Civil Rights Subjectivities and African American Women’s Autobiographies: 
The Life-Writings of Daisy Bates, Melba Patillo Beals, and Anne Moody

Dissertation

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By

Anne Michelle Mitchell, M. A.

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Dissertation Committee

Jacqueline Jones Royster, advisor

Linda Mizejewski, advisor

Rebecca Wanzo

Cricket Keating
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ABSTRACT

Bringing together Black Feminist and post-structuralist perspectives, this dissertation examines how the public discourse of the African American Civil Rights movement has created specific subject-positions that African American women must write *through and with*, if they are to tell their remembrances of that historical moment. Through textual analysis and archival research, this dissertation performs a queer reading of the Civil Rights movement. Previous scholarship on African American autobiography has centered on analyzing race, gender, and the experience of being oppressed by the dominant culture. My project differs from previous scholarship because it explores the ways that hetero-normative and racialized surveillance influences African American constructions of the self.
DEDICATION

This dissertation is dedicated to those that have contributed to my growth as a person and a scholar. It is also dedicated to the women of the Civil Rights movement, who did their work so that I could do mine.

James Donald Mitchell  (1941-1987)
Carl Melvin Dix, Sr.  (1919-1997)
Bertha Andrews Dix (1920-2009)
Katasha Ann Johnson  (1976-2009)
VITA

2010…………………………Women’s Studies, Ohio State University, Columbus, OH

2004…M.A. Educational Psychology, University of Minnesota, Minneapolis, MN

1999……B.S. Secondary Science Education, Grambling State University,
Grambling, LA

Fields of Study

Major: Women’s Studies
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Introduction: African American Women’s Life Writing and Civil Rights

Indeed, if you want to know whether today people believe in democracy, if you want to know whether they are true democrats, if you want to know whether they are human rights activists, the question to ask is, “What about gay people?” Because that is now the litmus paper by which this democracy is to be judged. –Bayard Rustin

Panopticism, as outlined by Michel Foucault’s *Discipline and Punish*, is the process of enacting the automation of power through technologies of surveillance. The disciplinary gaze of panopticism makes subjects believe that they are constantly being watched. When subjects of a given population internalize the sense of being watched and evaluated they begin to regulate their own behaviors to conform to the standards of the regime in power. The enactment of a disciplinary gaze within a population allows the ruling regime to get the results they are after, without having to resort to repression as often.

Examining the African American Civil Rights Movement, it is apparent that there is a complex interaction of race, gender, subjectivity, and the politics of surveillance emanating from within the movement and in the dominant community. Self-policing and the feeling of surveillance constrains and enables specific forms of subjectivity. Utilizing Foucault, my dissertation explores African American women’s life-writing in order to examine the sense of surveillance that exists within the African American Civil Rights Movement. Through the use of a multivariant analytical lens that is focused on textual analysis, this dissertation examines the social and discursive processes that create panoptic conditions through surveillance. The panoptic conditions in the movement
include the *policing of behavior, dress, movement, and sexuality*. This type of policing and surveillance both enabled and constrained the ways in which African American women who experienced the Civil Rights Movement constructed, enacted, and expressed their subjectivities in autobiographical narratives.

I argue that the civil rights citizen-subject is the culmination of an ideological hailing that called African American subjects into discourses of citizenship, racial uplift, and sexual normativity, in exchange for the shunning of non-normative desires and subject positions. Thaddeus Russell articulates that the civil rights ideology of the black middle class advocated the end of sexual deviancy for the benefit of the African American community. He states: “…the Civil Rights Movement, the project of attaining citizenship was constructed upon heterosexuality and in opposition to non-heteronormative behavior” (Russell 2007, 103). The deviancy that some leaders sought to abject was non-heteronormative behavior, particularly that of non-nuclear family structures, and gays, lesbians, bisexuals, and transgender people. Russell illustrates how Adam Clayton Powell Jr., a prominent civil rights activist, advocated for African American churches, press, and community members to condemn open displays of homosexuality in the church and in the wider community. Kevin Gaines and Evelyn Higginbotham explore the question of African American identity within political movements. Taking their work as a starting point, I theorize the ways that the black female body is negotiated within self-created representations of the movement.

I am articulating a civil rights subjectivity that polices the black female body around behavior, dress, and sexuality. Civil Rights subjectivity is policed by the African American and white communities. It enforces codes of behavior and tells African
American women to act “right” or be expelled from the African American community. Moreover, within the African American community it is governed by standards of respectability and the white (dominant) community it is enforced through structural racism. However, both are the result of systemic racism, sexism, and homophobia. Although the ideological call for the African American community to engage in practices of self and community policing existed before the Civil Rights Movement, the subsequent call to exhibit normativity during the movement was based in the abjection of the black queer. As Black feminist historians and cultural critics have previously argued, black women’s sexuality, behavior, and dress have been vehemently policed from within the black community\(^1\) and through white standards of ‘proper’ gendered behavior.\(^2\)

Throughout the 19th century-African American women were called on to uplift the race through self-surveillance of sexual behavior, dress, cleanliness, and manners.

Civil Rights Subjectivity is defined as a heteronormative ideal within the African American community. Beginning in the context of antebellum America, African Americans attempted to adhere to the constrictors of normative gendered relationship arrangements, dress, and behavior in order to gain citizenship rights. This meant that African American women had to attempt to conform to middle class standards of outward presentation to be deemed worthy of representing the race. For African American men these standards buttressed a hyper-masculinity, where heteropatriarchal arrangements dominated the dynamics of groups that challenged racism from a civil rights vantage


\(^2\) “Cult of True Womanhood,” 1966
point. In order to create this subjectivity and group identity, the group that has to be
abjected is black queers. Specifically, the heteronormative standards of civil rights
subjectivity are secured by abjecting queerness itself, meaning that any aberration of
heteronormativity must be done away with. Black women in particular are subjected to
policing and the disciplinary gaze of African American standards of respectability.

Although these standards of respectability constrict African American women,
when they represent themselves in autobiography, these women leave a space for queer
subjectivities to emerge. Because power circulates, and resistance is possible even within
hegemonic regimes, African American women have a space to express non-normative
subjectivities that queer the history of the Civil Rights Movement.

This dissertation argues that the creation of the black female civil rights citizen-
subject is one that is called upon to enact a politics of respectability through the abjection
of queer subjects. The call to enact this politics was initiated through public campaigns
that encouraged self-surveillance, in order to maintain normative standards. Despite the
call to self-police, each text examined in this project is able to resist the disciplinary gaze
and to articulate queer civil rights subjectivities that begins with the articulation of non-
normative subject positioning. This queerness is exhibited through each author’s ability
to authorize herself through stories of non-normative subject positioning. As I illustrate in
chapters two, three, and four, each woman breaks with surveillance and self-policing
narrative forms by speaking for others, who are not normally othered (Bates), resisting
the abjection of queer bodies (Moody), and queering the notion of a proper civil rights
subjectivity (Beals).
In this project, I use queer as both a subject position and as an analytical tool. This project uses the term queer as a subject position to signify when people exist outside of heterosexist norms. Specifically, this means people that violate the norms of heteronormativity, meaning not getting married, not producing children, getting divorced, having children outside of wedlock, or engaging in gay, lesbian, bisexual and transgendered partnerings or lifestyles. This group of people encompasses a queerness that is broader than the LGBT community. Following the logic of Cathy Cohen’s “Punks, Bulldaggers, and Welfare Queens,” this dissertation views queerness as a stance outside of heteropatriarchy that encompasses a wide range of living arrangements and positionalities. Cohen argues that the queer liberation movement should include all that stand outside of heteropatriarchy, including groups that are not often thought of as queer, but do challenge heteropatriarchal arrangements and power structures. Therefore, we can see women who make rights claims as queer because they too challenge heteropatriarchy at its very core because it dictates that only male citizen-subjects are worthy of rights. They represent themselves as citizens who are entitled to represent groups of people who are looking to broaden the reach of the citizenship rights and its privileges.

As an analytical tool, this project utilizes queer theory in order to examine texts in new ways. Queer theory encourages scholars to take unconventional approaches to research methods. Similar to Siobhan Somerville’s Queering the Color Line, this project uses a queer analytical approach to textual analysis, where scholars look to the strange and incongruous elements in a text and closely examine those elements. This does not ignore the major elements of a text, rather it puts them into conversation. Additionally, it highlights the normative and non-normative elements of a text.
Given the ways in which surveillance functions within socio-cultural contexts, the African American Civil Rights Movement offers a unique opportunity to examine the construction of subjectivity during a definable socio-political moment for African American women. The selection of specific autobiographical narratives offers an opportunity to examine these texts using a multivariant analytical lens that functions, in effect, to “queer” the memorialization of this time period and bring a different set of insights to women’s participation. Specifically, African American women’s participation is brought into view, in civil rights activism as a complex and important part of the American story. This project utilizes multiple meanings of the word “queer,” first, to invoke non-normative sexuality and gender identities; second, as the refutation of binary oppositions; and third, as the end of coherent identity categories. My usage of queer theory will be informed by the work in Black Queer/Queer of Color studies, which emphasizes the way that an idealized notion of race is simultaneously constructed with normalized notions of gender and sexuality (E. Patrick Johnson, Mae G. Henderson, Jose Esteban Munoz, Roderick Ferguson). In other words, this project will explore the ways that civil rights subjectivity tries to inscribe a normative body on those that participate in the movement. This study offers a new look at the narratives of citizenship where African American women utilize autobiography’s performative utterance to exceed the boundaries of identity (Michael Berube).

This dissertation examines popular life-writings by African American women of the Civil Rights Movement that have traditionally been read for their experiential and historical contribution, rather than as texts that enunciate the complexities of black female subjectivity. My focus on African American women’s texts is an effort to explore
civil rights subjectivity in relation to the female body. The texts include: *The Long Shadow of Little Rock* by Daisy Bates, *Warriors Don’t Cry* by Melba Patillo Beals, and *Coming of Age in Mississippi* by Anne Moody. As demonstrated by the tendency to create histories of the self that conform or respond to hegemony, each text contains both normative and queer notions of African American Civil Rights subjectivity. Though each of these women writes about key moments in the Civil Rights Movement, Bates and Moody’s texts are published during the 1960s, while Beals’s text does not appear in print until 1994. Due to the temporal differences in the writing and publication of the texts, I examine the ways that nostalgia operates with each text and enables each woman to re-imagine herself.

I analyze these narratives using feminist literary theory, autobiography theory, Foucault’s concept of surveillance, and queer theory. Utilizing these analytical lenses as guides for my close readings allows for a critique of binary notions of African American Civil Rights subjectivity through exploring the ways that the texts create space for, speak to, and silence non-normative subject positions.

Chapter 1 “Disciplined Bodies: Civil Rights, Sexuality, and the Black Female Body” introduces the project and its connections to queer of color critique, feminist theory, autobiography theory, and (Black) queer studies. Additionally, it makes a case for the use of a comparative queer method to elucidate the dissertation’s purpose, which is to critically examine a vital part of American history through an examination of women’s life-writing and autobiographies. In Chapter 1, I define the most important terms for this project, which are: Civil Rights citizen-subject, civil rights subjectivity, panopticism,
queer, and racialized gendered surveillance. I argue that these terms are important because they illuminate the conditions of subject formation during the movement.

My exploration of this temporal shift in representations of the self will be guided by Sidonie Smith and Julia Watson’s question laid out in Reading Autobiography: A Guide for Interpreting Life-Writing, “What models of cultural identity were available to the author?” (168). My central question is: How does the African American Civil Rights Movement as a specific historical moment, and the models of identity it espouses or silences, create certain types of subjectivities? Specifically, I am interested in the ways that African American women who participated in the movement from 1950-1965 represent themselves in their life narratives and the differences they exhibit in their representations of this period. Moreover, I will consider how civil rights subjectivity has changed in relation to the push towards normativity over time, through a comparative analysis of Bates, Moody, and Beals’s life-writings.

Through this analysis, I illustrate that my study of African American women’s autobiographical narratives from the modern Civil Rights Movement is in conversation with works that come out of Black Queer Studies and Postmodern autobiographical criticism in that I attempt to stretch the boundaries of queer studies by interweaving analyses of race, sexuality, politics, and normativity. Furthermore, this dissertation considers queerness linked to more than non-normative sexuality. It examines non-normativity as it is constructed by race, gender, and the performance of politics. Through

3 Texts such as Roderick Ferguson’s Aberrations in Black: Towards a Queer of Color Critique, Cathy Cohen’s The Boundaries of Blackness: AIDS and the Breakdown of Black Politics, and Jose Esteban Munoz’s Disidentifications: The Performance of Politics, and Leigh Gilmore’s Autobiographics: A Feminist Theory of Women’s Self-Representation.
comparative textual analysis of Bates, Beals, and Moody, this chapter highlights the ways that each text deals with the legacy and burden of being a body that is asked to conform to notions of proper “raced” female subjectivity. Moreover, it explores how both queer and normative Civil Rights subjectivities emerge from the texts.

Chapter 1 elucidates the need for new understandings of the African American Civil Rights Movement in relation to African American women’s bodies. By examining surveillance experienced by women in the movement, I highlight the ways that racialized surveillance is also gendered (e.g. Michel Foucault; Patricia Hill Collins). Because of America’s obsession with black male sexuality and the protection of white women’s sexuality, black female bodies become the site from which integrationist arguments could be made.

To illustrate an intersection between black female bodies and integration, I examine the historical uses of the black female body in Civil Rights struggles, beginning with a discussion of the earliest school desegregation case, Roberts v. City of Boston (1849). This illustrates how black girls were instrumental in creating a space for integration. The use of black girls as plaintiffs allowed for the focus of integration efforts to change from conjuring up images of black men and white women mingling together, to a focus on black girls whose bodies were already exploited by white men. By using black female bodies to fight for the integration of schools, Civil Rights attorneys moved the focus away from the earlier construction of black men as sexual deviants. Although black female bodies have also been constructed as sexually deviant throughout American history, in making claims for integration, the use of their bodies becomes integral to the success of the African American Civil Rights Movement.
In regards to integration, black female bodies were positioned as a site from which racial uplift could be achieved. As Evelyn Higginbotham’s *Righteous Discontent*, Candice Jenkin’s *Private Lives. Proper Relations: Regulating Black Intimacy*, and Maxine Leeds Craig’s *Ain’t I a Beauty Queen?: Black Women, Beauty and the Politics of Race* argue, the black female body was constructed as the site of African American “inferiority” through the rhetoric of sexual and familial deviance, which is why it becomes the focus of the project of racial uplift. The prevailing discourse dictated that the reformation of black female sexuality, behavior, dress, and the adoption of white heteronormative standards of childrearing, that the race could be uplifted. The rhetoric of behavior was accompanied by community wide legal and social protests for increased citizenship rights by African Americans.

The use of black women’s bodies fed into a culture of racial uplift that encouraged women to be proper ladies to improve the social position of the race. As Kathy Peiss’ *Hope in a Jar: The Making of America’s Beauty Culture* argues, African American women’s interaction with cosmetics has been heavily influenced by the politics of racial advancement and respectability. Despite messages about beauty and cosmetics changing depending on the temporal moment and political climate, the policing of black women’s bodies through beauty standards continues. Moreover, as Marisa Chappell, Jenny Hutchinson, and Brian Ward’s “Dress Modestly, Neatly…As if You Were Going to Church: Respectability, Class and Gender in the Montgomery Bus Boycott and the Early Civil Rights Movement” argues, black female bodies that adhered to the standards of black middle class respectability were utilized in the movement to highlight the difference between black respectability and the barbarity of white racism.
By utilizing Foucault’s notion of docile bodies, I analyze how Bates, Beals, and Moody conform to this notion and exceed it, through exercising a circumscribed agency in the creation of their textual selves. Through close readings of each text, I will illustrate how each woman re-writes movement history through authorizing herself as a Civil Rights citizen-subject through a story of black women’s trauma. This authorization through black women’s trauma queers movement history because it puts black women’s pain at the center.

Beals and Moody directly experience sexual trauma. A white man attempted to rape Beals on the day that “Brown v. Board of Education” was decided. Moody was sexually harassed by her stepfather and various white men. Bates’s mother was killed by white men. Therefore, Bates’s life is altered by this trauma. Though these incidents loom large in these texts, generally black women’s suffering due to sexual exploitation and the extinguishment of life have not been a cornerstone of the Civil Rights movement.

Chapter 2, “Writing & Speaking for Others: Daisy Bates as Female Autograph” analyzes the ways that Bates’s *Long Shadow of Little Rock*, queers the surveillance of Civil Rights subjectivity by utilizing her positioning to tell the stories of others. As Linda Martin Alcoff argues in “Speaking for Others,” anytime someone attempts to speak for other people, they risk performing an epistemological act of violence. I examine Bates’s text through Alcoff’s theoretical frame as she utilizes her life-writing to speak on behalf of the white men that aided her during the integration of Central High School. Through her self-representation, Bates’s text becomes an autography, de-centering her own life to tell the story of the “we” that enabled the integration to go forward. Bates uses her text to articulate her political commitment to ending racial segregation and utilizes a form that
focuses on and troubles both the “autos” and “graphia” a move that Jeanne Perreault’s
*Writing Selves* defines as an “autography.” Perreault argues that women can create
feminist community within life-writing by rejecting monadic subjectivity and speaking
with and for a like-minded community. By allowing other voices to speak within the text,
Bates’s narrative can be considered an “outlaw” genre in that it articulates a coalitional
politics in an autobiography that captures a particular historical moment (Caren Kaplan).

Chapter 3 “Queerness and Civil Rights Subjectivity: Anne Moody as Angelic
Trouble-Maker” explores the creation of the “proper” Civil Rights citizen-subject. This
position entailed an adherence to gender conformity and racialized social boundaries.
Being a “proper” Civil Right citizen-subject meant that one needed to participate in the
abjection of “improper” subjectivities from the African American body social (Thaddeus
Russell; Julia Kristeva). One of the abjected subjectivities was the queer subject. This
chapter explores the ways that panopticism and notions of a sexualized citizenship
intersect in the creation of a Civil Rights Citizen-subject (Lisa Duggan; Michel Foucault).
As Thaddeus Russell argues in “The Color of Discipline,” African American leaders of
the Civil Rights Movement made concerted efforts to expel non-normative sexualities
from the African American community through various media campaigns. This expulsion
of queer subjectivity is also evidenced in the historical example of Martin Luther King,
Jr. ending his association with Bayard Rustin, an important movement organizer (John
D’Emilio). Chapter 3 ties the notion of a normalized African American sexuality to a
reading of queer characters that populate Anne Moody’s text.

In *Coming of Age in Mississippi*, Moody encounters two transgender people, Lola
and Lily White, while living and working in New Orleans. This chapter examines how
these characters function in Moody’s text. Moreover, this chapter considers what it means to construct a movement and the memory of the movement without queer sexualities. A close reading of their interactions and Moody’s own struggles with racialized gender identity will reveal the complexity of gender aberration in the matrix of racialized hegemony. Examining how Moody’s body is policed both in the African American and white communities, reveals how surveillance intersects with race, gender, and heteronormativity in the construction of citizenship as a cultural concept.

Chapter 4 is entitled “African American Women’s Representations and Aggressive Femininity: Beals’ Gun-Toting Granny,” explores Beals’s construction of herself and Grandmother India. I argue that these two characters represent normative and non-normative civil rights subjectivities. By exploring the representations of these two women, my dissertation illustrates how black women’s bodies can become places where racialized notions of proper African American Civil Right Citizen-subjectivity are exhibited. In the spirit of racial uplift, African American women’s image was a part of a campaign of disciplinary action that sought to abject aberrant black womanhood through panoptic surveillance which dates back to the Reconstruction era (Evelyn Higginbotham; Kathy Peiss). Although this project of racial uplift to abject the aberrant was thorough, it could not end non-normativity; it left in its wake the idea of proper “raced” femininity. Due to the prevalence of this idea, some women strived to adhere to standard notions of raced femininity, while others who acted in aberrant ways, according to standards of African American respectability, have either been forgotten or re-remembered as proper ladies. Beals’ memoir is an important testimony to examine when attempting to understand the workings of nostalgia in life-writing because she attempts to
retrospectively construct herself and other members of the Little Rock Nine as a hyper-normative teenagers. However, Beals also constructs Grandmother India as both normative and queer in relation to civil rights subjectivity.

