value within the boundaries of worldview. The game makes the individual feel constantly behind, especially since the rules have changed from both slavery and reconstruction, Jim Crow and the Civil Rights era. As Close later notes in *The Envy of the World: On Being a Black Man in America*, "We are less sure of our place in the world than our predecessors, in part because our options, our potential choices, are so much grander than theirs. So we are trapped in a paradox" (11).

The concept of value is central to the conceptualization of the African American psyche. In his study *Psychology and African Americans*, Adelbert H.
Jenkins differentiates two ways of knowing in African American life. Following the Lockean view of psychology, the mind is a black slate on which experience is etched. "The development of the mind and complex abilities is held to be solely a function of the association and combination of simpler elements ‘put’ there by experience" (Jenkins 12). In contrast, the Kantian view presupposes a thinking mind that orders its reality. Therefore as a mind develops and has more tools in which to interpret phenomena, the world gains meaning. Speaking specifically of children, Jenkins writes, "What the developing childe comes to ‘know’ reflects what arises from both the child’s ways of categorizing and the qualities inherent in reality" (Jenkins 13).

A challenge of African American men is the negotiation between a complicated self and a fragmented self. Jenkins reminds that human beings are complex individuals and warns against simplistic mechanistic methods of viewing human behavior, particularly racialized behavior. … Self and self-concept, while standing for the cohesiveness of the individual, are also multifaceted. Thus, a person’s
self concept is an interconnected collection of the 
various ideas, images, and feelings that s/he holds 
about self. This collection is organized; that is, 
the different parts are meaningfully interrelated as 
far as the person is concerned - they are not just 
present in a haphazard way fashion. (Jenkins 31-32)

Facing obstacles is human and is the heart of 
western drama. In theatre, actors often discuss 
"strategies" and "tactics" about how to approach a role 
and how to construct a performance. When faced with 
obstacles, black men have several options at their 
disposal, which may include direct strategies such as 
aggression, hard work or the development of new skills. 
Indirect methods may include repression, compensation, 
overcompensation, rationalization, projection, denial, 
sublimination, displacement, regression or reaction 
formation (Houston 1990). The state of mind of African 
Americans has a long history in the legal system.

Paul Harris has researched the history of black rage 
as a defensive strategy in the American legal System. 
Citing a case from 1846, the trial of William Freeman 
details the first time the sanity of an African American
man was documented by the legal system. Wrongly accused of horse stealing, Freeman served a five years prison term, during which he was abused. suffered from abuse. When new evidence proved him innocent of horse stealing, the state released him from prison and he attempted to get work and to attain warrants against those who had falsely accused him. William Freeman proceeded to kill the family who had denied him employment. During his trial, several doctors evaluated and found him "to be dull, stupid, moody, morose, depraved, degraded Negro, but not insane" (Harris 19). Freeman sought several outlets for his frustration which ended in violence. Whereas, his acts are not pardonable, they become understandable within the contexts of social pressures placed upon him.

Basing their work on an early study on suicide (Durkhiem 1897), Poussaint and Alexander examine suicide in African American communities. Both researchers had survived the suicide of a male family member. While Durkheim had designated three forms of suicide (egoistic, altruistic and anomic), Poussaint and Alexander extend a fourth categorization, fatalistic. Egoistic suicide
results from a lack of social structures (family, religion, etc.) which leads to a crisis of connection with the rest of society. Cult domination like the 1997 Heaven’s Gate mass self-destruction is the best example of altruistic suicide. Related to egoistic suicide, anomic suicide describes an inability to adjust to societal change. For Poussaint and Alexander, fatalistic suicide has the historic dimension of slave oppression and institutional terror (49-50). Citing other well-known psychoanalysts, suicide can either be a form of repressed anger (Freud) or an attempt to gain sympathy from (or reproach) others (Adler)(51).

Within the context of the therapeutic situation, black males have competing notions of value and a need for validation. Viewing the past may present insurmountable obstacles to which suicide may seem the answer. The talking cure opens up spaces from which a troubled individual reconciles the fragmentary parts of his or her self. "The experience of trauma recollection, which always occurs in close work with a therapist or clinician, is very much like a Protestant conversion experience. It begins with the watchword
denial. Peterlike, one thrice denies past abuse. Ever since St. Augustine, conversion experiences have been accompanied by confession. Here I don’t mean the confessional, the place where the believer owns up to the priest. I mean the confession as a retelling of one's own past, giving the true past that one was denying" (Hacking 475).