As the chapter title suggests, Grandmother India is a gun-toting, Bible-quoting, grandmother, who encourages Beals to hide her pain and suffering. She is an example of an aggressive femininity that is often not represented as a part of popular Civil Rights history, which is a queer raced female subjectivity. Beals’ grandmother is a key figure in Beals’ narrative and this dissertation because she represents a non-normative femininity that is rarely represented in popular Civil Rights history.

Drawing on the work of feminist scholars that have analyzed aberrant representations of femininity, and black femininity in particular, I illustrate how embracing representations of aggressive black femininity opens a space for black feminist thought to move away from dichotomous categorizations of black female representations and into a space where multiplicity is possible (Patricia Hill Collins; Beverly Guy-Sheftall; Judith Halberstam; Judith Butler; Kimberly Wallace-Sanders).

The final chapter, “Black Women, Life Narratives, and Citizenship,” summarizes the points made in my earlier analysis and elaborates why this is an important area for study. Self-representational texts written by African American women are utilized in this study because they provide a space from which to explore the complexity of racialized surveillance that comes both from within and outside of the African American community. I argue that understanding the complexities of African American subjectivity from this particular moment is important because today’s juxtaposition of African American Civil Rights and the Gay marriage movements is an outgrowth of a particular
construction of African American Civil Rights subjectivity. This subjectivity was created through multiple processes of surveillance on black female bodies that encouraged hetero-normativity for the purposes of political gain. Reading life-narratives of the struggles of women of color for citizenship rights allows scholars to think about the multiplicity of identities that are managed and performed when one makes appeals to the state for increased rights.

Although the politics of normativity has changed over time, the grand narrative of the African American Civil Rights Movement’s push towards normativity has become stronger in the present moment. This dissertation illustrates that despite the respectability campaign that sought to confine African American women’s subjectivities through self-representation, these women are able to construct multiple types of subjectivities, and articulate a range of subject-positions that actually participated in the Civil Rights Movement.
Chapter 1: Disciplined Bodies? Civil Rights, Sexuality, and the Black Female

Body

We have inherited a composite portrait of civil rights leadership that has a male face. –Kathryn L. Nasstrom “Down to Now”

Instead of asking whether Black women raised their voices against racial oppression, the question should be why Black women’s voices were not heard. –Teresa A. Nance, “Hearing the Missing Voice”

A political genealogy of gender ontologies, if it is successful, will deconstruct the substantive appearance of gender into its constitutive acts and locate and account for those acts within compulsory frames set by the various forces that police the social appearances of gender. –Judith Butler, Gender Trouble

The African American Civil Rights Movement is in the process of being embraced in the larger grand narrative of American history. The incorporation into the American grand narrative means that it runs the risk of becoming written through the lens of those actors who fit national notions of success. Similar to the grand narrative of American history and the archetype of early American autobiography, the Civil Rights Movement narrative is populated by “great men” who committed great deeds. Much of the public narrative of it is filled with male leaders and women as minor characters. In this chapter, I lay out my theoretical conception of civil rights subjectivity, which
operates as a subject position with which African American women must contend when they make rights claims. An interdisciplinary approach to researching this movement serves to wrest this movement away from conformism.

Black Studies, Women’s Studies, and queer theory have not enjoyed easy alliance. They need to be brought into conversation in order to add complexity to the current conversation, and texture to the public memory of the Civil Rights Movement. By positing interventions of feminist and queer theory, my dissertation illustrates why this movement is ripe for inquiry through the merging of these lenses. The following analysis will include an examination of three theoretical interventions. First, the feminist move toward gender history, the insertion of women’s stories into the grand narrative of Civil Rights, and the possibilities for applying a queer lens to this historical moment—create a space for new ways of looking at the African American Civil Rights Movement. Second, to aid in creating a new way of looking at this historical moment, this chapter articulates a theory of civil rights subjectivity utilizing Michel Foucault’s articulation of disciplined bodies, surveillance, and the disciplinary gaze; I review and synthesize pertinent theories in women’s history, African American women’s history and the Civil Rights Movement, and queer theory, as they illustrate the peculiar ways that women have been included in histories of the Civil Rights Movement. Third, I propose a theory of civil rights subjectivity.

Examining the ways that African American women have represented themselves through this particular historical moment, how the regulations gender and heteropatriarchy influenced their subjectivities, and political goals, this project brings together a gender critique of the history of the movement through the examination of
African American women’s self-representation. As Teresa Nance argues in the epigraph above, scholars need to understand why African American women’s voices have not been a major part of the popular narrative of the Civil Rights Movement, despite their participation.

Additionally, this dissertation focuses on understanding how power is constructed with and through black female bodies during this historical moment. To analyze the complexities of African American women’s representation and sometimes absence from historical discourse, this project utilizes Foucault’s genealogical methodology, meaning that it takes an unconventional approach to textual analysis that deconstructs truth through exploring discourses, histories, and the constitution of subjectivities. Similar to Judith Butler’s sentiments in the epigraph above, this project is interested in examining the ways that the black female body has been constructed at specific historical moments when African Americans make rights claims. This project also highlights how gender and race intersect to create particular political outcomes. Furthermore, this project examines the ways that heteronormativity and heteropatriarchy influence the construction of African American women’s identities in relation to power structures and group norms. In regard to how this project approaches genealogical inquiry, Linda Alcoff’s “The Problem of Speaking for Others” states that a genealogy involves asking how a position or view is mediated and constituted through and within the conjunction and conflict of historical, cultural, economic, psychological, and sexual practices” (28). This chapter examines the ways that the black female body has appeared in African American Civil Rights history, critically examines what is missing from those representations, and asks how heteropatriarchy and heteronormativity influence these cultural productions.
Like the Ghanaian Andrika symbol for Sankofa, which depicts a bird with its neck turned around to retrieve an egg from its back, this project moves scholarly discourse forward, while looking backwards. It is only through the examination of past and current discourses that scholars can understand the situated-ness of individual and cultural identities. This project complicates popular understandings of the African American Civil Rights Movement in order to understand its cleavages and relevance for Civil Rights struggles today. Specifically, this project is interested in opening up the space around popular discourses of the African American Civil Rights Movement. The American political system has deemed some bodies worthy of the protection of citizenship and others as un-worthy. By critically examining the African American Civil Rights Movement, we get a better understanding of how similar mechanics of power were put in motion in the past. Moreover, by understanding this movement, we can begin to think about these political struggles and organizing for change, in new and creative ways.

Gender, History, and African American Women in the Movement

Critically examining this historical moment and the constructions of gender during this moment are very important for this project. Joan Scott’s, “Gender: A Useful Category of Historical Analysis” argues that theorizing gender, as opposed to solely locating women within history, has the potential to shift the dominant paradigm of historical inquiry by moving it away from asking the question: “Where are the women?,” to a mode of asking, “How are power relations constructed through the concept of gender difference?” Scott recommends that gender historians attend to the following concepts when investigating gender within a specific historical moment: culturally available
representations, normative concepts, politics, social organizations and institutions, and constructions of subjectivity.

Scott’s later essay, “The Evidence of Experience” explores how categories construct meaning. Scott encourages feminist theorists and historians to interrogate experience and the ways in which language participates in the construction of subject formation. Furthermore, Scott goes on to argue that both personal and social identities are in need of interrogation because of their creation within the discourse. She also contests the stability of all categories of analysis because each is unstable due to their creation within the space of language. Scott emphasizes the need for critical examinations of historical analysis, which is an integral portion of my dissertation, because this project explores how black women’s autobiographies from this period are constructed through the convergence of multiple discourses available during the civil rights era. Additionally, the project critically examines constructions of the public memory of the movement and its elision of women’s participation. Furthermore, my analysis delves into the ways that historians of African American history are constructing both women’s and gender histories of the movement.

In recent years, Civil Rights scholarship has gained popularity. Although much of this work has been male focused, work on women in the movement has gained ground within the academy. Most of the texts that focus on women and the Civil Rights Movement perform women’s history, meaning that they locate women’s participation. While they perform the needed intervention of disrupting the masculinist perspective of the movement, much of the work does not produce gender histories of the movement. Specifically, many of the major works on African American women and the Civil Rights
Movement attempt to locate African American women in the movement and add them to the historical record, rather than delving into the construction of gendered roles within the movement, which has been explored in scholarship on the Black Power movement. The contentious debate over Elaine Brown’s *A Taste of Power*, Michele Wallace’s *Black Macho and The Myth of the Superwoman*, and Tracye Matthew’s “No One Ever Asked What a Man’s Role in the Revolution Is:’ Gender and the Politics of Leadership in the Black Power Movement 1966-71” have ignited an on-going discussion about gender, power, and the Black Panther Party.

Victoria Crawford, Jacqueline Rouse, and Barbara Woods’s *Women in the Civil Rights Movement: Trailblazers and Torchbearers, 1941-1965* (1990), was one of the earliest texts to explore women and the movement. This collection unearths various accounts of women’s participation within the movement. *Women in the Civil Rights Movement* broke the silence around black women’s participation, adding them to the historical record and highlighting the multiplicity of roles women performed. It included women who challenged male leaders, such as, Septima Clark and Ella Baker. Moreover, *Women in the Civil Rights Movement* analyzes women’s participation in movement activities that rarely receive critical attention, such as maintaining the Freedom Schools and aiding the movement as freedom singers.

Further consideration of women’s roles in the movement is explored in Charles Payne’s “Men Led, But Women Organized: Movement Participation of Women in the Mississippi Delta” (1990) and Anne Strandley’s “The Role of Black Women in the Civil Rights Movement” (1990). Payne argues that African American women participated in the movement in large numbers in the Mississippi Delta region because they were
motivated by religious, familial, and kinship networks. Although these women joined the movement despite church leadership’s disapproval, Payne cites their religious beliefs as reasons for optimism about creating social change. Payne’s assertion is important because the idea that women’s participation was limited mainly to organizing has become an unchallenged paradigm. Payne’s work challenges the patriarchal paradigm because it illustrates that women were an important part of the movement instead of being peripheral participants.

In contrast, Anne Strandley’s “The Role of Black Women in the Civil Rights Movement” (1990) critiques historians such as Harvard Sitkoff, Aldon Morris, and Clayborne Carson for focusing on male preachers as leaders rather than looking to the various times when women led protests in the movement. Additionally, these male historians often overlook the ways that congregations, which were populated mainly by women, pressured their church leadership to participate in the Civil Rights Movement. Strandley contends that many women participants were sometimes submissive to clergy leadership and did not criticize the sexism within the movement until after the women left the Civil Rights Movement. This lack of critique during the movement contributes to the male bias of the historical record. However, there were women, such as Septima Clark, who were in leadership roles and critiqued male leaders, even though there were some women who may have defended male leadership. While Clark cited sexism as a force within the Civil Rights Movement, other women attributed black male leaders’ sexism to oppressive external forces such as capitalism. Crawford, Rouse, and Woods’ Women in the Civil Rights Movement sparked further interest in the topic of women in the movement.
As interest in women and Civil Rights grew, *The Journal of Black Studies* (1996) compiled a special issue dedicated to the topic. These essays continued the work of Crawford, Rouse, and Woods by addressing the absence of women from the histories of the movements. Deborah Atwater’s opening editorial entitled: “The Voices of African American Women in the Civil Rights Movement” describes this issue as both generating scholarship and critically analyzing existing works about black women’s role in the African American Civil Rights Movement. While many of the essays perform the task of diversifying the gender representation of the movement within the historical record, they also perform the recuperative work of portraying these women as “strong black women” sometimes reifying stereotypes about black womanhood. This recuperative work highlights the contributions of African American women and relies on easy characterizations of their nature. Moreover, it does not illustrate the complexity of maintaining a civil rights subjectivity.

Teresa Nance’s “Hearing the Missing Voice” (1996) categorizes African American women’s participation into three categories: the mama, activist, and friend. She argues that African American women’s roles in the movement mirror those during slavery and Reconstruction. Although the re-conceptualization of African American leadership within the movement is needed, these categories elide the ways that women did participate as “traditional” leaders, who took positions of authority outside of domestic sphere identifications. Moreover, Nance’s categorizations can reinforce gender stereotypes about women’s work as solely the helpmates of men. Nance characterizes women’s participation as rooted in their desire to aid in community survival.
Later, Belinda Robnett’s *How Long? How Long? African American Women in the Struggle for Civil Rights* (1997) enters the conversation about women and Civil Rights arguing that black women most often participated in the movement as “bridge leaders,” women that engaged in supportive roles that enhanced group cohesion and helped sustain the movement. Moreover, Robnett argues that this is an important concept through which to view African American women’s participation in the movement. While this concept is helpful, it elides as much as it illuminates because this paradigm relegates women into the role of helpmate to “real” leaders. Furthermore, the term “bridge leaders” has the potential to reformulate the activities of women who acted in “traditional” leadership roles into bridge leaders. Furthermore, the conceptualization of this term does not take into account the ways that gender oppression pressed women into the background of the movement.

Bettye Collier-Thomas and V. P. Franklin’s *Sisters in the Struggle: African American Women in the Civil Rights-Black Power Movement* (2001) performs multiple interventions in regards to interrupting the masculinist representation of both the civil rights and Black Power movements. First, it disrupts the notion of a strict separation between the two movements and acknowledges the complicated gender negotiations women made in both movements. Second, *Sisters* breaks with history as a discipline through featuring autobiographical accounts, by Mary McLeod Bethune, Rosa Parks, Dorothy Height, and Charlayne Hunter Gault, as historical documents. Although Scott would disagree with Collier-Thomas and Franklin’s categorization of these texts as unquestionable evidence, their usage points to the paucity of African American women’s voices in the historical record as speaking subjects. Finally, though *Sisters* leans more
towards characterizing women in the Civil Rights Movement as respectable ladies, some of the essays break with this representation to illustrate the complexity of black women’s images both during and after the movements through highlighting emotions such as fear, anxiety, and stress rather than strength.

Notably, Chana Kai Lee’s “Anger, Memory, and Personal Power: Fannie Lou Hamer and Civil Rights Leadership” explores unpopular emotions and the crafting of subjectivity. Rather than rendering Hamer as a dutiful daughter, Lee highlights how Hamer harnessed her anger and personal experiences with racial injustice to create a compelling personal narrative within the Civil Rights Movement. Lee examines the way that Hamer constructs her subjectivity throughout the movement from a timekeeper, racial justice activist, poverty activist, to a woman broken by her daughter’s untimely death, and eventually, a woman killed by chronic illness. This essay is an example of a complex exploration of subjectivity and movement politics, which illustrates how women’s complex gendered positioning affects their participation in the Civil Rights Movement.

*Gender and the Civil Rights Movement* (1999), edited by Peter Ling and Sharon Monteith is the only collection of work on women and the movement that specifically sets out to do gender history. Through analyzing the construction of gender and topics such as: the Montgomery Bus Boycott, black popular music, and women and leadership, this collection questions the constructions of maleness and femaleness within the movement. Furthermore, the editors Ling and Monteith acknowledge that the collection’s silence on issues of sexuality is problematic. Though the authors embrace social construction and refuse essentialist notions of identity, they do not embrace post-
structuralist theories that threaten the unity of history as a discipline because it de-centers notions of historical certainty about the past. Despite its shortcomings, *Gender and the Civil Rights Movement*, creates a space from which to begin exploring the movement from new vantage points.

Questioning the construction of the movement even further, Renee Romano and Leigh Raiford’s *The Civil Rights Movement in American Memory* (2006) examines the historical memory of the movement and its intersection with popular culture. One essay, Kathryn Nasstrom’s “Down to Now: Memory, Narrative, and Women’s Leadership in the Civil Rights Movement in Atlanta, Georgia” explores the construction of official narratives of the Civil Rights Movement that omit African American women’s leadership. Through the examination of a case study, Nasstrom describes the creation of a public memory of the Atlanta voting rights campaign of 1946 that excludes African American women. The irony of this public narrative is that African American women leaders and community groups participated in large numbers in traditional leadership roles. Nasstrom attributes the elision to a growing emphasis on scholarship that concerns black male leaders and the need for compelling narratives of success. She contends that if historians traced African American women’s advancement, the narrative would be “sobering” because historians would not find the narrative of their meteoric rise to leadership in Atlanta, Georgia; rather, they would find that women faced challenges because of their gender that stifled their rise through the ranks (Nasstrom 1996, 275).

Finally, Nasstrom calls for scholars to challenge the masculinist narrative of the movement. Nasstrom’s argument calls for scholars to examine the movement from women’s vantage points and to challenge the narrative of success that is attaching itself to
Civil Rights history. This dissertation seeks to do just that through an examination of women’s self-representations of their experience in the movement.

Similarly, Steve Estes’s “Engendering Movement Memories: Remembering Race and Gender in the Mississippi Movement” explores how gender interacts with the construction of memory and history. Through examining SNCC archival papers, Estes finds that for many African American male participants, the movement operated as a space to claim greater masculinity. Additionally, he claims that African American women in the movement felt empowered through their participation in anti-racist work, while white women identified sexism. The sexism within SNCC precipitated Casey Hayden and Mary King’s 1964 letter about male supremacy within the organization. Later, Hayden changed her perspective and retreated from claims of sexism. African American women began to claim that sexism did exist within SNCC after the movement ended, citing that women were often assigned to teaching positions, while the men were more often placed in positions where they worked and faced racism in the community. Estes concludes by arguing that just as perspectives change, so does public memory and the historical narrative of the Civil Rights Movement. Therefore, scholars need to continue interrogating the role of gender within the movement.

Although each of the texts previously discussed perform multiple feminist interventions, they also perform multiple elisions. Black feminist lesbians remain virtually invisible, masculinity is under-examined, and emotions such as doubt and fear are often traded in for representations of the women as fearless and courageous. These silences need to be explored because without complex representations scholars are merely trading in one stereotype for another. My examination of the texts is primarily
concerned with the production of the categories of analysis that are used when studying the Civil Rights Movement. The African American Civil Rights Movement is a historical moment that is in need of critical examination that moves beyond certifying what happened to examining how the black female body was instrumental within the movement.

In relation to Civil Rights scholarship, there also is a need to explore how heteronormativity and the sexualization of racism affected the movement. A way to explore this concern is through utilizing queer theory as a way of looking at the Civil Rights Movement. Rather than locating African American women within the movement, I analyze African American women’s movement autobiographies with attention to racialized sexuality and the construction of gender. In order to do this analysis, I bring queer of color critique to the analysis of the Civil Rights Movement, which is instructive here because it explores racialization and sexuality through a post-structural lens while critiquing whiteness.

Roderick Ferguson’s *Aberrations in Black: Towards a Queer of Color Critique* examines the formation of canonical sociology and the production of subjects of color that exist outside of heteropatriarchal norms. His queer of color critique articulates that there are no discrete identity categories; therefore, scholars must see how capital intersects with the state to create identities and existences at both the margin and center. This project uses queer of color critique to explore race, sexuality, gender, and rights narratives simultaneously. As Ferguson argues, the intersection of race and sexuality must be thought through, with serious consideration given to the specificity of the historical moment.
Queer theory pushes my project to consider complex questions around the ways that racism affects non-heteronormative sexuality and creates cleavages to heterosexual identities. I consider the following questions: How do racialized sexualized stereotypes help to create a politics of respectability within the black community? How are the politics of remembering the Civil Rights Movement affected by a politics of respectability? How do racial minorities mobilize rights struggles amid a culture where racism is sexualized? My assertion is that by utilizing Queer theory, particularly Queer of Color Critique, new understandings of this historical moment can emerge.

Critically analyzing the African American Civil Rights Movement is a dangerous prospect, because as Walter Benjamin argues, every historical movement is always moving towards conformism. He writes in “Theses on the Philosophy of History”

To articulate the past historically does not mean to recognize it “the way it really was” (Ranke). It means to seize hold of a memory as it flashes up at a moment of danger…The danger affects both the content of the tradition and its receivers. The same threat hangs over both: that of becoming a tool of the ruling classes. In every era the attempt must be made anew to wrest tradition away from a conformism that is about to overpower it. (Benjamin [1955] 1968, 255)

Taking Benjamin’s argument seriously means that even the Civil Rights Movement risks becoming a tool of the power structure it sought to disrupt. It is in the midst of moving toward conformism that is masculinist in character, meaning that it is moving towards becoming a narrative of male leadership that erases women’s participation and leadership. Moreover, creating a masculinist narrative of the Civil Rights Movement risks
an erasure of its critique of existing power structures. Benjamin theorizes an Angel of History that is standing on a pile of wreckage looking towards the past but being blown towards the future by a violent storm called progress that continues to pile more wreckage at its feet. The Angel is instructive here because this chapter explores three theoretical interventions—the feminist move toward gender history, the insertion of women’s stories into the grand narrative of the Civil Rights Movement, and the possibilities for thinking through the Civil Rights Movement utilizing a queer of color critique—in order to create a space for new methodologies exploring the historical narrative of the movement from the vantage point of African American women. Queer of color critique enables new questions about the ways that heteronormativity affects women’s self-representation and participation in the Civil Rights Movement. Theorizing the use of African American women in the movement by focusing on the way that their bodies were regulated within the movement, my analysis begins by examining Foucault’s concept of surveillance and histories of racial uplift within the African American community.