**Medal of Honor Rag**

*Medal of Honor Rag* by Tom Cole depicts a black Vietnam veteran in therapy with a Jewish psychoanalyst. Dale "DJ" Jackson has been awarded a Congressional Medal of Honor for bravery under fire. DJ has trouble adjusting to civilian life and determines that he wants to return the medal. Realizing the public relations minefield that could develop, the military admits DJ to a military hospital for psychiatric treatment. His doctor, a Holocaust survivor, has diagnosed DJ with survivor grief. After witnessing his former tank unit obliterated by a Vietcong attack, DJ single-handedly kills the rest
of the Vietnamese unit. Within 48 hours of the incident, he returned home to Detroit. Without employment prospects and a pregnant girlfriend, the ‘honored’ veteran finds himself locked into the alienated world of anti-war America. DJ hopes to recover some part of himself but does not know how to reclaim or reconstitute what he was before. After his release from the hospital, DJ robs a convenience store. In the comments of the play, the doctor speculates whether DJ was really resorting to crime or whether he was staging his own suicide.

Medal of Honor Rag was based on the life of actual Congressional of Honor Spec. 5 Dwight H. Johnson. As a child, Johnson's mother instructed him not to fight, but also not to be caught when others challenge. When he joined the military, Sgt. Johnson learned to turn the other cheek. For instance, once a soldier asked him what the NAACP stood for, to which Johnson responded, "The National Association for the Advancement of Colored People." Antagonistically, the soldier said, "Naw, that ain't it. It is stands for Niggers Acting As Colored People." As he was taught, Johnson turned the other
cheek and reacted by laughing at the slight. He earned
the admiration from his fellow soldiers by being "easy-
going, hard to rattle, impossible to rattle" (Nordheimer
A1+).

The Army drafted Dwight Johnson in July 1966. After
he finished his requisite training at Fort Knox, KY,
Johnson served a tour in Vietnam as a tank driver.
Besides his military duties, his military training had
offered him a space to make lasting friendships
(Mikaelian 248). Johnson arrived in Vietnam and a few
days before he was to be processed for home, the Army
transferred Johnson from one tank platoon to another.
The Viet Cong soldiers ambushed his unit. The citation
for his Congressional Medal of Honor tells the story.

For conspicuous gallantry and intrepidity at the
risk of his life above and beyond the call of duty.
Sp5c. Johnson, a tank driver with Company B, was a
member of a reaction force moving to aid other
elements of his platoon, which was in heavy contact
with a battalion size North Vietnamese force. Sp5c.
Johnson's tank, upon reaching the point of contact,
threw a track and became immobilized. Realizing that
he could do no more as a driver, he climbed out of the vehicle, armed only with a .45 caliber pistol. Despite intense hostile fire, Sp5c. Johnson killed several enemy soldiers before he had expended his ammunition. Returning to his tank through a heavy volume of antitank rocket, small arms and automatic weapons fire, he obtained a submachine gun with which to continue his fight against the advancing enemy. Armed with this weapon, Sp5c. Johnson again braved deadly enemy fire to return to the center of the ambush site where he courageously eliminated more of the determined foe. Engaged in extremely close combat when the last of his ammunition was expended, he killed an enemy soldier with the stock end of his submachine gun. Now weaponless, Sp5c. Johnson ignored the enemy fire around him, climbed into his platoon sergeant's tank, extricated a wounded crewmember and carried him to an armored personnel carrier. He then returned to the same tank and assisted in firing the main gun until it jammed. In a magnificent display of courage, Sp5c. Johnson exited the tank and again armed only with a .45
caliber pistol, engaged several North Vietnamese troops in close proximity to the vehicle. Fighting his way through devastating fire and remounting his own immobilized tank, he remained fully exposed to the enemy as he bravely and skillfully engaged them with the tank's externally-mounted .50 caliber machinegun; where he remained until the situation was brought under control. Sp5c. Johnson's profound concern for his fellow soldiers, at the risk of his life above and beyond the call of duty are in keeping with the highest traditions of the military service and reflect great credit upon himself and the U.S. Army.

Johnson returned home shortly before the disastrous Tet Offensive that would so greatly change American public opinion against the war. Within 72 hours of becoming a killing machine, the young soldier found himself back on the streets of Detroit, Michigan. Adapting to civilian life was difficult, especially when he started looking for work. His cousin, Thomas Tillman reports that Johnson felt "inferior," and would mumble his way through job interviews. "For two months we went
around to place after place and got doors slammed in our face" (Mikaelian 242).