**Surveillance and the Politics of Respectability**

Before learning about her through Highlander, I too had been a victim of the “Rosa was Tired” myth. As an educator, I knew how deeply this myth, which portrays the Montgomery bus boycott as a spontaneous action based simply on anger and frustration, is embedded in what we teach children about the struggle for civil rights. The story of the power of the community and the sophisticated planning that went into making a successful boycott was neglected or invisible. –Hebert Kohl, *She Would Not Be Moved*
The difference between the popular myth and scholarly histories of Rosa Parks demonstrates the creation of a social myth that illustrates how civil rights subjectivity molds women’s public personas, through the a combination of surveillance and the authorizing of certain types of narratives. In order develop a framework of civil rights subjectivity, first, I delineate Foucault’s definitions of surveillance, panopticism, docile bodies and the disciplinary gaze. This dissertation argues that the African American Civil Rights Movement utilized black women’s bodies as a site of integration, which encouraged a disciplinary gaze. This disciplinary gaze attempted to fit the women into certain modes of behavior and bodily styling that they work with and through to create their self-representations.

Although the African American Civil Rights Movement was made up of a series of local struggles that sometimes worked together, the strategic use of the politics of respectability and humanism undergirded many of its efforts. This politics of respectability is a gendered politics that lead to a specific type of surveillance on black female bodies, which attempted to write them as docile bodies through a disciplinary gaze. Within my explanation, I discuss how I intend to use Foucault’s terms. Second, I discuss how the project of racial uplift influences the African American Civil Rights Movement and utilizes gender constructions to encourage women’s docility. Then, through a case-study analysis of Roberts v. City of Boston, one of the earliest school desegregation cases, I provide an example of the use of African American women’s bodies as sites to make integrationist claims. Self-representation and the public memory intersect at a point of contention for African American women autobiographers because they must work with, and through it, to create their self-representations.
Herbert Kohl’s example of being a victim of “The Rosa Parks was tired” myth is an example of how gender norms affect representations of the Civil Rights Movement and shape cultural understandings of African American women’s participation. Parks has to be characterized as a tired woman within popular accounts, rather than a skilled and trained activist with convictions. Furthermore, because of Parks’ image in the African American community, as respectable, law-abiding, and married she was judged as a suitable candidate to enact this type of public protest.

The description of the Civil Rights Movement as one that embodied surveillance upon black female bodies may be seen as controversial because it challenges African American community politics; however, my analysis of Daisy Bates, Melba Beals, and Anne Moody’s life narratives illustrates that this gaze influenced the construction of their subjectivities. For African American women in the Civil Rights Movement the social order of the African American community established norms of behavior. Moreover, these norms function to contain and shape the behavior of the women in the movement, which leads to an internalization of the norms and behaviors demanded by the community. In the self-representations examined in this dissertation, African American women dealt with the normalizing force; yet, they also utilized their circumscribed agency to work with and through movement politics. To analyze the ways that African American women’s bodies are regulated and policed, I turn to Foucault’s notions of panopticism, surveillance and the disciplinary gaze.

Foucault’s *Discipline and Punish* examines how societies create order and control through various methods of discipline. He argues that Western society has shifted from a model of disciplinary power where the sovereign enacts punishment upon the criminal
body, which displayed control through a mixture of terror and spectacle, to a model of power where every person operates as if they are being observed and judged by those in power. This new model of disciplinary power that is characterized by panopticism, an all-seeing gaze, produces individuals who are invested in their own subjection. The panopticism operates through, what Foucault calls, “subtle coercion” which makes the subject police her own behaviors ([1977]/1995, 209). This subtle coercion is evident within representation of the self. For this dissertation, I focus on where that subtle coercion is evident in the texts of African American women who participated in the Civil Rights Movement. Foucault highlights that the panoptic gaze is active whenever there are regulations of behavior, gestures, and where there is pressure to conform to a preconceived norm. Panopticism works through the installation of normalizing judgment throughout society. Foucault writes,

The workshop, the school, the army were subject to a whole micro-penalty of time (lateness, absences, interruptions of tasks), of activity (inattention, negligence, lack of zeal), of behaviour (impoliteness, disobedience), of speech (idle chatter, insolence), of the body (‘incorrect’ attitudes, irregular gestures, lack of cleanliness), of sexuality (impurity, indecency). (Foucault [1977]/1995, 178)

Foucault theorizes that discipline acts as a micro-physics of power, meaning that it works through subjects internalizing norms of behavior, politics, and morals. Furthermore, he argues that discipline is a politics of ranking, where people judge
one another by a standard by which privileges are assigned or taken away. The creation of standards that people strive to reach, also known as norms or normalization, are an outgrowth of the distribution of disciplinary power. Standards of normalization discipline populations through creating an accepted mode of behavior that utilizes penalties to maintain the average. Additionally, if a person does not meet a standard, they are encouraged to continue striving to meet it. If a person does not meet the standard, they may be judged as abnormal. In fact, Foucault characterizes normalization as a type of disciplinary power that “differentiates, hierarchizes, homogenizes, [and] excludes” (Foucault, [1977] 1995, 183). An institution or social group is able to enforce normalizing judgment through surveillance, which is “a specific mechanism of the disciplinary power” (Foucault, [1977] 1995,175). An environment where people believe that they are constantly under surveillance creates a space where the subject strives to meet the standards of normalization because they believe that they are constantly being inspected. Therefore, power does not need to constantly punish subjects who behave in non-normative ways; rather, it creates an environment where subjects do not act “abnormally” for fear of being punished. Power works through subjects. A society, institution, or social group that relies on surveillance to enact disciplinary power produces docile bodies. Foucault defines docile bodies as bodies “that may be subjected, used, transformed and improved” (Foucault [1977]/1995, 136). Docile bodies are acted on, shaped, and molded to fit a standard.
Specifically, this project is interested in the ways that surveillance enacts a disciplinary gaze on populations. African American struggles for increased citizenship rights have been working with and through the disciplinary gaze of white supremacy. This gaze creates certain politics with the American body social and within the African American community. However, this disciplinary gaze is not all powerful; resistance is possible. Margaret McLaren outlines Foucault’s take of surveillance, in *Feminism, Foucault, and Embodies Subjectivity* by stating,

In order for discipline to achieve its goal of producing useful and docile bodies, the body must internalize its demands...Surveillance, or the disciplinary gaze, was found especially in hospitals, asylums, prisons, schools, orphanages, factories, and working-class housing developments. ...But surveillance did not end with one individual supervisor, it was part of a network of power....The pervasiveness of the disciplinary gaze results in self-monitoring. Resistance, when it happens, happens within and through the body. It happens both through the individual body and the collective, social body. (107-108)

While this dissertation applies Foucault’s terminology of surveillance, it departs from his theorization in various ways. First, this dissertation is not arguing that the African American Civil Rights Movement operated entirely within a panoptic framework; instead, it argues that there was a disciplinary gaze or surveillance on African American
female bodies. Second, this dissertation is not arguing that African American women who participated in the Civil Rights Movement were solely docile bodies. This dissertation argues that their life choices were limited by systemic racism and movement politics, but they were still able to work for change, despite these constraints.

The later chapters demonstrate how Daisy Bates, Melba Beals, and Anne Moody work with and through these constraints utilizing a circumscribed agency. Similar to the critique of Foucault’s theories by Monique Deveaux’s “Feminism and Empowerment: A Critical Reading of Foucault,” this dissertation takes the position that agency is possible, despite being circumscribed. African American women are able to utilize their agency to work with and through disciplinary regimes. Judith Butler’s *Gender Trouble* (1990) argues that repetition of norms with the addition of a critical difference can transform disciplinary regimes. This argument is useful to this study because it posits a way for people to use their subject positions to create change within a power structure.

This dissertation asserts that African American women who participated in the Civil Rights Movement mimicked the body stylings of white women in order to gain access to the American body social. Barbara Welter’s “The Cult of True Womanhood: 1820-1860” (1966) outlines the standards for white womanhood that African American women re-created in their attempts to join the “cult of domesticity” in order to work for civil rights advances, which I illustrate in Chapters three, four, and five. She argues that white women were encouraged by the education system and mass media (i.e. periodicals) to exemplify “piety, purity, submissiveness, and domesticity” (Welter 1966, 152). Furthermore, Welter states, “Without them [piety, purity, submissiveness, and domesticity], no matter whether there was fame, achievement or wealth, all was ashes.
With them she was promised happiness and power” (152). In the case of African American women, these standards were cast as standards one met not only for herself, but for the betterment of her race. Not meeting these standards meant, for some, that they would not be considered a ‘good’ representative of the race, and might be judged unfit for representing African Americans in the struggle for civil rights.

Through the creation of what Evelyn Higginbotham’s Righteous Discontent terms the “politics of respectability,” where members of the African American community are asked to behave with decorum for the betterment of the race, some African American women were able to enact the phenomenon of ‘repetition with difference’ in order to create the world anew (1994). This dissertation argues that although African American women were subjected to a disciplinary gaze, they were able to use and re-cast their subjectivities to oppose American racism through circumscribed agency.

The politics of respectability within the African American community have been theorized by previous scholars as a movement that asked individuals in the community to adhere to white-middle class norms of behavior in order to uplift the entire race. This dissertation is interested in exploring the gendered nature of the politics of respectability and the ways that African American women use self-representation to fight racism and the constrictions of racialized comportment. Underlying this discourse of racial uplift is a belief that the behavior of African Americans both enables and changes systemic racism.

Kevin Gaines’s Uplifting the Race examines elite African Americans response to racism through the construction of racial uplift ideology and the politics of respectability in the late 19th and early 20th centuries. This ideology shifted from a “lift as we climb” approach to racial advancement to a dominating approach that emphasized class
differentiation, which privileged the Black elite. Through historical analysis, Gaines illustrates that African Americans emphasize class distinctions within the group to aid in the project of gaining civil rights. Therefore, elite African Americans highlighted the moral and behavioral differences between themselves and impoverished African Americans.

Due to the large scale malignment of African Americans through mass media (e.g. minstrel shows, films, and toys), educated African Americans sought to counter racist constructions and make citizenship claims through the use of racial uplift ideology. As Gaines describes, “racial uplift ideology addressed: black elites’ quest for the authentic, or “positive,” black middle class subject” (Gaines 1996, xvii). He argues that the black middle class is a group that is not conventionally defined by monetary wealth or privileged status, rather, they loosely define themselves as a “better class” of people that are striving for the protections of American citizenship through an adherence to white middle class norms and achieving respectability for the race (Gaines 1996, 16). By exploring Gaines’s theories of the black middle class subject, it is clear that in order to enact this mode of being, a politics of surveillance and internalization of community norms had to be present.

During the early 20th century, Gaines finds that African Americans were subject to “restricted labor markets, segregation, the lack of legal protection and full citizenship status, and [were subject to] threats of violence or sexual abuse” (16). According to Gaines, the black middle class subject is constituted by both the African American community’s notions of a respectable citizen and white American social ideals of class distinction. Therefore, the black middle class subject is one that is invested in both
personal social mobility and community advancement. This subject position aids the community, but places strictures on African American womanhood that prevented them from expressing the full complexity of their subjectivities. The prominent belief among the black middle class was that, if they could gain the favor of whites through racial uplift, they could re-claim the citizenship rights granted during the Reconstruction. Gaines illustrates that the problem with this strategy is that it reifies class differences and replicates racist logic.

Not only did uplift ideology highlight class differences within the African American community, it also emphasized self-help and self-monitoring rather than focusing attention on the harmful effects of systemic racism. For African American elites, uplift ideology usually focused on “self-help, racial solidarity, temperance, thrift, chastity, social purity, patriarchal authority, and the accumulation of wealth” (Gaines 1996, 2). Moreover, Gaines finds that through the construction of racial uplift ideology, anti-black racist rhetoric is often reproduced within anti-racist rhetoric through its adherence to normative notions of class distinctions, sexuality, and gender roles. Through an adherence to normative patriarchal gender roles, elite African Americans attempted to distinguish themselves from “lower-class” African Americans. Gaines states,

Bitter, divisive memories of the violence and humiliations of slavery and segregation were and remain at the heart of uplift ideology’s romance of the patriarchal family, expressed by black men and women’s too-often-frustrated aspirations to protect and be protected. Claiming respectability often meant denouncing non-conformity to patriarchal gender conventions and bourgeois morality. A sense of shame might compel silences or
revisions of any number of sensitive matters of parentage, disease, transgressive sexuality, or other behaviors or occurrences to which a real or imagined racial stigma might be attached. (5-6)

In the case of African American women, this gendered distinction takes on more significance because it leaves black women leaders in a space of contradiction. They are charged with the task of both espousing uplift rhetoric as they break with patriarchal gender conventions. What is important for my project is recognizing the continuance of the preoccupation with heteronormative gender roles and patriarchal norms within the African American community during the civil rights struggles of the late 20th century. Furthermore, Gaines contends that the preoccupation with Victorian gender roles within the African American community also led to “emphasizing the victimization of black men through lynching or economic exclusion and silencing the particular victimizations of black women” (13). This silencing of the victimization of black women is influential in the construction of their subjectivities. I explore how the confines of the politics of respectability and the surveillance it enacted, interacts with African American women’s construction of their life-narratives.

This project extends Gaines’s theories of the black middle class subject to theorize a “black civil rights subjectivity.” While Gaines’s black middle class subject is constituted through the African American community’s notions of a respectable citizen and white American social ideals of class distinction, I theorize a “black civil rights subjectivity” that is constituted through the same ideals with an emphasis on racialized heteronormativity that is maintained through a politics of surveillance. The black civil rights subjectivity solidifies patriarchal concerns as the highest priority within African
American community politics and creates a space that is ideologically hostile to patriarchy’s non-conforming “others.”

Thaddeus Russell’s “The Color of Discipline: Civil Rights and Black Sexuality” illustrates the outcomes of this hostility to gay, lesbian, and transgendered members of the African American community during the early 1950s. Russell argues that the influence of civil rights leaders, such as Adam Clayton Powell Jr.’s, adherence to normative sexuality and gender presentations became a community preoccupation. According to Russell, non-normative gender presentation and sexualities were accepted among the African American working class until the internal campaign to abject non-normative sexualities commenced. This internal campaign was bolstered by a national climate of abjection signified by Executive Order 10450 enacted by President Eisenhower that ordered the expulsion of federal employees who were “guilty” of “sexual perversion” (1953). Within the African American community, Russell contends, this campaign of abjection took the form of public shaming of non-normative sexuality through church sermons, the elimination of drag ball coverage by Jet and Ebony magazines, and Martin Luther King Jr.’s ousting of Bayard Rustin from his inner circle of advisers.

By intersecting Gaines’s black middle class subject with Russell’s illustration of the abjection of queerness within the Civil Rights Movement, what emerges is a black civil rights subjectivity. This particular subjectivity coalesces around the project of respectability which calls on African Americans to abject non-normative sexualities and gender identities. This new subjectivity hails patriarchy’s others, namely, women, queer people, people with disabilities, and gender variant people, to perform normativity for the
sake of the race. In the late 20th century these phenomena continue as Cathy Cohen illustrates in her analysis of the black AIDS crisis. Cathy Cohen’s *Boundaries of Blackness: AIDS and the Breakdown of Black Politics* names the phenomenon of othering a subset of a marginalized group “secondary marginalization,” which is a process that has occurred within the African American community around various issues (1999, 75). As Cohen explains it, secondary marginalization is a process of policing group membership and normativity. Those deemed as normative or most similar to the dominant group police their community and its image in the public sphere by moving some people in to and others out of the public eye. This policing is done for the political benefit of the dominant group. Cohen writes,

At the root of the process of policing is the idea that black communities can reconstruct themselves for the white gaze, formulating their own indigenous definitions of blackness. These internally created, community-based definitions of identity, in this case blackness, center not merely on easily identifiable physical characteristics, but also use moralistic and character evaluations to appraise membership. (Cohen 1999, 74)

She goes on to state,

Policing the visible or public boundaries of group identity threatens the status of those most vulnerable in marginal communities. Through such a process, those members of marginal communities most in need and reportedly extreme in their “non-conformist behavior” are defined as standing outside the norms and behavior agreed upon by the community. (Cohen 1999, 75)
As Cohen explains, what is at risk is the livelihood of marginal group members of already marginalized groups. Civil rights subjectivities are created through acts of secondary marginalization. These subjectivities are inhabited by those fighting for citizenship rights, but the parameters of subject position are influenced by dominant and marginalized groups.

To illustrate how this construction of the civil rights subjectivity hails black women’s bodies, I analyze three case studies that involve school integration claims utilizing female bodies, namely, Roberts v. City of Boston (1849), Gong Lum v. Rice (1927), and Brown v. Topeka Kansas Board of Education (1954; 1955). I use school integration cases because as historical moments they exemplify the complexity of the nexus of race, gender, and representation that create the space for black civil rights subjectivity. Additionally, these cases involve the construction of a particular narrative of helpless black girls and strong black fathers who work for the enfranchisement of African Americans into the American social body.

Two Long Walks: Black Girls as Plaintiffs

An early claim to desegregate public schools came in 1849 on the behalf of a five-year-old African American girl named Sarah Roberts. Although this case is not often cited in popular histories of the African American Civil Rights Movement, it is monumental because it is the origin of the phrase “separate but equal” rendered by Justice Lemeul Shaw in 1845 (Kendrick and Kendrick, 2004). The Roberts case, which was argued by Charles Sumner before the Massachusetts Supreme Court, served as a
precedent for the Plessy v. Ferguson (1896) decision. Furthermore, Sarah Roberts’s case is emblematic of the representational strategy utilized in later desegregation cases.

Beginning in 1840, African American parents boycotted Boston’s only school designated for their children to attend. Spurred on by support of the African American community and white abolitionists, such as William Garrison, Lydia Maria Child, and David Child, the school boycott lasted five years. By 1844, independent of the school boycott, Benjamin Roberts attempted to enroll his four-year-old, Sarah Roberts, in multiple white public schools. In *Sarah’s Long Walk*, Stephen Kendrick and Paul Kendrick contend that Roberts engaged in this protest because he could not see the logic in his daughter having to walk past white schools to attend the Smith School designated for African Americans. Roberts was able to get Sarah Roberts admissions tickets to attend the white schools just by using their family name. Upon arriving with his daughter, however, the two of them were promptly turned away from most of the schools. Eventually, Sarah was admitted to the Otis School, which she attended for a few months, until she was expelled. As Kendrick and Kendrick contend, the method of Sarah’s expulsion revealed the harshness of segregation. They state, “The [Boston] School Committee saw to it that the four-year-old Sarah was removed from her new school by a police officer” (2004, 99). Promptly following this display of force, Benjamin Roberts sought a lawyer. The case would eventually reach the Massachusetts Supreme Court.

Charles Sumner’s arguments in this case are important because they illustrate the ways that integrationists create an argument to forward their cause using black female bodies. His framing of the case for desegregation illustrates how the female body was key to the positioning of his case. Sumner writes,
On one side of the city of Boston, strong in wealth, influence, character; on the other side is a little child, of degraded color, of humble parents, and still within the period of natural infancy, but strong from her very weakness and from the irrepressible sympathies of good men, which, by a divine compensation, come to succor the weak. This little child asks at your hand her personal rights. So doing, she calls upon you to decide a question which concerns the personal rights of other colored children; which concerns the Constitution and Laws of the Commonwealth; which concerns that peculiar institution of New England. The Common Schools; which concerns the fundamental principles of human rights; which concerns the Christian character of this community. Such parties and such interests justly challenges your earnest attention. ([italics inserted] Sumner [1849] 1870, 1)

The language of Sumner’s argument is telling—it emphasizes the youth and weakness of Sarah Roberts. This argument is bolstered by her gender because within American cultural discourse women are commonly referred to as the weaker sex. Furthermore, Sumner positions Sarah Roberts as someone who is begging for her rights at the hands of the Justices and white citizens. He goes on to argue that skin color should not be a reason for the separation of students, but characteristics such as gender and mental ability are justifiable reasons. Sumner states,

The power to determine the qualifications, though less simple, must be restrained to age, sex, and fitness, moral and intellectual. The fact that a child is black, or that he is white cannot of itself be a qualification or a
disqualification… It is clear that the Committee may classify scholars according to \textit{age and sex for obvious reasons} that these distinctions are inoffensive and especially recognized as legal in the law relating to schools. ([italics inserted][1849]1870, 12)

This statement illustrates how Sumner emphasizes the School Committee’s right to segregate based on gender while arguing for racial integration. This is an important point because in the context of representations of Black sexuality, specifically the myth of the black male rapist, Sumner’s emphasis on gender segregation creates a space for the separation of black men from white women. His rhetoric reinforces a masculinist attitude to “protect the weaker sex.” Moreover, Sumner’s statement that the School Committee has the right to separate students based on intellectual fitness allows for the separation of people with disabilities and opens space for the separation of African Americans who were frequent victims of scientific racism. According to Stephen J. Gould’s \textit{The Mismeasure of Man}, African Americans have been wrongly portrayed as less intelligent, as a group, than whites throughout the 19\textsuperscript{th} century by prominent scientists Samuel Morton and Louis Agassiz. Therefore, Sumner’s argument, which is meant as a racially progressive statement actually reinforces racist, sexist, and ableist discourses.