His fortunes changed when the Army began investigating him for the purpose of awarding him the Medal. They wanted to make sure that the future hero was worthy of such an award. Abraham Lincoln had created the Congressional Medal of Honor in 1863 in order to honor Union soldiers. By Lyndon Johnson's administration, the Medal not only recognized bravery among soldiers but was also a political tool. Although the conflict would not end until 1975, Johnson used the November 19, 1968 ceremony to evoke the possibility of peace. "In this company we hear again, in our minds, the sound of distant battles. This room echoes once more to those words that describe the heights of bravery in war -- about and beyond the call of duty ... These five soldiers, in their separate moments of supreme testing, summoned a degree of courage that stirs wonder and respect and an overwhelming pride in all of us" (243). Among the soldiers honored during Johnson's ceremony was Chaplain Charlie "Angelo" Liteky, who would later leave his medal at the Vietnam
War Memorial in order to protest President Ronald Reagan's Central American policy.

Dwight Johnson's life became more chaotic. The people who ignored him suddenly seemed interested in. He complained of how the government had deported his father for immigration infractions, and his senator arranged for his father's repatriation. He rejoined the Army as a recruiter in Detroit, because officials thought that he could "reach" other African Americans. Eventually picketers would demonstrate against his appearances and call him "an 'electronic nigger,' a robot that the Army used to recruit blacks for war in Asia" (Nordheimer A1+). His newfound celebrity confounded the normal challenges of wife, house and family. Like many young black men that would follow him (boxer Mike Tyson, baseball player Kirby Puckett and rapper Sean Combs), Johnson limited his possibilities to his field of experience. A friend of his family called a "ghetto mentality," which describes how the mind relates to a world beyond neighborhood that is dominated by whites.

What does he do when he's introduced to Bunkie Knudsen, the president of Ford? ... Does he come
across strong and dynamic because he knows there is a $75,000-a-year job waiting for him if he makes a good impression? And what happens to him when he just stands there and fumbles and doesn't know if he should shake hands of just nod his head? He was forced to play a role he was never trained for and never anticipated. (Nordheimer 1971)

Under tremendous stress, Johnson began to experience stomach pain. He eventually became a patient at the Valley Forge Army Hospital in Phoenixville, Pennsylvania. Although he was a patient, fame continued to hound him. On his first night, military officials took him to a Freedom Foundation function for a publicity opportunity. Johnson protested that if that happened again, he would go AWOL or "absent without leave." Tom Cole's Medal of Honor Rag dramatizes the interchanges between "Dale Jackson" and his psychiatrist. Cole used information from Johnson's psychiatric record such as the following:

Subject expressed doubts over his decision to re-enter the Army as a recruiter. He felt the Army didn't honor its commitment to him. The public affairs were satisfactory at first, but he felt
inadequate. People he would meet would pump his hand and slap his back and say "Johnson, if you ever think about getting of the Army, come and look me up." On several occasions, he contacted these individuals and they didn't remember him. It always took several minutes to remind them who he was.

(Nordheimer)

In the play, Cole orchestrates "the retelling of one's own past, giving the true past that one was denying." The audience becomes the individual who does not remember the hurt of a Vietnam War veteran. In a stark room, without television lights or protest signs, a man articulates the wounds of war, race and gender. During his talking cure, DJ does eventually talk about several issues that bother him. First, he talks of his first day in Vietnam, where no one is available to guide his transition into war. Driving with a group of soldiers, they open fire on civilian children because one of them gave them "the finger."

And they are laughing . . . So, uh, . . . everybody on the truck opens fire. I mean I couldn't believe it, they're like half a platoon, they got M-16's,
automatic rifles, they're blasting away, it sounds like a pitched battle, they're pouring all this firepower into these kids. The kids are lying on the ground, they're dead a hundred times over, and these guys are still firing rounds into bodies, like they're gone crazy. And the kids' bodies are giving these little jumps in the air like rag dolls, and then they flop down again. (Cole 31)

Like Cephus Miles of Home, DJ's education was founded on the commandment "thou shall not kill." After 11 months and 22 days, the Army transferred DJ from his unit, the home he had constructed for his emotional safety. The next day the old tank unit was hit and DJ saw his friends obliterated.