Both Sumner’s argument and Justice Lemuel Shaw’s opinion given with the ruling are important in that they create discourses that continue long after the Roberts case is decided. Chief Justice Shaw’s opinion endorses Sumner’s idea of ‘equality before the law’ regardless of color, but also supports the School Committee’s ability to determine if students should be separated by race. The Shaw’s opinion reads:

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In the absence of special legislation on this subject, the law has vested the power in the committee to regulate the system of distribution and classification; and when this power is reasonably exercised, without being abused or perverted by colorable pretences, the decision of the committee must be deemed conclusive…. It is urged, that this maintenance of separate schools tends to deepen and perpetuate the odious distinction of caste, founded in a deep-rooted prejudice in public opinion. This prejudice, if it exists, is not created by law, and probably cannot be changed by law. (Cushing 1866, 209)

This opinion was later cited as precedent in the 1896 Plessy v. Ferguson decision where the doctrine of “separate but equal” public facilities becomes legally justifiable until the Brown v. Board of Education decision of 1954. What is interesting about the relationship between these cases is that it illustrates how race and gender segregation are justified via the use of the black female body. They are used in order to advance and retract the project of integration. The black female body is integral to the projects of segregation and integration in US legal discourse because of its positioning as a race and gender subjugated body.

The Roberts case’s argument and ruling indicates that a particular discursive space can be created around black female bodies to advance civil rights discourses. In the Roberts case, the black female body becomes a body from which one can simultaneously argue for integration of the races, and justify separation based on gender and mental ability. Only through the use of the black female body can Charles Sumner argue both that African Americans deserve equal access to public schools and that his client, a girl,
is of the weaker sex. The character of his argument is important when considering the stories of African American women who participated in civil rights struggles because they are writing from a space where their bodies have also been used to forward the community’s goals.

Another such case was that of Gong Lum v. Rice (1927), which took place in Mississippi. The case involved, Martha Lum, an Asian American girl, who was ready to attend high school. A petition to allow Lum to attend the white public schools was filed in 1915, when she was nine years old. The petition argued the Lum was a citizen of good moral character. Although she was permitted to go to her district’s high school, Lum was later informed that she was not allowed to attend because she was not white. Martha’s father sued the school district contending that his daughter was not of the ‘colored race’ and should therefore be able to attend the white high school.

The Supreme Court also used the Roberts and Plessy cases as precedent to rule that, “If the plaintiff desires, she may attend the colored public schools of her district, or, if she does not so desire she may go to a private school…But the plaintiff is not entitled to attend a white public school” (Taft 1927, 2). Despite the passage of the 14th Amendment to the United States Constitution, Lum was denied access to the school because she was not white. The Court ruled that equal protection under the law existed because a public school for ‘colored’ students was available to Martha Lum. While this case differs from the Roberts case because it does not challenge the system of segregation because Lum fights for access to whiteness. However, the Lum case further illustrates that female bodies are essential to the construction of race. Lum is discursively positioned as a raced girl of good moral character who should be able to attend the white school.
Further, the scenario of her father fighting on her behalf is often repeated because it bolsters a racialized patriarchal male identity, while the raced female body does the discursive work. In other words, Gong Lum positions himself as the family patriarch that used Martha Lums raced and gendered body to illustrate his dominance and his daughter’s subjugated positioning within the dominant white culture as gendered.

The final case study, Brown v. Board of Education Topeka, Kansas (1962/1954), involves the consolidation of four cases under the case of Oliver Brown who sued the school board on behalf of his daughter, Linda Brown. Though each case has unique circumstances, the Supreme Court consolidated all of them under the question of whether or not segregation of public schools was a violation of the 14th Amendment of the U.S. Constitution, with the exception of Bolling v. Sharpe in Washington D.C. because Washington D.C. is not a state. It was examined, therefore, under the Fifth Amendment. Adopted in 1868, the Fourteenth Amendment grants equal protection under the law and due process of the law to all citizens. Significantly, the Fourteenth Amendment allows for citizens to sue states for violating their constitutional rights. The Fifth Amendment guarantees due process of the law in cases against the federal government. The narrative of the Brown case is very similar to that of the Roberts case. Both girls had to walk past white schools to get to the African American school in their districts. And both girls’ cases were championed by their fathers—middle class African American men.

The lawyers, who represented the states of Kansas, South Carolina, Virginia, Delaware, and Washington D.C., advocated for the States’ Rights to segregate because the language of the Amendment did not include public schools. Furthermore, they argued that the Supreme Court should not interpret the amendment as extending to public
schools. However, the attorneys who argued on behalf of desegregation suggested that the Amendment was framed openly to allow for broader interpretation in the future.

Although legislation had passed between the time of Roberts and Brown, such as the Fourteenth Amendment, and crucial precedents had been established; Gaines v. University of Missouri in 1938, Sipuel v. Board of Regents of University of Oklahoma in 1948, and Sweatt v. Painter in 1950. I argue that it is not coincidental that the circumstances of the cases are similar. Oliver Brown’s case, brought on behalf of his daughter, is the most compelling to the NAACP-Legal Defense Fund because it encompasses a narrative that involves the denial of rights to a young girl, the quintessential innocent in American political culture. As Lauren Berlant’s *The Queen of America Goes to Washington: Essays on Sex and Citizenship* (1997) argues, that American political identity of the late 20th century is constructed around the idea of an “infantile citizen,” who usually assumes the identity of a young (white) girl. She argues that the discourses of citizenship and public personhood pre-figure levels of appropriateness from the vantage point of a pre-pubescent girl rather than of an adult. Figuring the public sphere as a place full of ‘innocents’ positions non-heteronomative people outside of the discourse on citizenship. Through an examination of Francis Harper’s *Iola Leroy*, Harriet Jacobs’s *Incidents in the Life of a Slave Girl*, and Anita Hill’s testimony to Congress, Berlant contends that in order to re-write the rhetoric of (infantile) citizenship, there is a need for acts where subalterns challenge the national narrative. Berlant calls these challenges in the public sphere, acts of “diva citizenship” ([1997] 2005, 223). She contends that diva citizens engage in these acts because they
believe that “the privileged persons of the national culture will respond to the sublimity of reason” (Berlant [1997] 2005, 223).

Similarly, Renee Romano’s “Narratives of Redemption: The Birmingham Church Bombing Trials and the Construction of Civil Rights Memory” explores the significance of female victims to the creation of compelling citizenship narratives. Through examining the trial narratives and news coverage of the Birmingham church bombing, Romano finds that the killing of the females was emphasized over and above the killing of two black boys who were murdered the same day. According to Romano, Virgil Ware, thirteen years old, and Johnnie Robinson, sixteen years old, who were killed following the church bombing, Ware was killed by an Eagle Scout who had just left a segregationist rally while Robinson was shot in the milieu after the church bombing. Both killings were initially included in the headlines but were dropped from the headlines and the popular civil rights narrative. Romano states, “Perhaps the erasure of these two black boys from the nation’s collective historical memory suggests that it is easier to paint girls as uncomplicated victims” (2006, 105). Though some boys, such as Emmett Till do make compelling victims, they sometimes suffer from the complications of the sexualized racism that often paints interracial contact as taboo, especially between black men and white women. This fear of miscegenation even hung over the Brown trials, where the emphasis was on the black female body.

**First Comes the School, Then Comes the Marriage: The Miscegenation Question**

During the arguments of the cases consolidated under Brown v. Board of Education, lawyers on both sides invoked the discourses of segregating based on sex,
moral fitness, and intellectual ability. In the Briggs v. Elliott case Thurgood Marshall argues,

Insofar as the argument about the states having a right to classify students on the basis of sex, learning ability, et cetera, I do not know whether they do or do not, but I do believe that if it could be shown that they were unreasonable, they would feel too, that any of the actions of the state administrative official that affect any classification must be tested by the regular rules set up by this Court. (Marshall as cited in Friedmann [1969] 2004, 62-63)

By arguing that segregation based on gender and intellectual ability were entirely different questions, the lawyers created a space where fears of black male sexuality were quelled because of the possibility of separating white girls and black boys, through other ‘allowable’ types of segregation. The inclusion of these discourses alludes to white societal anxiety about racial intermarriage. Justice Frankfurter brings up intermarriage in his questioning of Hayes, a lawyer for the petitioners for the integration of Washington D.C. school. During the Bolling v. Sharpe case, Justice Frankfurt asks attorney Hayes, “I wonder whether you would say, right off from your analysis of the Constitution, that marriage laws relating to race are ipso facto on the face of things unconstitutional?” (Frankfurter as cited in Friedmann [1969] 2004, 116). To this query, Hayes answers that the court should answer that question.

Later, in the Bolling v. Sharpe case, the counsel for the school systems argued that, because gender segregation was legal, separating people based on other identity markers is a lawful practice. Counsel person Korman argues,
I call your attention to the fact that there is separation, I have learned, by
sexuals in many of the large cities of the country, not in all schools,
apparently, but in some, perhaps for some special reason…Those are the
things which are left to the decision of the legislature, the competent
authority in each case to decide what is best for that community. (Korman
as quoted in Friedmann [1969] 2004, 137)

In Davis v. County School Board of Prince George County, VA, the issue of
miscegenation laws arises briefly in the statements to the court. Davis, a counsel person
for the state of Virginia, argues that miscegenation laws are “beneficial protection to both
races” (Davis as quoted in Friedmann [1969] 2004, 216). Later, counsel person Davis
summarizes his argument by saying that “the best is often the enemy of the good” (216),
implying that though segregation might not be the best thing for human relations, it
provides a good living situation for the people. Taken together, there is a pattern of
invoking miscegenation as a way to make people afraid of the outcomes of racial
integration. Another example of the use of this logic in the Davis case happens when a
state counsel person Moore argues that there are rights that are not covered under the
Civil Rights Act of 1866. He states,

I hope to show you tomorrow, there were three types of rights which they all
finally admitted were not civil rights. The first one was the right to vote, which was never
given until the Fifteenth Amendment. The second was the right to marry a white woman
or the other way. The third was the right to go to mixed schools. Now as I hope to show
Your Honors tomorrow morning, those were certainly three vital rights in spite of all this
talk about equality of men, which was never intended to be given under that bill. (Moore as cited in Friedmann [1969] 2004, 222)

The fear of intermarriage bolsters the need to use black female bodies to make these claims because it diminishes the case that this will lead to the end of the white race. Speaking as both scholars and people who came of age during the 1950’s, bell hooks and Peter Irons both address the politics of integration and segregation within the public schools both conclude that much of the anxiety about integration stemmed from a fear of intermarriage. Peter Irons’s *Jim Crow’s Children* begins with the author’s personal narrative that highlights the intersection of race, gender, and school desegregation. Iron’s writes,

> The heart of the Jim Crow system, and the institution most central to its functioning, was the segregated public school system. The consignment of black children to separate schools kept them “in their place” and safely away from white children, especially girls, who might not realize that black males—even at grade-school level—might threaten the “purity” of the young “flowers of southern womanhood.” The combined power of racial prejudice and sexual phobia should not be underestimated as a motivating factor in the southern insistence on school segregation. The combined power of racial prejudice and sexual phobia should not be underestimated as a motivating factor in the southern insistence (Irons 2002, 12-13)

Writing about her experience growing up in the South, hooks says,
Once we left our black schools, gifted black male students ‘disappeared.’ They had always been visible at our all black schools…our parents talked about this unfair treatment of black males; racist white folks simply did not want gifted white girls sitting next to black boys (hooks 2001, 79)

These two statements illustrate the ways that fears of miscegenation intersected with the school desegregation issue. I argue that the terms of desegregation, coupled with the politics of respectability, created conditions that constricted black female subjectivity within the African American Civil Rights Movement. Black female bodies were positioned as symbols of the race, and proper womanhood which within the African American community. They buttressed respectable black masculinity, and quelled white fears of miscegenation. This politics was created from dominant white society and within the African American Civil Rights Movement; with the politics of respectability functioning to influence the discourse on American citizenship and African American civil rights subjectivity.

Daisy Bates, Melba Beals, and Anne Moody do not always claim the public sphere as a place where truths can be told. Because these women participate in a movement that is engaged in a politics of respectability to encourage racial uplift, these women learn to put on appearances. Although these women do not boldly speak about the “truths” of the complexities of race and gender, their autobiographical texts reveal that they both adhere to notions of proper civil rights subjectivity and exceed those limits.

Bates, Beals, and Moody use their autobiographies to testify to what Berlant calls the “unfreedoms” of being African American in the public sphere, while engaging in complex critiques of race, gender, sexuality, and national identity within their life
writings. These unfreedoms germinate from both with and outside of the movement; however, each woman grapples with the use of her body differently and attempts to balance her position with the gains of civil rights. As Shannon Winnubst’s *Queering Freedom* argues, the rhetoric of freedom can be seductive to the point where a group is willing to be lulled into enacting systems of domination in exchange for greater access to other kinds of freedoms. Making rights claims within the African American community seduced elite African Americans to abject those who do not fit into the discourse on normativity. The school desegregation cases are an example of the African American community’s intoxication with the discourse of freedom. Through the black female body black men are able to enter the territory of the neutral liberal citizen or phallicized whiteness (Winnubst).

In conclusion, I argue that the black female bodies of African American women who participated in the Civil Rights Movement were subjected to a disciplinary gaze in service to the discourse of racial uplift. In other words, the discourse of the Civil Rights Movement participated in the production of particular kinds of bodies. The surveillance ensured that a gendered discourse of race was produced that quelled fears of integration. I illustrate in the chapters that follow how Bates, Beals, and Moody conform to the restrictions of civil rights subjectivity, but also exceed it through a queering of it that allows them to step out of normativity. Daisy Bates withholds information about her problems with male leadership. Finally, Anne Moody conforms to popular beauty standards of feminine appearance in order to escape her mother’s identity, fights for Civil Rights, and challenges racialized normativity. Although Bates, Beals, and Moody are
confined by civil rights subjectivities, they also exceed this subject position in their life writings.

Bates (Chapter 2) exceeds this subject position by speaking for white men in her texts and through her claiming of male space of being a journalist and working with and against the NAACP. Moody (Chapter 3) transgresses boundaries by rejecting her maternal lineage and transforming herself into a proper civil rights subject with the help of a transwoman who acts as a mother to her. Beals (Chapter 4) represents herself as hyper-normative, but not through her own narrative. Instead, she breaks these bindings by the inclusion of her Grandmother India who transgresses notions of civil rights subjectivity by toting a gun and advocating for integration.
Chapter 2: Writing & Speaking for Others: Daisy Bates as Female Autograph

Daisy Bates’s *The Long Shadow of Little Rock* (1962) is a memoir of the integration of Little Rock, Arkansas’ Central High School. The early portion of *The Long Shadow of Little Rock* is an autobiographical sketch of her life before becoming a “racewoman,” while the bulk of the text is a memoir of the desegregation of Central High School and the aftermath. As the leader of the State Committee of the Arkansas NAACP, Bates oversaw the desegregation process. In her professional life, Bates was a reporter and editor for the State Press, a newspaper dedicated to reporting news from and important to Arkansas’ African American community. Bates ends the text with a mixture of melancholic and hopeful musings about the state of the American race relations and the future. In *The Long Shadow*, Bates makes the case for the need to push for racial integration in local public schools and in the US, but this chapter is concerned with how the text is constructed and its engagement with the politics of representation.

There are pivotal moments in *The Long Shadow of Little Rock* where Bates engages in the practice of speaking for, to, and with others to examine the far-reaching trauma of racism. This is important because it illustrates how Bates performs subjectivity, not as a monad, rather, as a “performative utterance” of a complex group that works for
the cause but is not coherent in its thinking about the goal of integration or motives for participation. I argue that Bates’s *The Long Shadow of Little Rock* is an example of autography and best feminist practices of representation because it enunciates a self that is inherently connected with its community’s political goals. Bates uses her text to articulate her political commitment to ending racial segregation and utilizes a form (the memoir) that permits her to trouble both the “autos” and “graphia,” a move that Jeanne Perreault defines as an “autography.” By allowing other voices to speak within the text, Bates’s narrative can be considered what Caren Kaplan has called an “out-law” genre in that it articulates a coalitional politics in a cultural autobiography that captures a particular historical moment.

Caren Kaplan’s “Resisting Autobiography: Out-Law Genres and Transnational Feminist Subjects” utilizes Jacques Derrida’s theory of genres, where he argues that genres are always engaging with their limits, to argue that feminists can create texts that both engage with and break autobiography’s rules of self-representation. Kaplan says, “As counterlaw, or ‘out-law’, such productions break most obvious rules of genre. locating ‘master’ genres, revealing the power dynamics embedded in literary production, distribution, and reception” (208). By mixing two different genres together, Kaplan asserts that feminists can critically engage with the “discourse of authorship” in order to create texts that challenge hegemony and structural oppression (208).

When analyzing out-law genres, Kaplan asserts that when critically analyzing a text, scholars need to be aware of the political underpinnings of the text’s production. Kaplan asserts, “These emerging out-law genres require more collaborative procedures that are more closely attuned to power differences among participants in the process of
producing the text. Thus, instead of a discourse of individual authorship, we find a
discourse of situation; a politics of location” (208). When analyzing a text that defies
genre limitations, scholars need to be familiar with the politics of production.

Furthermore, scholars need to pay attention to who does the speaking and who is
spoken for within the text. Bates’s *The Long Shadow* falls under the category of cultural
autobiography outlined by Kaplan. This genre is characterized by the linking of personal
history “with communities at a given historical junctures” (Kaplan 213). Bates does this
creating a text that tells the stories of other people and the community of people who are
struggling for increased civil rights. By examining the politics of speaking we can better
understand how power is operating and whom it serves in the production of the text.

As Linda Martin Alcoff argues in “The Problem of Speaking for Others,” anytime
someone attempts to speak for other people, they risk performing an epistemological
violence. She writes that when engaging in the act of speaking for others, “I am engaging
in the act of representing the other’s needs, goals, situation, and in fact, who they are”
(Alcoff 9). By speaking for others, the speaker can purport to represent them, which can
lead to overgeneralizations and misrepresentation of the other person or people involved.

Using a blend of post-structuralism, critical race studies, and subaltern studies influenced
by the work of Michel Foucault and Gayatri Spivak, Alcoff asserts that scholars must pay
attention to the positionality of the involved parties and the discursive context of the
speaking. When examining the speech act, one needs to understand how positionality
influences the way that the speech act is perceived. Alcoff writes,

[T]he practice of speaking for others is often born of a desire…to privilege
oneself as the one who more correctly understands the truth about
another’s situation or as one who can champion a just cause and thus achieve glory and praise. And the effect of the practice is often, though not always, erasure and reinscription of sexual, national, and other kinds of hierarchies. (29)

By thinking critically about speech acts, one can begin to understand whom the act benefits, and whom it silences. Within Western culture white men have been in the position to speak for all other groups, by claiming to be impartial observers that maintained an objectivity that bolstered their power and dominance. While this dynamic is changing, it is important to critically examine the act of speaking for to ensure that it does not equate with power over a certain group. Moreover, Alcoff writes that examining speech acts can enable scholars “to develop strategies for a more equitable, just distribution of the ability to speak and be heard” (Alcoff 29). Alcoff is interested in creating a space for speech acts that enable power sharing.