D.J. You never seen your best friend's head blown right off his body so that you look right down in his neck-hole. You never seen somebody you loved, I'm telling you like I mean it, somebody you loved and you get there and its nothing but a black lump, smells like a charcoal dinner, and that's your friend, right? -- a black 203
lump. You seen anything like that, am I right? (15-16)

After this experience, DJ lost control of reality and exacted revenge. As the doctor notes "He saw the bodies of his other friends all burned and blasted, and then -- for 30 minutes, armed first with a 45-caliber pistol and then with a submachine gun, he hunted the Vietnamese on the ground, killing from ten to twenty enemy soldiers (no one knows for sure) -- by himself. When he ran out of ammunition, he killed one with the stock of his submachine gun" (21). After being subdued with 3 shots of morphine and a straitjacket, he was released from a hospital within 24 hours and sent back to the states within 48 hours. After almost a year of evading death and destruction, DJ did transition into the killing machine his country expected and came back to his civilian world within 72 hours of eliminating the Viet Cong who had killed his fellow soldiers.

The first half of the session is about getting to the central issues of DJ's situation: his experience in Vietnam. When he returns home, he finds he cannot talk about it and cannot emotionally connect to his
surrounding. So he ends up spending a lot time in his room. He does not look for work, nor can he connect with his fiancé. The military contacts him after nine months and informs him that he is being considered for the Congressional Medal of Honor, the highest American honor for bravery. DJ expresses his disbelief. "Yesterday afternoon for they knew, I was a junkie on the street, today the President of the United States can't wait to see me" (37). As the turning point in the play, DJ has totally opened up to the doctor, who interprets the rawest of DJ's emotions.

Doc: (You wept for your dead friends, you wept for your dead self, for your life that slid away in the first fifteen seconds of that ambush on the road to Dakto. You were choking on your grief, a grief you couldn't share with anyone, and you became paralyzed by your guilt, and you still are, and you're going to be, until you decide to make your own journey back through that membrane into some acceptable reality . . . Some real life, of you own.}
(Both DALE JACKSON and the DOCTOR seem momentarily stunned by the latter's outpouring.) (39-40).

At the end of the session, the Doctor makes plans for them to continue through the therapy. He wants DJ to join a support group for Vietnam veterans. "They are curing themselves. And they are a lot like you. . . . But they refuse to stay isolated. They meet, in therapy groups, which they started. Up in New York. 'Rap Sessions' ... a new kind of unit, you might say... Everybody tells his story. You see? They're people who have been through the same fires you have, who were there, whom you can trust..." (47). Although the doctor is providing an opportunity for community, DJ remains reluctant, having already exposed himself to the Doctor. He knows that his 'acceptable reality' is remains being a black man in 1960s' America.

DJ: (after a pause) Doc, those dudes on TV are all white.

Doc: You have been watching them.
DJ: Yup, and I'm going to tell you something.
You got your reasons for wanting to see no
more war, right? -- and no more warriors.
I dig that, for your sake. But a lot of
folks don't want the black veteran to
throw down his weapons so soon. Know what
I mean? Like we are supposed to be
preparing ourselves for another war, right
back here. Vietnam was just our basic
training, see? I'm telling this to both
of you, y'see, so you wont be too
surprised when it comes.

The session ends, but the two men do not reconvene.
In prolog, the doctor reveals to the audience that DJ was
killed during a botched robbery. The government buried
him in Arlington National Cemetery with full military
honors.

Sgt. Johnson eventually left the military hospital
and face mounting financial troubles. On April 30, 1971,
he visited his wife in the hospital and asked her, "Ain't
you going to give me a little kiss." After her kiss, he
went to a bar. He then entered the Open Pantry Market to
buy a pack of cigarettes. Johnson offered to pay for the
smokes, but also demanded the cash from the register. He
shot twice, barely grazing the owner. The owner
retrieved his gun from under the counter and began
firing. "'I hit him with two bullets, but he just stood
there, with the gun in his hand, and said, 'I'm going to
kill you.'" I kept pulling the trigger until the gun was
empty,' the storeowner told police' (Mikaelian 253).

Johnson had carefully orchestrated his suicide, which had
echoes of the nightmares he had experienced. Again from
psychiatrist notes:

The subject remembers coming face to face with a
Vietnamese with a gun. He can remember the soldier
squeezing the trigger. The gun jammed. The subject
has since engaged in some magical thinking about
this episode. He also suffers guilt over surviving
it, and later winner a high honor for the one time
in his life when he lost complete control of
himself. He asked: "What if I lost control of
myself in Detroit and behaved like I did in Vietnam?
The prospect of such an event apparently was deeply
disturbing to him (Nordheimer).
The play ends with the doctor quoting DJ's mother as saying, "Sometimes I wonder if Dale tired of his life and needed someone to pull the trigger" which are the exact words Joyce Johnson said of her son Dwight.