Examining Bates’s text through Alcoff’s theoretical frame is fruitful because Bates utilizes her life-writing to speak for the white men who aided her during the integration of Central High School. Bates uses her text to reverse racist power dynamics where African Americans are spoken for by whites, and asserts that an African American woman has the power to represent the story of what really happened. She does this without the tone of taking care of these white male bodies; their stories stand with hers, in struggle [Your meaning is unclear here. Do you mean: in struggle with each other; in the struggles of life, in THE struggle/the struggle for civil rights]. Through her self-representation, Bates’s text becomes an autography, de-centering her life to tell the story of the “we” a coalition of strugglers who enabled integration to move forward.
Alcoff examines some of the problems that arise from this type of act. Exploring the power dynamics in situations where academic scholars speak for non-academics, she argues that speaking for others is a dangerous proposition because it can reify oppressive relations. Alcoff uses as an example the case where the academic, who is from a privileged group, engages in speaking for a marginalized group. As in the case of early anthropology, she points out that power structures were not challenged and the speech act was used most often to sustain the notion of the marginalized group as primitive.

Speaking with groups is preferable because these options are more geared towards dialogue. Speaking ‘to’ a group has inherent problems because it does not challenge power hierarchies. The inherent danger of “speaking for” others does not lead Alcoff to argue that it should be avoided; on the contrary, she advocates for academics and members of privileged groups to advance the cause of speaking with and to, rather than for marginalized groups.

Rather than retreating into a narcissistic position, where a person will only speak for herself and washes her hands of political resistance, Alcoff advocates that people engage in speaking when outsiders are necessary to champion the causes of the oppressed, but this act should be engaged in only to advance the cause of marginalized groups. Furthermore, she argues that speaking - to and -with different groups is important work that breaks with the hero model of engaging with others, where the privileged person looks as though she is saving the marginalized groups from oppression.

Additionally, all speech acts are potentially dangerous. And simply identifying with a group does not automatically make a person an advocate for that group. Therefore, she encourages scholars and marginalized groups to engage in dialogue for the sake of
political advancement, be open to criticism, and refuse the “desire for mastery” of the other (Alcoff 29).

This chapter includes a close reading of the chapter “White Casualties” from *The Long Shadow* where Bates “speaks for” three white men, two of whom killed themselves (and in one case, he also killed his wife) as a result of the social isolation that they encountered after their participation in the integration of Central High School. It is here that I argue that Bates’s text breaks down it moves away from a focus on the “autos” to open up the story of civil rights to (reluctant) white participants and victims of racism. This type of writing is queer in that an African American woman is speaking for white men, not the other way around. This is a dramatic reversal of the racial paradigm, which usually dictates that whites speak for African Americans. Furthermore, if we gender this racialized paradigm, we can see that this switch is an even bolder move on the part of Bates because she is an African American woman. African American women rarely speak for anybody, certainly not for white men.

In doing this work of speaking for, and with, others, Bates’s *The Long Shadow* engages in autography. Perreault’s *Writing Selves: Feminist Autography* argues that autography is the practice of constructing a self from interchanging the “I” and the “We” of life narratives. Perreault writes, “In autography I find a writing whose effect is to bring into being a “self” that the writer names “I,” but whose parameters and boundaries resist the monadic” (2). By resisting the monadic, autobiographers are better able to communicate the sense of dialogue that is inherent in political communities. I propose that Bates is a member of a complex political community that is tied together through its work, not by skin color.
Perreault argues that the central questions for feminist theorists are “Who will construct the categories into which “I” and “we” fit ourselves? Whose words will we attend to? Whose texts will we honor?” (4). These questions are also central to The Long Shadow of Little Rock. While it recounts a familiar event in African American Civil Rights history, it does so from a woman’s perspective. As Maggie Humm’s A Reader’s Guide to Contemporary Feminist Literary Criticism asserts, dominant modes of literary and historical criticism rely on “masculine norms to exclude or undervalue women’s writing and scholarship” (5). Therefore feminist criticism must critically analyze the work of women and ensure that women’s work is not erased from culture. Furthermore, in the case of African American Civil Rights history, it is important to both uncover and engage critically with women’s participation and theorization of that historical moment. Vicki Crawford, Jacqueline Rouse, and Barbara Woods’ Women in the Civil Rights Movement write, “Future scholarship, promises not only to reclaim experiences, but also to analyze them critically, thereby challenging previously held assumptions about the Civil Rights Movement” (xviii). The construction of Bates’s text points to the varied experiences and outcomes of this historical moment. Rather than creating a narrative of civil rights struggles that limits, Bates creates a narrative that joins disparate portions of the movement together and re-narrates specific moments to direct attention to lesser known events and subject-positions. Perreault also argues that the text is a means to create a self, where the author is both “product and producer” of the discourses of the self and community from which she writes (7).

Bates begins her text with the days before the integration of Central High school. She describes Little Rock as a sleepy southern city before the struggle to desegregate. The
sleepy nature of Little Rock might be debatable, but once desegregation was underway it became a place where racist actions were taking place on a daily basis. As the State President of the Arkansas NAACP, Bates’s home was targeted for segregationists’ attacks. She begins this passage with a wholesome activity, walking the dog, which aides in creating the image of an idyllic life. This representation of an idyllic middle class existence is quite literally shattered by the brick that flies through her window. Bates then wonders if it is worth it to be a target of violence. More importantly, she wonders if she is committed to justice over and above her own safety. She writes,

Little did I know that this would be the last quiet walk that Skippy [family dog] would enjoy for many reasons. After we re-entered the house, I sat down on the divan in the living room, directly in front of our large picture window, and started glancing through the glass. Suddenly a large object came crashing through the glass. Instinctively I threw myself on the floor. I was covered in shattered glass….I reached for the rock lying in the middle of the floor. A note was tied to it…Scrawled in bold print were the words: STONE THIS TIME. DYNAMITE NEXT….Suddenly I realized that this was the calm before the storm, that this was war….Was I ready for war? Was I ready to risk everything that L.C. [Bates’ss husband] and I had built? Who was I really and what did I stand for?...Towards the dawn I knew I had found the answer. I was ready. (4-5)

This moment situates The Long Shadow as one where Bates engages in an internal community and political struggle. Bates’s internal struggle highlights her doubts about her commitment. The text’s earlier musing about Little Rock as a quiet city that is forever
changed by desegregation, illustrates the community’s struggle with racial progress. By the time *The Long Shadow* is written, the event it documents is well known in the U.S. and around the world as a great political struggle that calls on the greater ideals of the U.S. Constitution and the moral character of U.S. citizens. The moment when Bates’s window is shattered, did in fact happen, was reported to the police and documented in their records. What is constructed is Bates’s idealized life that is free of racialized terror.

After Bates sets up desegregation as the central conflict of the text, she goes into a short autobiographical sketch that focuses on her life’s intersection with racism. Before Bates was born her life was being shaped by the sexist and racist practices of the South. Bates’s cousin Early B. explains to her that Bates’s mother was murdered,

One night when you were a baby your daddy was working at the mill, a man went to your house and told your mother that your daddy had been hurt. She rushed out, leaving you alone, but she met a neighbor and asked her to listen out for you while she went to see about your daddy. When your daddy got home the next morning he found you alone….The news spread fast around town that your mother couldn’t be found. Later in the morning, some people out fishing found her body. They say that three white men did it. He was so hurt, he left you with the people who have you now, his best friends. I sat there looking into the dark waters, vowing that some day I would get the men who killed my mother. (11-12)

Bates’s mother was killed by sexist and racist violence, leaving Bates to be raised by adopted parents. Later, when she asks her adopted father about her birth mother, he explains that she was murdered because of the “timeworn lust of the white man for the
Negro woman” (15). This lust that her father speaks of is an outgrowth of sexual taboos that constrict the interactions between the races by making sexual relations explicitly prohibited, while implicitly encouraging them—often against the will of African American women. Bates’s father explains that her mother was murdered because of “her race—as well as her beauty, her pride, her love for my father” (Bates 15). He went on to say that she was not the “type to submit, so they took her,” meaning that they raped her (Bates 15). The combination of Bates’s involvement with desegregation and the death of her mother, set her character up and authorize Bates as a “racewoman.”

Within her personal life the knowledge of her mother’s murder and the humiliations of racism felt by African Americans give Bates’s life a goal, which is to fight for justice. Bates writes that after she finds out about her birth mother’s death, her demeanor changes from content to angry, “so happy once, now I was like a little sapling which, after a violent storm, puts out only gnarled and twisted branches” (Bates 15). Later, when her adopted father is dying of cancer, he redirects Bates’s anger against white people to working against discrimination and systemic racism. He says to Bates, [I just picked up on the fact that you need to double indent your quotations, not just single indent. They should, in other words be centered rather than shifted just to the right.]

You’re filled with hatred. Hate can destroy you, Daisy. Don’t hate white people just because they’re white. If you hate make it count for something. Hate the humiliations we are living under in the South. Hate the discrimination that eats away at the soul of every black man and woman. Hate the insults hurled at us by white scum—and then try to do something about it, or your hate won’t spell a thing.”…How I loved this strong man
who all his life had not been able to use his strength in the way he wanted to. He was forced to suppress it and hold himself back, bow to white yoke or be cut down. And now that his life was ebbing, he was trying to draw on that reservoir of unused strength to give me a lasting inheritance.

(Bates 29)

Grif Stockley’s biography Daisy Bates: Civil Rights Crusader takes issue with the veracity of Bates’s story; however, I argue that questioning whether or not this moment actually happened is to miss the larger question of how it is situated in the text. Textually, this moment gives the reader an understanding of the deep intersection of race and gender in Bates’s dedication to civil rights struggles. The combination of racism and sexism take her mother and keep the authorities from prosecuting the offenders. Moreover, the placement of her father’s deathbed speech constitutes, in Bates’s words, an inheritance. Bates is encouraged to shape her life around the recognition of the larger picture, and call for systemic change, rather than fester in personal vendettas.

Even though racism will continue to cause both minor and major problems in Bates’s life her text continues to refocus the reader’s attention to the systemic problem of racism. Later, in the The Long Shadow, Bates illustrates the irony of racism in the chapter “Arrest.” This chapter details the order to arrest all governing board members of the Arkansas NAACP because of their violation of a newly created city ordinance that was created to give city officials access to the membership list of the state NAACP. After Bates surrenders herself, and the NAACP lawyers get the charges dropped, two crosses are burned in front of Bates’s house. She writes,

Two flaming crosses were burned on our property…At the base of the
cross was scrawled: “GO BACK TO AFRICA! KKK.”…A rock was thrown through our living-room window and it barely missed me. A few nights later, a volley of shots was fired at our house from a passing car. One bullet pierced the window, entered the living-room and lodged in the wall. Other bullets ricocheted off the brick front of the house. (Bates 110-111)

The irony of this situation is that while the city is busy creating ordinances to further police the state’s African American population, a citizen, Daisy Bates is the victim of racist terrorism and receives no police protection or investigation into the matter. Because the black body under Jim Crow segregation is not thought of as a human being that the state has an obligation to protect, it is left uncared for and unprotected. She writes, “Our friends—concerned for our safety—organized a volunteer committee. It took many weeks for me to become accustomed to seeing revolvers lying on tables in my own home. And shotguns, loaded with buckshot, standing right near the doors” (Bates 111). Therefore, Bates’s home becomes a virtual prison, so that she may continue the work of integration, which is the work of making the U.S. live up to its legal ideals of equality under the law.

**Daisy Bates and Racialized Surveillance**

Although panopticism is illustrated through a deep internalization of the disciplining gaze, it is enacted through mechanisms of surveillance. In the case of Daisy Bates the mechanisms of surveillance in her life were the elite African American and white communities, the Little Rock School officials, and the NAACP. Each of these entities
served as mechanisms of surveillance because they were invested in shaping Bates’s behavior during the process of integration. The elite members of the African American community were invested in their positions as community leaders and race-managers. They helped to maintain the social and political boundaries between African Americans and whites. Bates was a peripheral member of this group because she was not born into it, but achieved membership because of her social status and occupation as a journalist and newspaper owner. Due to her insider-outsider status Bates was able to resist their surveillance and policing of her political ambition. The African American elite of Little Rock were invested in maintaining segregation because they did not want to displease the whites in political power.

Another mechanism of surveillance utilized by the white community, was political power in the form of school officials. Virgil Blossom and Bates were at odds many times about the admission of African Americans to schools and their treatment upon arrival. Despite the School Board’s approval of desegregation efforts, Blossom as Superintendent was in a position of power to carry out their orders. He did so in a way that enacted colorist, class, and intelligence standards that ensured that only a certain kind of African American student could gain admission to Central High School. His interaction with the selection process was like the will of the white community being able to manipulate the desegregation process.

Finally, the NAACP acted as a counter-political mechanism of surveillance because they held the federal, local, and state government to standards set forth by the U.S. Constitution and the Supreme Court. They worked with Bates and the federal government to fight for integration to occur, despite the will of the local community and
Governor Faubus.

Daisy Bates became a leader in the Arkansas NAACP during a time of great advancement and great crisis. This moment is best understood as a negotiation of power that ended with greater citizenship rights for African Americans. It is also important to recognize the power structures at work that had to be navigated in order to achieve the integration of schools. During the integration of Little Rock’s schools, multiple technologies of power were deployed, key among them were the disciplinary powers of policing and surveillance. Bates, a savvy public figure, had to maneuver through and utilize disciplinary power. Integration of Central High school involved the use of military force, in the form of the National Guard, police officers, and armed citizens. An illustration of the culmination of these forces is when the troops arrive is Little Rock. Bates writes,

Some of the citizens watching the arrival of the troops cried with relief. Others cursed the Federal Government for ‘invading our city.’…Any time it takes eleven thousand five hundred soldiers to assure nine Negro children their constitutional right in a democratic society, I can’t be happy.

(Bates 100-101)

The need to involve troops illustrates the threat that integration posed to the ways of the South, even within a nation that is supposed to be dedicated to equality.

Bates is positioned within the community in multiple and contradictory roles. She is an African American woman, who grew up poor, and had aspirations of joining the black middle class. Her class aspirations meant that she had to style her body in particular ways and abide by the racial etiquette of the historical moment. Nevertheless, her
involvement with civil rights struggles meant that she was invested in challenging the norms of racial etiquette and second-class citizenship. Effectively challenging racism during the Civil Rights Movement meant engaging with, and resisting, the politics of respectability. Bates did this in a way that is noteworthy because it allowed her to circumvent sexism in her personal life and challenge structural racism.

Historians describe Bates as a beautiful woman, but more importantly she used charm and niceties to draw people in and aid her political goals. This is the politics of respectability, where dress, behavior, and manners are regulated in both the white and African American communities. Biographer, Grif Stockley described Bates’s upbringing as the following, “Her father raised her to be a lady, and her femininity was a part of her arsenal…She radiated tastefulness and dignity” (Stockley 54). According to Stockley, Bates used her femininity in service of her political work, rather than letting it dictate her role in the world. He describes Bates as a woman who fought racism and sexism. Stockley writes,

Beneath her lovely clothes and effusive manner she possessed a will of steel, energy to match, and an ego, as she became famous, that increasingly put herself at the center of the universe. Her ascent did not come without problems. A black woman battling for civil rights had to take on both the white supremacy and black and white sexism. (Stockley 58)

Not letting femininity be a hindrance, Bates worked for liberation and increased rights through the utilization of the politics of respectability. Without being deemed a part of the “respectable” community, individuals could be silenced from making claims that
would be heard by a larger audience. This meant regulating the body in ways that are recognizable to powerful elites, even when there were aspects of your life that did not fit into their standards of respectability. Bates knew how to navigate both the white and African American standards, but she also knew when to push on these standards.

[S]he knew exactly how far to go and what tone she could take. Impeccably dressed, courteous, and never directly contradicting them she understood she could confront certain white males in authority and get away with it, so long as she did it with an air of innocence and the mask of a smile….It was not that, as Bates claimed, she had lost her fear of whites by 1954; it was that she knew how to handle them and refused to be intimidated by them. (Stockley 69)

Bates was a boundary pusher who used her feminine gender performance to open doors. She challenged white men in ways that were taboo, and could result in death.

Nevertheless, she used her gender to challenge the white power structure in ways that might have been off limits to African American men. An example of this differential treatment around challenging white authority happened when Bates was advocating for integration. She followed the Superintendent of Schools around Little Rock, verbally challenging him during his speeches to white constituents.

Stockley writes the community felt, “as a woman…Daisy Bates was far more effective in dealing with whites than her ‘handsome, erect black husband' would have been, or than any black male could have been” (166). Here, Stockley illustrates the gendered nature of racism that exists both within and outside the black community. African American men and women are only able to challenge racism by acting within
racist gendered expectations. Although Bates did the public challenging, she and her husband engaged in challenging racism in both the African American and white communities.

Daisy Bates and her husband, L. C. Bates upheld standards of respectability, but they did not always meet them. Neither of them were native Little Rock residents, so they were perceived as outsiders because their roots were in smaller towns; therefore they were outsiders to the African American elite of Little Rock. Stockley says that Bates and her husband were outsiders who did not have college degrees, and, because they were invested in ending racism, “They were both too critical of the status quo, too in-your-face to be fully acceptable” by the African American elite (Stockley 35). So, Daisy and L. C. Bates worked with the African American elite, but were never fully incorporated within their ranks.

Outsider status allowed Bates to critique other local African American leaders, whom she believed were lining their pockets instead of forwarding the cause of civil rights. Within the larger African American community the Bateses were thought of as helpful advocates for the advancement of Civil Rights. This reputation was garnered because of their self-published newspaper *The State Press*, which covered news happenings in the African American community, critiqued racism and performed advocacy. Stockley writes, “When specific incidents of discrimination occurred, Daisy Bates’s name invariably appeared as part of a self-appointed team that called attention to them and demanded action” (64). The newspaper was also used to police the African American community. Because L. C. and Daisy Bates believed in certain aspects of the politics of respectability, they used the paper as a bully pulpit to espouse their views on
proper behavior and morals. *The State Press,* according to Stockley, was “a hard-hitting advocate for civil rights,” that “would aspire to teach African Americans the habits and values they needed in order to live decent and respectable lives” (Stockley 26). The way that the Bateses used their paper to advocate proper standards of living and values illustrates the ways that they were both breaking with and reinscribing standards of normalization. The newspaper is a place where Daisy Bates engages in the disciplinary gaze over other African Americans. She is invested in ending racism; however, Bates is also lulled by power to do the work of policing others.

Elizabeth Jacoway’s *Turn Away Thy Son: Little Rock, the Crisis that Shocked The Nation* features interviews with Bates that reveal the deep level of involvement she had with integrating public schools before 1957. She worked with and against Virgil Blossom, school Superintendent, to recruit students to attend Central High school. Jacoway indicates Bates’s collusion with standards of respectability during the process of selecting students to break with racialized segregation. She writes,

> In the spring of 1957, Virgil Blossom instructed the black junior and senior high principals of those children’s current schools to begin ‘screening’ them…. Daisy Bates also believed the School Board intended to select only ‘light Negroes’ for the first Central High students. She claimed to have told Blossom, ‘We’ve got 215 kids. You can take the cream of the crop, or you can take all of them.’ He finally retorted in defense of the screening process. ‘I know it is undemocratic and I know it is wrong, but I am doing it.’ He also threatened to use the recently adopted Pupil Placement Act to effect a reduction of black participants if his critics
Bates challenges Blossom’s tactics of selecting students based on the lightness of their skin-color, social class, and grades. Despite her disagreement with Blossom’s colorism, according to Jacoway, Bates is in agreement with his selection of students with high grades and middle class homes. Despite her agreement with some of the standards, Bates is willing to stand up against those with whom she does not agree. In return, Blossom furthers asserts his power by stating that he can use a new School Board Act to guarantee him the right to select whomever he sees fit. This is an example of the disciplinary gaze of racism working in the favor of white supremacy. Blossom has the power of the law to ensure his unfair standards because he is in a position of power. And when pushed too far by Bates, Blossom asserts that his personal views are backed by a power structure that does not value Bates’s view.

In *The History of Sexuality Vol. 1*, Michel Foucault writes, “Where there is power, there is resistance, and yet, or rather consequently, this resistance is never in a position of exteriority in relation to power,” this applies to Bates’s dealings with Blossom’s selection process (1977, 96). According to Stockley, Bates circumvented Blossom’s power by getting the list of students and coaching them on what to say to gain admittance to Central High school. Bates relayed, “I got all the names of the kids that he [Blossom] had not interviewed and I talked to them before [the interview]. When they went down there, they knew what to say and what not to say” (Stockley, 99). Bates works to circumvent the power of Blossom, which allows more students eligibility for admittance into Central.

The goal of successfully integrating Little Rock’s public schools was not achieved without the disciplinary gaze being turned on Bates herself. Governor Faubus closed all
of Arkansas’ public schools after the first year of integration. In an effort to divert the blame on to African Americans that wanted integration, Faubus blamed Bates for the closing of the schools. Bates writes, “Governor Faubus, in his finest rhetoric, declared: ‘If Daisy Bates would find an honest job and go to work, and if the U. S. Supreme Court would keep its cotton-picking hands off the Little Rock School Board’s affairs, we could open the Little Rock (public) schools!’” (Bates 155). Rather than locate the problem as white supremacy, Faubus tries to configure Bates as an improperly employed person. His rhetoric also configures her as an aberration and damage to the status quo.

“White Casualties”

Regardless of their personal feelings about the urgency or moral cause of racial integration, the white men that Bates writes about in her memoir removed their names from the “racial contract.” Eugene Smith, Chief of Police in Little Rock is a person to whom Bates refers throughout her autobiography. His life and Bates are intertwined because of integration, and as the text progresses the relationship becomes more complex. In “White Casualties” Bates eulogizes Smith and others like him who put their lives and livelihoods on the line by working for integration.

Charles Mills’ *The Racial Contract* denotes a theory that is a take-off of the social contract on which many Enlightenment ideologies are based. Mills argues that the racial contract is the underlying racial ideology of Western society. It explains how racism can exist within a system that is supposed to value the equality of all men. This contract operates through historical, political, social arrangements and customs that name some people as human beings and others as non-humans who do not deserve equal rights.
Through the social arrangements of many Western societies and the absence of a thorough examination of history, the racial contract is allowed to continue because of ideological policing and violence of those in power. Mills suggests that the ideology of Whiteness encourages whites to have a skewed vision of history because it allows for them to participate in a “consensual hallucination” that does not account for the subjugation of people that have been othered for the benefit of white supremacy (18). He states,

[A]s a general rule, that white misunderstanding, misrepresentation, evasion, and self-deception on matters related to race are among the most pervasive mental phenomena of the past few hundred years, a cognitive and moral economy psychically required for conquest, colonization, and enslavement. And these phenomena are in no way accidental, but prescribed by the terms of the Racial Contract, which requires a certain schedule of structured blindness and opacities in order to establish and maintain the white polity. (Mills 19)

The racial contract is held together by the structured blindness of the white polity. What happens when a white person symbolically removes their name from the contract? Mills argues that the racial contract is also maintained by physical violence and policing, so one can assume that physical violence would be visited upon whites that break with the racial contract by symbolically removing their names from its ledger.

By symbolically removing their names from the racial contract, they opened themselves to the social isolation and policing that is usually reserved for people of color. These men lost their standings in the community, were forced out of business, and made
to quit jobs. Due to their loss in status and positions as patriarch of the family, these men altered their lives in multiple ways. William Hadley and Reverend Dunbar Ogden left the South in order to create a life in Washington DC, while another, Eugene Smith resorted to killing himself and his wife because of the social ramifications that were visited upon them after the integration of Central High School. Reverend Ogden’s son, David, also took his own life after being singled out as a “race traitor.”

Bates utilizes her skills as a reporter to create this last section of The Long Shadow, by recording the stories of Eugene Smith, Little Rock Chief of Police; David Ogden, who walked in support of the Little Rock Nine to school; and William Hadley, television/radio commentator and local business man, in the style of a journalist. In the chapter entitled “White Casualties” Bates details the stories of the white men involved in helping the integration effort and the aftermath, in her memoir. When the image of policing is invoked in a U.S. context, the image of white people policing other whites is usually not the image that exists in the mainstream American imaginary. Mills contends that policing in a Western context is usually that of whiteness/white people policing those deemed as others, usually racialized minorities, and poor or working class people. He argues,

The coercive arms of the state, then—the police, the penal system, the army—need to be seen as in part the enforcers of the Racial Contract working both to keep the peace and prevent crime among the white citizens, and to maintain the racial order and detect and destroy challenges to it…To understand the long, bloody history of police brutality against blacks in the United States…one has to recognize it not as excesses by
individual racists but as an organic part of this political enterprise. (Mills 84-85).

Here Mills asserts that the state is invested in the maintenance of racialized boundaries as a political project worthy of the use of military and police force. The benefits to whiteness accrued through this policing are exclusivity, wealth, and the maintenance of their structured blindness. What happens when white people are marked as non-white, or participate in the struggle against the white mainstream? In the case of those whites that aided in the integration of Central High School in 1957, they were ostracized from the community and forced out of jobs. Similar to the African Americans that worked for integration, these white people felt the force of going against the white polity. Bates writes,

The struggle of the American Negro does not lack for martyrs, and the so-called “Little Rock Nine” will surely be counted among them. But the Negro was often not alone in his struggle. Many white fellow-Americans joined the ranks with him. And they have paid the price. I offer their stories in the hope that whites and Negroes in other Southern communities, where the battles is yet to come, may be encouraged to stand firm but with full knowledge of what to expect. (Bates 179)

What is interesting here is that Bates ties her life story to the efforts of others. She goes on to argue that the white people who stood with them during integration were met by the policing efforts of the segregationists. These white people suffered the loss of connection with the white community and its political protections. Furthermore, they were brought out of their structured blindness into the realization that by taking their names off of the
contract made them susceptible to the violence that is usually reserved for those that are othered. Bates writes,

> They became active allies of the Negro citizens fighting for human decency. Inevitably they soon became casualties of vindictive hate attacks. Until this time most had taken their freedom for granted. After all, they were members of the “privileged class” that perpetuated the political and social enslavement of millions of Negroes….All of these white Southerners came face to face with the agonizing fact that the same system they had supported all these years—the same system that had been used to deny Negroes their rights—was now being used against them. Those who dared to speak up became pariahs. They were fired from their jobs, put out of business, ostracized by their friends and driven out of town. (Bates180-181)

Bates details how white community leaders who helped with the integration effort were ostracized by the white community. The editor of a liberal paper was driven out of town. Little Rock’s superintendent of public schools was fired from his position the year following the Little Rock Nine’s integration. And the city’s mayor left town after the embattled year because of pressure from the segregationist. For the white members of the community the worst of their experiences occurred after 1957 because in the fall of 1958 Governor Faubus closed all public schools in the state of Arkansas, which gave credence to the segregationists’ perspective. He symbolically authorized segregationists’ violence throughout the state. Furthermore, this closing of the schools gave credence to the perspective that integration was an issue of states’ rights versus federal power. The re-
configuring of the desegregation of schools as a state versus federal rights issue, allowed people to enact a segregationist policy while claiming that they did not want to be ruled by federal power.

In those tense years after the integration of Little Rock’s Central High School, three of the white people who helped the integration effort met their ends. Bates writes that these deaths were the result of the policing of racial boundaries that was enacted on each of these people’s lives. The earliest incident was that of a murder suicide of the former Chief of Police in Little Rock, named Eugene Smith. With a gun, he took his own life and that of his wife in spring of 1960. He aided in the integration effort, against the wishes of Governor Faubus, by providing the students with police protection on the way to-and-from school every day. Although he never said that he supported integration, Smith aided the effort by protecting the students during a time when many would not. Bates quotes Smith as stating to *The New York Times* about his personal feelings on integration, “That is out of my province. Our function is to do everything we can to protect life and property and preserve the public peace. And that’s what we do every day” (183). Whites fought back against Smith’s support of the effort by suing him, claiming that he allowed the police to brutalize them, by using excessive force, while they attempted to keep the students away from the school. One suit, Pritchard versus Smith was still being pursued by the plaintiff in 1983, twenty years after his death, claiming 50,000 dollars in damages (1961/1988). Bates writes, “They accused him of brutality in protecting the Negro students. They hurled epithets at him as “Gestapo!, Yellow dog!, Nigger-loving red!, and Judas!” (183). By using racist language against Smith, the segregationists’ attempt to reconfigure his support as a treacherous act against the white
race. Additionally, it is ironic that they would call Smith a Gestapo, a German officer in the Nazi Army, while they attempt to maintain racialized segregation.

Smith’s story is particularly poignant for Bates because she identifies herself with him despite their many differences. Bates even goes so far as to say, “The tragedy of Chief Smith is almost inextricably bound up with my own Little Rock experiences. As I lay in my bed the morning I learned of his death, I remarked to Jonnie, this might have been my own story” (Bates 189). Despite their differences in gender, race, and class, Bates empathizes with Smith’s story. She demonstrates an understanding that she could have shared a common fate with Smith. Moreover, she understands the ostracism faced by anyone who participated in the integration effort. Smith’s death is a flashpoint for Bates to demonstrate the inner suffering caused by systemic racism.

Although Smith was suffering from a tremendous amount of strain because of his involvement with the Little Rock Nine, it does not excuse the murder of his wife, Mary Smith. Examining this act through a feminist lens, reveals that Eugene Smith committed an act of life-ending violence against his wife, which is inexcusable. Although we can never know exactly why Smith committed these acts, the suicide was likely linked to depression, and to the oppression Smith felt from the community. In this last act to exert power over his life, Smith also takes his wife’s life.

Popular media outlets speculate that his actions were the result of his son’s recent conviction on minor theft charges. *The New York Times* via the Associated Press ran the headline: “Little Rock Officer Kills Wife, Himself” on March 20, 1960, two days after the fatal incident. When Bates states that Smith’s story could have been her story, readers are left to wonder if she means that her husband might have taken this kind of action or
that Bates herself might, due to the strain on their lives during and after the integration of Central High School.

By writing Smith into her text and identifying with his suicide, Bates creates a community of relation. She and Smith are joined because both of their livelihoods were destroyed because of their participation in the struggle for equality. Bates lost her newspaper during desegregation. The loss of their livelihoods is due to the enactings of white supremacist ideology that made people withdraw support or take up arms against others. Furthermore, it is the racism that is embedded within the criminal justice system that allows injustice to prevail even when it does not align with the moral code of law.

Eugene Smith is not the only person that committed suicide because of the actions of segregationists. David Ogden, the son of Reverend Dunbar Ogden, also ended his life in the period directly following the integration of Central High School. His father, Reverend Ogden, was one of the few local religious leaders to publicly stand with the Little Rock Nine in 1957. He and his son went with the students as they attempted to enter the school during the early days of the struggle. Reverend Ogden, the President of the Greater Little Rock Interracial Interdenominational Ministerial Alliance, was called on by Bates to walk with the children to school on their first day. Both the Reverend and David Ogden showed up, with three other ministers to accompany the Little Rock Nine on their first attempt to integrate Central High School. He worked with the Little Rock Nine and Bates throughout the school year and advocated for integration in the community. After helping, Reverend Ogden was harassed, his church members deserted him and stopped financially supporting his church until he was reassigned to a church in West Virginia.
David, who remained in Little Rock after his father left, was also harassed. Bates writes that David Ogden, “began receiving the traitor treatment” (194). A white friend of Bates’s witnessed the traitor treatment and reported to Bates that,

Tonight, as I was entering the theater, I observed a group of boys harassing another youngster just beyond the ticket window. I paid no particular attention until I heard your name mentioned. Someone was saying, ‘Why ain’t you with Daisy Bates, nigger-lover?’ I turned and saw a group of hoodlums taunting David. They surrounded him and were yelling, ‘We ran your old man out of town! You should have gone with him!’ It was horrible. But David stood there. He just stood there and didn’t bat an eyelash.” (Bates 193-194)

David Ogden received the traitor treatment because of his association with integration.

By walking with the Little Rock Nine, he too removed his name from the racial contract. David Ogden was not only harassed in the social sphere, but this harassment also affected him economically. In his effort to find work, David Ogden was confronted by segregationists, which lead to his resignation from multiple jobs due to constant harassment. The taunting continued until June 22, 1960, when David Ogden took his own life, using a shotgun aimed at his chest. It is clear from this incident that Bates’s identity is interconnected with the identities of her allies.

The stories located within “White Casualties” are connected through Bates’s interactions with the actual men, or through conversations. Bates relays William Hadley and Reverend Ogden’s stories through conversation, while Eugene Smith’s story enters the text through third hand accounts and local news reports. Bates relays each story in
relation to her own, and compares her reactions with each man’s reaction to their collective newfound circumstances.

Late in “White Casualties,” Bates relays the story of William (Bill) Hadley, who was a television and radio commentator, owner of a public-relations and advertisement business, and community activist. During the integration of Central High School, Hadley stood with African Americans in the fight for integration. He relays his story to Bates in the form of an interview, where the reader is exposed to Bates’s questions and his answers. Driven out of business and the city of Little Rock, Hadley, can only bear to tell Bates the story once he has resettled in Washington DC. Bates’s account of his story indicate that the gun that Eugene Smith used to kill himself and Mary Smith, his wife, was given to him by Hadley.

During 1960, William Hadley explained the hardships he faced because of his involvement with the integration effort. Hadley was run out of business, and eventually moved to Washington D. C. Prior to leaving Little Rock, Hadley’s business and family were subjected to threatening phone calls and other forms of harassment. Before Hadley became involved with integration he had a successful business and was thought of as a community leader. After supporting the integration effort during speaking engagements, Hadley became a target for the segregationists. They stopped patronizing his business and friends stopped associating with him.

As a member of many community groups, Hadley witnessed white people change their sentiments towards integration because of their fear of retribution. Hadley goes on to tell Bates that he stops attending interracial community group meetings because of their cowardice. For the first time in his life, Hadley is experiencing what it means to
remove your name from the racial contract. Because race is a social construction it means that its privileges can be revoked. By standing with the Little Rock Nine and aiding them in the effort to desegregate, Hadley loses his business, home, and sense of community. Bates understands that this is the price that a person pays when he removes his name from the racial contract and loses the privileges of whiteness. She writes, “Yes, I thought, he’s finally learning what Negroes have always known and lived with—how sharply lines are drawn in a Southern community” (199). In an effort to raise Hadley’s spirits Bates tells him that “[T]hey’re not afraid of anything real—only of their neighbor’s opinion—what the public thinks” (199). The social realities of Arkansas during the 1950s and 1960s mean that livelihoods can be put in jeopardy due to the ill will of those in power.

Bates and Hadley’s stories are tied together in three ways. First, they are both driven out of business because of their involvement with integration. Both Hadley’s public-relations and advertising firm and Bates’s newspaper, The State Press are forced to close. Second, is that they both are confronted by the paradox of American racism by foreigners. Hadley is directly asked about the contradiction of American democracy and its treatment of African Americans while in Paris. Bates is questioned in Washington DC near the Lincoln Memorial about the meaning of freedom by two students, one African, one Indian. Reflecting on the unfinished business of integration, (pre-1962 when the book was published) Bates is speechless. She writes that the Indian woman asked, “You are an American Negro—what does it mean to you?” (213). Bates writes, I couldn’t answer her. I just stood there, not uttering another word. I knew all the speeches that patriotic Americans are supposed to make at such a time, but I just stood there. Sensing my confusion, they smiled and walked
away leaving me in the whirling snowstorm with the words freedom and justice sticking in my throat. (213)

Both moments draw out the irony of racism within the U.S. because they highlight the difference between the U.S.’s reputation and its racial realities. Hadley is questioned by a French audience in Paris about American democracy, while Bates cannot utter the words freedom and justice, despite her struggle for both. By ending “White Casualties” with the words freedom and justice in her throat, Bates is constructing the U.S. as a place where African Americans and their allies are left voiceless, with their agency spent in vain.

This moment serves as a call to action to the reader to join in the struggle for racial equality. Furthermore, this textual moment is one that is usually found in a manifesto or testimonio that leaves readers with a sense of the work that needs to be done. Bates ties her experiences in with the movement’s white participants and allies to an international discourse of human rights, which is on the minds of many because of U.S. involvement in World War II and the politics of the Cold War.

Third, Hadley and Bates’s stories connect in that each considered suicide. Bates alludes to this when she finds out about Eugene Smith’s suicide Bates states, “This might have been my story” (189). Hadley claims a direct connection to the Smith murder-suicide because he gave Smith his gun. Bates records that Hadley states,

I think the worst thing that I went through was in January-February-March of last year, ’59. You know, Daisy, I have a trained mind, trained for organization. Suddenly, it was as if I had no talent, no intelligence. I was absolutely no good for anything. I couldn’t go to the store for groceries and come back with what I was sent for—even when I had the money!”
He paused, then continued, his voice now almost inaudible. “I couldn’t sleep. I didn’t sleep—for weeks at a time. I’d doze, then wander through the house at night. I was fighting a battle within myself: is this worth it, worth crucifying my family, myself? Why should I do this to myself, to my family? …It was during this time that I almost, that I came close—very close—to committing suicide. Daisy, I’m telling you what I’ve never told anyone else: the gun that Gene Smith used—well, that gun was mine. I gave it to Gene when I left Little Rock. So you can imagine my shock when I heard about Gene. That’s the gun I almost used on myself. (Bates 209-210)

Hadley and Smith’s stories are tied together not only by their experiences of supporting integration and friendship, but they are also symbolically tied through the gun. Although there is a literal gun in the story, the gun is also symbolic of white supremacy. As a weapon that is thought to harm people of color, it also inflicts harm on whites if they work against racialized hegemony. White supremacy, like all forms of oppression it polices “insiders” and “outsiders” into enacting its goals. White supremacy is a sword that cuts both ways.

Bates’s inclusion of these events is an act of speaking with, for and to, whites that aided the Little Rock Nine during integration. Bates’s The Long Shadow illustrates the depth of policing that both black and white bodies face when they fight against systemic racism. Rather than creating a narcissistic tale of personal glory, Bates relays a story of a coalition that works to integrate Little Rock’s public schools. Moreover, she illustrates how white people are also affected by racism. Bates creates an imaginary community
within the text to populate her autobiography. Moreover, as Perreault argues, “autography…invites the reader to reconsider the imbrications of subjectivity, textuality, and community” (2). *The Long Shadow* is a work that includes and valorizes the work of forgotten actors that aided the struggle and paid the price with their lives. About autobiography, Perrault writes, “When that self no longer is seen either as a monad, as isolated and alienated being, hearing only its interpellated construct, existing only as another discourse, then writing the self can be recognized as a social and political act” (Perreault 133). By the end of the text, it is evident that Bates’s life is no longer a monad. Rather, she is connected to those who worked for the increased civil rights of the students and forwarded the goal of integration.
Chapter 3: Queerness and Civil Rights Subjectivity: Anne Moody as Angelic Trouble-Maker

We need in every community a group of angelic troublemakers. –Bayard Rustin

Indeed, if you want to know whether today people believe in democracy, if you want to know whether they are true democrats, if you want to know whether they are human rights activists, the question to ask is, ‘What about gay people?’ Because that is now the litmus paper by which this democracy is to be judged. –Bayard Rustin

The intersection of queerness and the African American Civil Rights Movement is an important place to examine the subject positions produced by the movement. Anne Moody’s *Coming of Age in Mississippi*\(^4\) provides an opportunity to critically examine queerness in relationship to the African American Civil Rights Movement. Although Moody does not claim a queer identity, I argue that her narrative can be taken up as a queer text for two reasons. First, *Coming of Age* includes transgender characters, Lola and Lily White. They are friends of Moody’s and participate in her transition into

\(^4\) Referred to as *Coming of Age* henceforth.
womanhood. Second, Moody transgresses hegemonic notions of a “proper” gendered
civil rights subjectivity, making her a queer character. As a movement subject, Moody is
called into the discourse of normativity; her queer subjectivity allows her to resist the
disciplinary gaze. Moody’s resistance is enabled by an embodiment of what Anzuldua
calls a “borderlands subjectivity,” subject position which lies on the borders of identities
able to see the contradictory nature of each.

For Moody the mechanisms of surveillance are community based. She is policed
and subjected to the disciplinary gaze of both the African American and white
communities. Throughout her life she is subjected to her mother’s version of racial
etiquette, and social mores, which entail keeping your mouth closed about injustice and
feigning ignorance when approached about racial issues. These are Elmira “TooSweet”
Moody’s ways of maintaining control over her children.