In Act Like A Man (1995), Robert Vorlicky argues that confinements in a prison or a hospital become liberating for American men in contemporary drama. In these places which are organized to police the body, men "engage in violent power plays in an effort to forge an identity and to pursue a connection with other men" (133). American male dramatic characters experience communicative freedom "if they are not drunk or drugged" (133). Using the black and white male characters of David Rabe's Streamers, Vorlicky contends healing for masculine scars for Vietnam veterans comes from "willingness to free the differences in themselves" (173). He further believes "Only by starting here -- by releasing the 'little gook' in the spider hole -- can men gain self-knowledge and, in turn, begin to know 'others' more fully" (173).

Unfortunately, Medal of Honor Rag does not fit so comfortably into Vorlicky paradigm. The violence that
troubles DJ resides in his head and the incongruence of war and nation does not match with his life in the United States. The talking cure of the setting of the play cannot address the Vietnamese soldier pointing an AK47 at DJ's face. The close proximity of the treatment room, or the similar experiences of post traumatic stress make for great drama but does not address the internal pain that the character faces. There are not drugs or alcohol that can help DJ and the pain of his mind is literally eating him up from the inside out as demonstrated by the stomach ulcers. DJ has gained more self-knowledge and yet still has no means of living with it. The doctor has opened up a cavern of feeling but did not have time to prop him up. Faced with the abyss, the character and his real life counterpart, engineer their own deaths. In this sense, DJ and Dwight have joined the man in the spider hole.
CHAPTER 6

CONCLUSION

According to recent census reports, African Americans are no longer the largest minority and as a national consensus group may begin to lose political power of the last century. As for Tiger Woods, his skill as an athlete in his chosen sport is unquestioned, yet the public yearns for him to speak narratives as to whatever identity politics surround the golf industry. Whereas other greats such as Muhammad Ali challenged the prevailing notions of race, nation and religion, Tiger Woods assumes a stance of racial amnesia and concentrates on athletic excellence and market driven capitalism. As a national narrative, race will always matter but in the performance of identity in America.
Black male performativity records its past, present and future in the texts of Modern Drama. These texts provide an invaluable look at how black men think about themselves, how others have constructed that experience and how the slow painful change in cultural values proceeds. When a black male actor stands on the American stage, he brings with him the cultural economies forged within the fires of theatre practice. While ideology is operative, I contend that the enactment of drama builds on value of theatre and combats negativity by the act of critical engagement.

As the world continues to change, so does the image of African American men. Current media representations fix black men in urban spaces with a pent up anger of the last four hundred years of struggle. The advent of hip-hop culture is a radical reinvention of black masculinities. In contrast to both assimilationist aesthetics of the civil rights era and the revolutionary politics of Black Nationalism, hip-hop creates a image of black men that are economically secure and culturally subversive.
The representations of gender and racial identities are at the heart of American Drama. Black men are everywhere, from the cereal box to the billboard, and yet there exists only few modes of black masculine performance: the gangster, the hipster and the athlete. Towards this end, this study recognizes that the interiority of black men are multifaceted and reside on the American Stage. Cephus Miles lives on the land and constructs his identity from it. The image and stories of this historically fraught relationship is essential to fighting the collapsing visions of slavery. Black men in same-sex or cross racial same-sex relationships operate on a multi layered playing board of social, racial and gender identity. As Baldwin has shown, black gay men operate on a high level of social functioning and are deserving of a more critical space than Contemporary American Drama has afforded.
BIBLIOGRAPHY


Biography of Marlon Riggs. 


Fiedler, Leslie. "Come Back to the Raft Ag’in, Huck Honey!" In Leslie Fiedler and American culture. ed. by Steven G. Kellman and Irving Malin. Newark:


---. "This Disease Called Strength: Some Observations on the Compensating Construction of Black Female


223


Ross, Marlon B. "Some Glances at the Black Fag: Race, Same-Sex Desire, and Cultural Belonging." In


Sheppard, Brian Oliver. "Black Farmers and Institutionalized Racism." The History of African


Van Gelder, Lawrence.  "'Medal of Honor Rag': The Dark Didn't End in Vietnam."  *New York Times*, Retrieved February 1, 2001 from the World Wide Web:  