Moody also faced the surveillance and policing with the structure of her high
school. When she became more aware of racial hierarchies, she wondered about African
American resistance. Eventually, she found Mrs. Rice who told her about the NAACP
and its goals. Later that school year Mrs. Rice disappeared. Moody speculates that it is
because her principal, who is a member of the African American elite, and rumored to be
an “Uncle Tom,” fired her. This principal acts as a gate-keeper with the community.
Furthermore, he is able to survey and police his charges away from movements against
racial injustice.
The final mechanism of surveillance that Moody faced was the racial sentiment of the white community. This sentiment was enacted through her interactions with members of the community that believed that Moody was inherently inferior. Mrs. Burke treated Moody as if she was inferior, while she worked as a domestic in her home. She also expected her compliance to racial etiquette and subordination in every interaction. Moody resists, but she is also disciplined by Mrs. Burke for her non-compliance. Besides Mrs. Burke’s policing, Moody is also subject to leering white men. This is another out-growth of the mechanism of the white community’s surveillance of Moody’s body.

The surveillance of Moody’s body is connected to queerness because she uses queer methods to work with, and resist, the policing of her body. Although queerness and the African American Civil Rights movement have not been theorized together in the past, this dissertation brings them together to enhance the critical scholarly perspective on this historical moment.

Queerness and the African American Civil Rights Movement have not shared an easy relationship. Bayard Rustin’s life is an example of the difficulties that arise at the intersection of civil rights subjectivity and queerness. As a black gay political strategist and activist in the movement, Rustin advocated for the use of Mahatma Ghandi’s non-violent protest methods to structure an anti-racism movement and worked with A. Philip Randolph and Martin Luther King Junior. Despite being an important figure in the African American Civil Rights struggle, Rustin’s work is largely forgotten.
The inclusion of Rustin in the narrative of the African American Civil Rights Movement is a recent phenomenon. Texts such as John D’Emilio’s *Lost Prophet: The Life and Times of Bayard Rustin* and Devon Carbado and Donald Wiese’s *Time on Two Crosses: The Collected Writings of Bayard Rustin* argue that Rustin’s contributions have been ignored because of his sexuality. D’Emilio argues that Rustin’s openness about being a gay black man presented a problem for Civil Rights leaders. Furthermore, D’Emilio contends that even historians have succumbed to homophobia when dealing with Rustin’s legacy. He states, “Up until quite recently…civil rights historians dealt with him [Rustin]—when they have chosen to include him at all—as a ‘sideline activist’ whose principal purpose was to support King and the movement. Perhaps no other figure contributed so much to the Civil Rights Movement yet has been so heavily penalized by it” (2003, ix-x). The heavy penalty dealt to Rustin because of his sexuality is that of being excluded both during the movement and in its cultural memory because he did not inhabit a normative civil rights subjectivity.

The saga of Rustin’s cultural memory highlights past exclusion and recent moves towards the reclamation of queer civil rights subjectivities. Similar to Rustin’s historical contributions, Anne Moody’s *Coming of Age* provides an opportunity to perform a queer reading of the African American Civil Rights struggle. Rustin’s life highlights the ways that queerness as a sexual identity, and a queer analytical frame, intersect to influence the construction of the popular narrative of this historical moment. By taking a queer
analytical approach that highlights how non-heteronormativity influences the popular narrative. Moreover, it takes a scholar that is interested in pursuing an unconventional analysis to recuperate the public memory of figures like Rustin. This chapter discusses the intersection of the African American Civil Rights Movement and queer subjectivity. *Coming of Age* is an autobiographical narrative that allows for a queer reading of a civil rights subjectivity. Before my analysis of the text, I give a brief summary of the narrative and review previous literature on *Coming of Age in Mississippi*.

**Coming of Age: Race, Place, and Gender**

Anne Moody’s *Coming of Age in Mississippi* chronicles her life from ages four to twenty-five. The text is divided into four sections, beginning with, childhood, then high school, then college, and finally, The Movement. Born Essie Mae Moody in 1940, her parents were poor Mississippi sharecroppers who struggled to feed their family. Moody’s father left the family during her childhood. To help provide for the family Essie Mae, the eldest child, sought work outside the home. Working as a domestic for a series of white women, Moody learns about the social construction of race.

In the eighth grade, Essie Mae’s name is changed to Anne because that is the name mistakenly recorded on her birth certificate. Essie Mae finds out that her name is recorded as Anne on her birth certificate, and because she never like the name Essie, she

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5 My usage of the term queer throughout the chapter will refer to transgressing hegemonic norms and non-normative sexuality--additionally, I will denote which meaning of the word queer during my analysis of the text.
asks her mother to leave it. Then she starts the eighth grade being called Anne. The name change is a transitional moment that parallels a narrative move found in the slave narratives, such as Sojourner Truth, which usually signals a major shift in the narrative.

During the same year, Emmett Till is murdered and Moody is elected 8th grade Homecoming queen. Elmira Toosweet Moody, her mother, remarries a light-skinned man named Raymond, with whom she has more children. To earn money and see the world outside of Mississippi, Moody goes to Louisiana to work during the summers. In Louisiana, Moody lives with her grandmother and works at a diner, where she meets Lola and Lily White, two black transgender people. Despite her initial transphobia, Moody becomes good friends with both Lola and Lily White.

During her senior year of high school, Moody has a conflict with her stepfather, Raymond, which leads to Moody’s departure from Centreville to live with her father. Once she goes college, Moody stages protests of its rules. Eventually, she also joins the Civil Rights Movement through her involvement with National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP), Council of Federated Organizations (COFO), and Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee (SNCC). Moody’s mother does not approve of her involvement in the Civil Rights Movement because of the danger it brings to the family. Moody becomes famous because she participates in a sit-in aimed at desegregating a Woolworth’s lunch counter, which makes international headlines. As the movement progresses Moody begins to question its goals and comes to believe that
economic issues need to be at the forefront.

Anne Moody’s narrative self can be characterized as the angelic trouble-maker Rustin says that every community needs because she works for change but does not forgo her questioning of the community. Her narrative opens a discourse for queer inclusion within historical remembrance that is later used to reclaim figures such as Bayard Rustin. I argue that the lack of attention on the queer aspects of civil rights subjectivities has allowed for the creation of a distorted history of the movement. I show how Moody creates a queer subjectivity that disidentifies with hegemonic notions of a civil rights subjectivity. This subjectivity is created through Moody’s complex identification with the black queer people that the movement sought to abject.

Although Moody does not claim a queer identity for herself, I argue that her queer identity stems from her entry into womanhood through queer moments, an identification with queer characters, and living her life by what Judith Halberstam calls “queer time” (2005). Halberstam argues that queer time is “about the potentiality of a life unscripted by the conventions of family, inheritance, and child rearing” (2005, 2). Moody lives her life in queer time because she does not follow the heteronormative life script. Halberstam argues that anyone that lives outside of the marriage between a man and a woman, who produces children, where the man is the masculine breadwinner and the wife is the subordinate partner, live outside of heteronormativity. Anyone who lives outside of this life-script presents a challenge to heteronormativity and can be thought of as queer.
Furthermore, I propose that it is Moody’s queer subject position that enables her to make queerness visible, critique the direction of the movement, and subvert the surveillance of American race relations.

Previous scholars have failed to examine Moody’s relationship with Lola and Lily White through a queer lens. They have analyzed various aspects of *Coming of Age*, including Moody’s choice of language, the presence of racial melancholia, its sense of place, and African American self-development. In “The Girls Who Become the Women: Childhood Memories in the Autobiographies of Harriet Jacobs, Mary Church Terrell, and Anne Moody,” Nellie McKay argues that African American women’s autobiographies illustrate how black girls develop a positive sense of self despite coming of age within the oppressive regimes of racism, sexism, and classism. McKay refutes the hypothesis that racism causes African Americans to develop negative sense of self-worth. The act of writing an autobiography allows African Americans to assert their humanity and critique systems of oppression. McKay asserts that many African Americans do not have the opportunity to have a traditional childhood, which she characterizes as a “protective isolation” from the social world; additionally, they are exposed to “a hostile social world” (107). McKay notes that their exposure to the hostile social world enables them to develop a strong sense of self.

According to McKay, Anne Moody never has the experience of childhood innocence where she lives a sheltered existence. McKay characterizes Moody’s early
environment as one filled with poverty, racism, and feelings of powerlessness against the social system. Moody is born into a family whose way of life is reminiscent of slavery. Her parents work on a plantation for a former slave master. Her family eats food that is left over from their share-cropping harvest. And they have very little money to purchase adequate food, shelter or clothing. From an early age, Moody was exposed to the reality of raising a family in poverty. Moody did not allow her circumstances to determine her future; rather, she rejects racism, the poverty of sharecropping, and the burdens of motherhood by leaving her community to attend college and, eventually, join the Civil Rights Movement. McKay compares Moody’s narrative to Richard Wright's narrative. Though they experience a similar sense of alienation, Wright criticizes racial politics, but Moody channels her energy into working for racial change. Overall, McKay concludes that Moody uses the adversity of her upbringing to develop a positive sense of self in a sexist and racist world.

William Andrews’s “In Search of a Common Identity: The Self and the Sought in Four Mississippi Autobiographies” also compares Wright and Moody’s texts. Through an exploration of the interaction of place and formations of the self, Andrews argues that Wright turns to autobiography for psychic survival while Moody writes to grapple with the intersection of personal and regional history. Andrews contends that Moody and Wright experience similar alienation from both the African American and white communities and are raised by evasive mothers who avoid engaging in discussing racism
with their children. Both feel alienated from the white community because of the South’s racial caste system and the African American community because it did not support a sustained challenge to racist ideology. Andrews points out that the major difference between *Black Boy* and *Coming of Age* is that Wright has an urban experience in Jackson, Mississippi, whereas Moody has a rural experience in Centreville, Mississippi. Similar to McKay, Andrews, first, finds that Moody searches for a sense of community in the movement while Wright remains alienated throughout his life; and second, that Moody rejects her mother’s identity as an overburdened mother with children. Andrews concludes that the contemplative ending of Moody’s narrative, “I WONDER. I really WONDER” (384) mirrors the alternative, rebellious textual self she creates.

Similar to Andrews and McKay’s previous arguments, Angela Hudson’s “Mississippi Lost and Found: Anne Moody’s Autobiography(ies) and Racial Melancholia” asserts that Moody rejects her mother’s way of life and creates a political identity through her anti-racism work in the movement. Hudson argues that the inconclusive ending of *Coming of Age* and Moody’s subsequent exit from the movement mirror the racial melancholia of Anne Moody’s life. Hudson utilizes Anne Cheng’s articulation of racial melancholy to analyze Moody’s creation of her narrative self and its relationship to place. She argues that Mississippi has a traumatic hold on Moody’s psyche; however, the racial hierarchies are productive because they give birth to Moody’s radical political identity. Throughout the coming of age process, Moody vacillates
between an acceptance and rejection of her “mother/land,” which refers to both the mother and her homeland (286).

Taking a linguistic approach, Jace Anderson’s “Re-Writing Race: Subverting Language in Anne Moody’s *Coming of Age in Mississippi* and Alice Walker’s *Meridian*” argues that Moody’s narrative offers a new way to think about race and racism through her creative use of language. Anderson contends that Moody’s narrative utilizes language to perform its politics of racial inclusion. Within the text, Moody encounters light complexioned African Americans who are more privileged than darker complexioned African Americans. Anderson notes Moody’s articulation of the hierarchies within the African American community does not use derogatory terms such as ‘half-breed’ and ‘mixed-blood’ when exploring the complexity of what it means to be socially black or white and illustrates the absurdity of racial hierarchies. Furthermore, Anderson contends that Moody resists hegemonic discourse’s naturalizing tendency by exposing the arbitrariness of racial labels. He analyzes Lily White (also known as James), as a character that highlights that complexity of racial and gender identification among cisgendered people. For Anderson, Lily White’s drag performance subverts the notion of naturalized race and gender by moving between identities. While I agree with Anderson’s

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6 Cisgender is a term coined by Carl Buijs in an online community as a way to refer to normatively gendered people as a group. Definition can be found in Julia Serano’s *Whipping Girl: A Transsexual Woman on Sexism and Scapegoating of Femininity* (2007), where she uses the term cissexual to refer to people who are not transsexual and who have only ever experienced their subconscious and physical sexes as being aligned" (12); the term seeks to combat transphobic language that poses transgender people as less valuable than cisgendered people.
assessment, I examine Lola and Lily White as transgender people rather than as stand-ins for cisgendered politics. In addition to further examining the race and gender implications of Lily White’s character, I explore how Lily White and Lola’s transgender identities influence Anne’s subjectivity and entrée into civil rights struggles.

The previous literature on *Coming of Age* prepares a foundation for my examination of the narrative. I use this literature as a starting place for my analysis of Moody’s text. The implications illustrated in the previous literature of race, place, gender, and trauma are informative for this project. My analysis seeks to extend the work of Andrews, McKay, Hudson, and Anderson by examining how gender, queerness, and civil rights subjectivity intersect in Moody’s narrative. The previous treatments of *Coming of Age* agree that Moody rejects her mother’s identity as a woman burdened by motherhood and trapped in the South. What has not been explored is how Moody is able to reject this identity. I assert that Moody is able to do the work of rejecting her mother’s identity through her queer entrée into gender identity, which is facilitated by queer moments in the coming of age process.

My argument is that Moody’s experience of becoming eighth-grade homecoming queen, working in the chicken factory, and being urged by Lola to embrace her femininity/femme identity are moments that aid in Moody’s construction of her queer civil rights subjectivity. I argue that Moody is a queer subject because she is ushered into “normative” womanhood and civil rights subjectivity through queer moments where the
coherence of gender is disrupted. Since Moody enters her gender identity through these queer moments, her narrative is able to create space for the consideration of queerness and civil rights subjectivity and the reclamation of queer figures such as Bayard Rustin. Rather than entering a normative civil rights subjectivity that abjects queerness in favor of African American respectability, Moody creates a civil rights subjectivity that engages the project of racial uplift while queering that subjectivity. Moody queers civil right subjectivity through a complex process of disidentifying with the project of racial uplift. Moreover, Moody rejects the hail to abject queer subjects. In the next section, I lay-out the theoretical terrain of abjection, disidentification, and its intersection with African American women’s role in the project of racial uplift.

**Abjeting the Queer: Disidentification, Respectability and African American Sexuality**

The normative civil rights subject is a creation of African American civil rights leaders that adheres to white middle class standards of propriety in terms of gender identity, manners, behavior, and sexuality. My reading of Anne Moody’s *Coming of Age* is theoretically informed by the terms abjection and disidentification. Moody’s narrative self is able to subvert the panopticism of the movement through claiming what it abjacts and disidentifying with normative civil rights subjectivity. Therefore, in order to understand my reading of Moody, one must understand abjection, disidentification, and how their intersection plays a role in understanding African American sexuality and the
Abjection, as articulated by Julia Kristeva, is the condition of being that which is opposed to the “I.” The “I” gains a sense of identity through casting off the not “I.” This casting off of the “not I” allows the “I” to temporarily escape the sense of ambiguity. As Kristeva contends, “abjection is above all ambiguity” (9). This ambiguity is related to the civil rights citizen-subject because this particular subject-position was created through abjection of the other, namely the non-normative—queer subjectivity. The need to abject queer subjectivities is related to the myths that surround African American sexuality which are integrally connected to notions of African American inferiority. Myths of African American inferiority have been linked to sexuality through racist logic that attempts to fix black bodies as primitive, bestial, and non-human.

African American sexuality has been mythologized as pathological throughout American history. This racist characterization asserted that a voracious sexual appetite lead black men to rape white women and bolstered the idea that it was impossible to rape black women due to their “insatiable” sexual appetite (Collins; Sheftall; Gilman). Moreover, this myth was used to justify African Americans’ lower position in society because it asserted that they could not suppress their “primal urges.” Although this argument was based on racist assumptions, leaders within the African American community encouraged projects of racial uplift that both challenged racism and admonished African Americans for not living up to middle class standards of propriety.
The encouragement to be “better” people included lessons on propriety through cleanliness, behavior, dress, hairstyling, and posture.

The idea that queerness needed to be abjected from the African American body social was introduced during the 1950s by Adam Clayton Powell⁷. Before Powell’s denouncement, Black queerness was visible to the African American body through coverage of drag balls in national publications such as Ebony and Jet magazines, and in local newspapers. Thaddeus Russell’s “The Color of Discipline: Civil Rights and Black Sexuality” illustrates that the abjection of black queerness was an explicit project of Civil Rights leaders during the early 1950s. The abjection of non-normative sexualities was not limited to the African American community. During the 1950s, President Eisenhower was also enacting a policy of abjecting homosexuals from federal employment. Furthermore, Russell argues that queer people were accepted members of the social milieu of working-class African Americans. He locates the commencement of the campaign to abject black queerness with the Ebony magazine’s 1951 publication of a letter by Adam Clayton Powell Jr. entitled “Sex in the Church.” In this letter, Powell admonishes homosexual preachers and their lavish displays of non-normative sexuality in the church. By 1954, Russell writes, “Ebony stopped publishing stories about

⁷ Son of Adam Clayton Powell Senior, who lead the Abyssian Baptist Church of Harlem, New York, which he took over in 1937. In 1941 Powell Jr. became a New York City Council representative. Later, he became the first African American representative to Congress from New York in 1944. Powell Junior organized many protests for equal rights to employment. Some examples include The New York World’s Fair in 1939, and on the behalf of transit workers and pharmacists, in 1941. In 1960, Powell Jr. forced Bayard Rustin to resign from the Southern Christian Leadership Conference (SCLC).
homosexuality and the black newspapers in Detroit, New York, and Chicago ended their coverage of drag shows” (2008, 114). Moreover, Russell argues that for African Americans, the price of racial equality was adherence to heteronormativity. In other words, the price of racial equality is equated with the abjection of queerness from the African American body social along with other non-normative identities.

Although Powell’s letter may be the public birth of this campaign to abject queerness, I argue that the construction of the civil rights subjectivity began long before the 1950s. By examining scholarly works on women’s activism in the late 19th and early 20th centuries, I illustrate that regulating African American women’s bodies for the purposes of racial uplift has been an on-going endeavor since the emancipation. The prevalence of the church in the African American community after the Civil War and during the early twentieth-century enables it be viewed as a place from which discourses about black womanhood flowed. In Righteous Discontent: The Women’s Movement in the Black Baptist Church, 1880-1920, Evelyn Higginbotham argues that respectability was a tool used to counter racist logic. Higginbotham shows that the Baptist church judged women’s morals, behavior, and appearance. Church leaders believed that the African American community could combat the assertions of scientific racism through public presentations of well-dressed and well-behaved blacks. The demands of ‘proper’ public presentation behavior were all encompassing, regulating, and disciplining the African American women’s bodies. Higginbotham states:

106
Respectability demanded that every individual in the black community assume responsibility for behavioral self-regulation and self-improvement along moral, educational, and economic lines... The Baptist women spoke as if ever cognizant of the gaze of white America, which in *panoptic* fashion focused perpetually upon each and every black person and recorded his or her transgressions in an overall accounting of black inferiority. (196; my emphasis)

More than just an ideal in the African American community, standards of respectability were policed by the church. Higginbotham contends: “The insistence on conformity was reinforced in the institutional structure of black churches. Values were imparted in sermons, Sunday school lessons, and home missions, but in addition churches in the early twentieth century commonly regulated behavior—what Foucault refers to as “disciplining the body”—by performing a judicial, even punitive function” (201). She argues that black female bodies were represented as unclean, promiscuous, and diseased women. Even though the disciplining of bodies affected the entire African American community, it regulated women’s bodies in relation to the racist logic attached to black female bodies. To counter racist logic they relied on a discourse of respectability, which Higginbotham states, “tended to hold black women primarily accountable for the rise or fall of the black family, and by extension for the rise or fall of the entire race” (202).

Similar to Higginbotham, Candice Jenkins’s *Private Lives, Proper Relations* asserts
that African American women bear the cultural weight of the project of racial uplift because black female sexuality is frequently under attack. Candice Jenkins argues that African American women are still called upon to engage in suppression and internal sacrifice during the late 20th century through the present moment. Moreover, Jenkins asserts that African American women were asked to adhere to Victorian ideals by their community to combat notions of racial inadequacy. As Jenkins notes, “…women have historically been understood as the gender most responsible for maintaining domestic and sexual decorum—a Victorian convention that in the case of black women also served as a marker of racial inadequacy, given the persistent assumption in American culture that black women are incapable of appropriate domestic and sexual comportment” (32). Incorporating and extending the scholarship of Higginbotham and Jenkins, I argue that within the Civil Rights Movement, a project of racial uplift encouraged the abjection of queerness in order to create a civil rights citizen-subject that adhered to hegemonic notions of normality. Moreover, it encouraged African American women to continue to engage in a project of respectability that involved suppression of desires and internal sacrifice through the surveillance of a panoptic styled gaze.

In relationship to the Civil Rights Movement, I contend that this type of bodily policing continues into the late-twentieth century. Due to the added surveillance on women’s bodies and behaviors in the public sphere, it is important to study the acceptance or rejection of community standards. Kathy Peiss’s *Hope in a Jar: The
*Making of America’s Beauty Culture*, further argues that the African American community’s relationship with women’s cosmetics functioned as site of struggle over the politics of racial uplift during the late 19\(^{th}\) and early 20\(^{th}\) centuries. Advocating that African American women had the right to be beautiful, community leaders urged black women to take their place as women of virtue. She argues that black women entered beauty culture with the idea that it allowed them to assert their right for respect as women.

The adherence to a politics of respectability throughout the African American Civil Rights Movement, as argued in Marisa Chappell, Jenny Hutchinson, and Brian Ward’s “‘Dress Modestly, Neatly…As if You Were Going to Church:’ Respectability, Class and Gender in the Montgomery Bus Boycott and the Early Civil Rights Movement,” was a strategy that highlighted the barbarity of racism and the morality of its victims. When women were pictured as racists, the visibility of “unlady-like” behavior was intensely scrutinized if the images were captured in new footage or photographs. Chappell et al. assert that the iconic image from the integration of Little Rock’s Central High School depicting Elizabeth Eckford, member of the Little Rock Nine, being shouted at by Sammy Dean Parker, a white female segregationist illustrates the use of African American respectability as a useful tool to fight racism. When Sammy Dean Parker confronts Elizabeth Eckford—Parker’s face is seething with anger as she shouts at Eckford. The contrast between Eckford and Parker’s demeanor shatters the logic of
white moral superiority because Parker appears to be out of control while Eckford seems poised. Though Eckford’s looks defy racist logic, her appearance reflects what Chappell et al. refer to as dressing for church; her looks are socially constructed as an embrace of the “New Negro.”

By discarding the “Old Negro” who was characterized as uneducated, lacking good manners, in exchange for the “New Negro” who was respectable, impeccably dressed, educated, and well-mannered—African Americans could wage a civil rights battle based on their readiness to join the American body social. The problem with this logic is that it reifies white middle class notions of propriety as the standard on which symbolic admission into the American body social is based. Moreover, because of respectability’s adherence to patriarchal standards of behavior, African American women were asked to perform a standard of white middle class womanhood that was made possible through their subordination. Not only does the policing of African American women’s bodies encompass behavior, appearance, and morals, it asks women to participate in a project of abjecting non-normative sexualities from the African American body social. My contention is that Anne Moody’s narrative self disidentifies with these notions of African American respectability.

Disidentification, as articulated by Jose Esteban Munoz, is an identification process that does not uniformly attempt to align with dominant notions of proper selfhood; nor does it wholly reject proper selfhood, instead it “works on, with and against” those
notions to enact a self (Munoz 1999, 12). Anne Moody works on, with, and against notions of ‘proper’ civil rights subjectivity to create her queer subjectivity. Though Munoz’s project focuses on a new way of reading queer of color performance art, his theory is informative for my project because it allows me to read Moody through a lens that does not deny her adherence to assimilationist doctrine, nor her rejection of it. Munoz contends that strategies of identification must change to suit the environment and desired outcome. This makes both assimilationist and radical actions available to minority subjects who need to successfully negotiate the public sphere.

Anne Moody’s narrative self is a disidentifying subject that exists on the margins of identity. She strategically adopts the assimilationist doctrine of respectability to gain the cultural capital that enables her to engage in Civil Rights struggles. Disidentification is connected with struggles for citizenship rights in that it enables subjects to participate in the discourses of citizenship through an ever-changing alignment with normative standards of personhood. Munoz explains that “Disidentification is meant to be descriptive of the survival strategies the minority subject practices in order to negotiate a phobic majoritarian public sphere that continuously elides or punishes the existence of subjects who do not conform to the phantasm of normative citizenship” (4). I argue that Moody’s narrative self is one that is able to disidentify with a ‘proper’ civil rights subjectivity and embraces a black queerness that the movement attempts to abject. The abjection of queerness and “deviant” sexuality enables African Americans to engage in
the discourse of citizenship. Community leaders hinged the entrée into citizenship on women’s adherence to normativity because African American women were caricatured as the source of this deviance through their behavior. Moody is subjected to this caricature and consequently faces policing from the African American and white communities.

Surveillance Within and Outside of the Movement

Moody’s name change during her eighth-grade year from Essie Mae to Anne symbolizes a new beginning for her racial consciousness. She begins to understand that the vestiges of slavery are present everywhere in her community; African Americans are oppressed economically and socially by the white community. During her first year of high school, Moody finds out that those vestiges are deadly for African Americans. When Moody was younger, her mother told her that the unsolved murders of black people were caused by evil spirits that killed you if you behaved badly. During Moody’s teenage years her mother could no longer deny the inherent inequality between whites and African Americans, rather she chose not to speak directly about race and racism, but gives her daughter advice about how to behave in front of white people.

Overhearing some other students in the hallway of school, Moody finds out about the murder of Emmett Till. When she attempts to talk with her mother about the meanings and motives behind his murder, Moody is met with obfuscation. Her mother tells her that, “And don’t you let on like you know nothing about that boy being killed
before Miss Burke them. Just do your work like you don’t know nothing…That boy’s a lot better off in heaven than he is here” (Moody 123). Mrs. Burke is Moody’s white employer, who is deeply racist. Because no answers can be obtained at home, Moody asks her teacher, Mrs. Rice. This is the point in the text where Moody begins to understand the viciousness of racism and that some people are brave enough to work against it. To illustrate her ignorance about race relations, Moody includes a moment in the text where she attempts to look up the acronym NAACP (which stands for National Association for the advancement of Colored People) in the dictionary. Although this level of ignorance about politics seems implausible, it allows Moody to illustrate how little was known about resistance efforts in her family. A teacher, Mrs. Rice tells Moody about the NAACP and their efforts to work for suffrage for Mississippi’s African American population and against racist violence throughout the nation.

Moody moves the text from a nationally known event, the murder of Emmett Till, to similar local events that did not gain the national spotlight. These events coupled with the Till murder become Moody’s authorization and motivation to work for racial justice. The other events that happen in Moody’s community are the beating of a black male classmate, Jerry, and the murder of the Taplin family, whose house was burned down by

8 The term disidentification was originally theorized by Michel Pecheaux in Language, Semantics and Ideology, New York: St. Martins Press, ([1975]1982)

Coming of Age is written in Black vernacular. Moody writes the phrase “Mrs. Burke them” to indicate the phrase: Miss Burke and them. This phrase “and them,” is a colloquial way of saying “Miss Burke and her family.”
night-riders. The incident ended with Jerry being beaten is very similar to the Emmett Till murder. Jerry was accused of making lewd phone calls to white women in town. The local sheriff picked him up, pretending to give Jerry a ride home, only to drop him off where a group of white men brutally beat him up while accusing him of making the phone calls.

Directly following Moody’s narration of Jerry’s beating, she includes the murder of the Taplin family. The Taplins lived in an area of town called “The Bottom” which is where most of the African American families live. Moody writes that she was awakened during the night because she heard screams. Later, Moody, her mother, and step-father, leave the house to see where the screams are coming from. They find a gathering of people around a house that has been burned to the ground. The house burned down is the Taplin’s. Only two of the nine family members residing in the house survived. Later, Moody finds out why the Taplin family was targeted for this deadly arson. Apparently, the night-riders were targeting the house of a poor white woman, who lived in the African American section of town, that was engaging in a sexual relationship with an African American man. The woman that they were targeting lived next door to the Taplins.

The combination of Jerry’s beating and the death of Emmett Till come together in the text to illustrate the immediacy of the need to fight for racial justice. And they serve as powerful reminders of the racialized gendered surveillance that is part and parcel of racism. Although this deadly surveillance is directed towards African American men,
Moody recreates these moments as motivation for her work to end racism. This is a complex way to re-write the physical traumas intended for African American men, as personal and community traumas. Moody writes, “Hadn’t many of my classmates witnessed the burning last night. I wished they had. If so, they wouldn’t be talking so much, I thought. Because I had seen it, and I couldn’t talk about it. I just couldn’t….I was just there inside of myself, inflicting pain with every thought that ran through my mind” (Moody 136). This is the beginning of Moody’s use of these memories as both personal and community trauma. By writing that she cannot speak about it because she had seen the carnage, Moody illustrates how the un-representability of trauma works. The person perceives that they are involved in a life-threatening incident and is rendered unable to relay it. Later, Moody writes,

I was fifteen years old and leaving home for the first time. I wasn’t even sure I could get a job at that age. But I had to go anyway, if only to breathe a slightly different atmosphere. I was choking in Centreville. I couldn’t go on working for Mrs. Burke pretending I was dumb and innocent, pretending that I didn’t know what was going on in all her guild meetings, or about Jerry’s beating, or about the Taplin burning, and everything else that was going on. I was sick of pretending, sick of selling my feelings for a dollar. (138)

Here we see that in the creation of Moody’s civil rights subjectivity, she questions what it
means to work for white people and mask the racialized and gendered traumas experienced by the African American community. Moody writes that she needs to get out of Centreville in order to stop pretending, but what she finds once she leaves is that because of the restrictions of racism, there is nowhere that she can go that is not affected by this regulating system. When she goes to Baton Rouge and New Orleans during the summer, Moody encounters internalized racism that turns African Americans on one another, and the racialized hierarchy of work in the U.S. that regulates who can have certain jobs and wages.

While Moody is attending college she becomes more aware of the surveillance that happens within the African American community and its contradictions. As a female student, Moody was subject to certain rules of conduct that were overseen by Mrs. Evans, as were all the women at Natchez College. Mrs. Evans regulated everything; Moody writes that “After about two months of Natchez College, I was completely fed up with it. I had never in my entire life felt so much like a prisoner, not even when I worked for white Klan members at home” (Moody 224). Moody is experiencing the strictures of regulating the black female body within communities that are interested in projecting an image of African American respectability. The young men on campus are allowed to roam free and date whomever they please, while the young women are regulated by campus rules of conduct that dictate when and how long they can see members of the opposite sex. She writes,
Now the only time that girls with boyfriends on campus got together was on Sunday from four to six. Then they sat up in the lounge with the door open and Mrs. Evans sat right across in the next lounge knitting…The boys weren’t too upset over the campus rules because they could go anywhere without permission, spend the night off campus, and do just about anything except openly tamper with the girls on campus. (Moody 226-227).

The women’s bodies and behaviors were regulated while the men’s bodies were not. The only stricture that they experienced was related to dating campus women. It is evident here that within the African American community the black female body is under a scrutiny that black male bodies do not face. To challenge these rules, Moody incited a kissing rebellion. While dating a young man on campus named Keemp [sic], Moody broke the school rules of decorum by kissing her boyfriend at night in front of the dormitory. Mrs. Evans eventually had a conference with Moody to discuss her kissing behavior.

The restrictions of movement were not only present at the college, Moody found them to be a part of Civil Rights Movement activities. She observes that women in the movement are protected, while the men are allowed to come and go as they please. Moody writes about the differences between herself and a male staff person,

He had a lot of other men to hang out with….He could go out and drink
beer with the men every night or so. And he had lots of girls. His life was pretty normal in many ways. With girls, things were different. We weren’t allowed to go anywhere, and there wasn’t anything we could do to relax.

People were always over protecting us. (Moody 343)

Men and women within this movement for greater citizenship rights were treated differently. Women were overprotected according to Moody, while men were allowed to roam freely. This gendered dynamic reveals the inherent heteronormativity and continued sexism that prevailed even within the Civil Rights Movement. Women are thought to be weak, and in need of protection, and men are thought to be strong with the inherent ability to protect themselves, despite the overwhelming evidence to the contrary. Men’s bodies were being policed during the entirety of the struggle; however, women were relegated to staying at home for “their protection.”

Not only was Moody’s body policed within the African American community, it was also policed by the white community. In the white community Moody’s body falls under a sexualized and racialized surveillance. When she comes of age and begins to look like a young woman, as opposed to a girl, she is followed around her home town by white men who want to know where she lives. They want to know this information to presumably start up an affair with her. Her mother advises her not to listen or talk to any white man in town after nightfall. Once she is in college and working in the movement, she is targeted again by white men. This time it is by those who want to do her harm.
because of her work in the movement. The house in which Moody lives is targeted by a
group of white men who plan to burn the house down. The men halt their plans because
they think that no one is inside. In addition, Moody finds out that one officer is targeting
her specifically. She writes that, “He seemed more like the type that would rape me rather
than beat me up…” (Moody 333). And finally, Moody falls under surveillance by the
Klan. She finds out that they want her dead from a flyer distributed in the white area of
Canton, MS, where she was organizing African Americans. She writes,

> I had one of the most horrible scares in my life. She showed me a Klan leaflet
> that she had gotten from a friend of hers who lived near a white
> neighborhood…I couldn’t believe it, but it was a Klan blacklist, with my
> picture on it….There were also pictures of other Negroes who had been killed
> with X’s marked across their faces. (Moody 339)

The surveillance that Moody lives under is deadly. Racist white men intend to harm her
body in specific ways because of both her race and sex. Moody’s text relays a story that
includes Klansmen, local racist citizens, and police officers who believe that they have
the right to victimize black women’s bodies.

Although Moody is susceptible to the racialized and gendered policing of white
men, she is also the victim of harassment by African American men. These harassments
are poignant moments in the text that move Moody from one identity to another. The first
incident happens when Moody decides to move out of her mother’s house. Her step-
father, Raymond is looking at her with wanton eyes. She decides that she cannot live in a house with sexualized surveillance happening, so she leaves and moves in with her father. This moment marks the end of her home life with her mother. The second incident involves a young man named Dave whom she is dating. He attempts to rape her, and after this incident she decides to spend her extra-curricular time at the NAACP.

After a date at a local dive bar, Dave wants to have sex with Moody. When she refuses he pulls her close and tries to force her to kiss him. Moody can taste the alcohol on his breath, and when she pulls away Dave tears her sweater. She gets away and goes to the dorm, vowing never to see him again. What is interesting about this moment is that after he attempts to rape her, she joins the NAACP. Moody uses the memory of gendered violence to authorize her participation. She writes, “The more I remembered the killings, beatings, and intimidations, the more I worried what might possibly happen to me or my family if I joined the NAACP. But I knew I was going to join, anyway” (Moody 248).

Both of these moments involve sexualized and gendered harassment coming from within the community and propel Moody to more independence and work for justice. *Coming of Age* gives the reading public a complicated image of what it means to be a black woman in America through glimpsing the gendered violence that must be managed to preserve one’s life and work for justice.
The Creation of Queer Anne Moody

Through a close reading, I identify three queer moments in *Coming of Age* to illustrate how Moody creates a queer subjectivity. The first of these queer moments is Moody’s election as eighth grade Homecoming queen. In the narrative, Moody juxtaposes the scene of a parading Homecoming court and the school band playing Confederate nostalgia music. Instead of reveling in her acceptance as a normative female subject who is revered for her beauty, Moody recreates this moment as a reflection on the ugliness of racism. The second queer moment illustrates the brutality of normality. During a summer in Baton Rouge, Moody works at a chicken factory. At the chicken factory, she sees hundreds of chickens being killed every day. Her observation of the butchers’ conversation illustrates the danger of normativity. The third queer moment in the text is when Moody befriends Lola and Lily White, two transgender people. Moody’s friendship with them facilitates both her entry into normative civil right subjectivity and the queering of that subjectivity. At Lola’s urging, Anne begins to take ownership of her femininity/femme performance, which ushers her into normative notions of female civil rights subjectivity through an adherence to standards of gender presentation. Furthermore, Moody’s eventual friendship with both Lola and Lily White illustrates her ability to reject transphobia.

The intersection of beauty ideals, race, and gender has been explored by multiple scholars, e.g. Higginbotham and Jenkins. As I illustrated previously, African American
women have had a complex relationship with beauty ideals and gender norms. Due to the malignment of African American women’s bodies during enslavement and the discourses that circulated after emancipation, black female bodies have been perceived as lacking beauty and refinement. The discourses that surrounded African American women made their bodies central to the project of racial uplift, with an emphasis on their adherence to normative gender performance. The creation of Anne Moody’s queer civil rights subjectivity can be read in the queer moments in the narrative. I analyze these moments below, beginning with Moody’s experience as a homecoming queen, experience working at a chicken factory, and relationship with Lola and Lily White.

Anne Moody’s entrée into normative gender performance is queered by her attention to the race and gender politics of the moment. Her ascendancy to homecoming queen begins her nomination. Moody nominates herself for homecoming queen. Moody faces two competitors. The first competitor, Dorothy, is elected by the “quiet girls,” and the second, Amanda, is elected by the “fast girls.” Here we can see that Moody is leading the reader into the assertion that she is something other than the two archetypes of female representation, the Madonna and whore. Although Moody asserts her difference, she does not shun either the “fast” or “quiet” groups because she understands that she also participates in both groups. Sometimes, she is “quiet” and at others, she enjoys the admiration of her male classmates who elect her as the third candidate. Here we can see that Moody is beginning the process of disidentifying with archetypical roles of women.
As Moody writes, “The boys elected me?…I got up and purposefully swayed my ass all the way up to Mrs. Willis’s desk” (99-100). Anne subsequently wins the title through raising more money than her competitors. This moment illustrates the beginning of Moody’s disidentification and enunciation of herself as something in-between. Rather than be fast or quiet, Moody is trying to be something else through utilizing the strategies from both groups. Although she is a good student who is concerned about grades, Moody’s obligation to help provide for her family does not allow her the luxury of focusing on appearance and popularity.

Once Moody claims the Homecoming Queen title, the narrative falls into the cliché storyline where the heroine has no dress to wear to the “big ball.” The “big ball” is the parade and subsequent crowning ceremony that occurs during the halftime of the football game. Similar to other princess narratives, Moody turns to her father to make things better and asks him to buy her a “proper” dress. Unlike traditional narratives, the circumstances are different because Moody’s poverty is due to the combination of racism and her father’s departure from the family. Not willing to rely entirely on her father, Moody turns to her white employer, Linda Jean, for help, but all of Linda Jean’s dresses are dowdy. Eventually, Moody’s father delivers—he sends her a beautiful blue dress from New Orleans. At this point, the expectation for a normative fairytale plotline is one where Moody relishes feeling beautiful and expresses that she is having the best time of her life. Moody’s narrative adheres to this plotline through expressions of “feeling like
the most beautiful girl” at the parade. Moody begins with the beautification process:

By the time Mrs. Willis was back with the girls we were sitting there in our gowns ready to be made up. … I sat there feeling like a *pampered princess*. … When they had carefully pinned the crown to my hair, Mrs. Willis said, smiling, “Turn around, Queen, look at yourself.” I pulled the stool out a bit. I was scared to look in the mirror now that they were all finished. But from the way Mrs. Willis was looking at me, I could tell that I must look pretty. (106-107; my emphasis)

Then she moves on to the moment when she sees herself looking beautiful. When Moody sees herself, she does not believe that what she is seeing is real. She writes:

When I turned, I had to touch my face to see if it was me. I sat there in front of the mirror for a good five minutes; I kept staring at myself, at my piled-up hair, my full breasts and wide hips—I realized that *I was no longer a little girl*. Then Mrs. Willis was tapping me on the shoulder, motioning that it was time to go. As I got up, I took one more glance at myself. Full figure, *I seemed even less real*. … The boys stood gaping and oohing and the girls looked enviously. (108; my emphasis)

Moody has narrated the moment such that it seems as if the moment is entirely centered on the subject of embracing the identity of “beautiful” woman, but it is not. This moment is queered because Moody chooses to juxtapose the notion of African American beauty
with the ugliness of racism. While riding the float, Moody sees her employer, Linda Jean, who has a hard time recognizing Moody because of the “transformation.” However, Moody imagines that Linda Jean’s trouble with recognizing her is imbued with a racist logic that renders white people incapable of seeing an African American woman as beautiful. Moody writes,

Turning slightly, I found myself looking into a group of white faces. There was Linda Jean staring like she didn’t know me either…giving me a look that said, “My how beautiful you are;” as if she was surprised that a Negro could look that beautiful. I wanted to answer her and say, “Yes, Linda Jean, it’s me. Negroes can be beautiful too.” I got an urge to yell it to her but instead I just smiled and waved some more. (108)

This imaginary conversation is evidence of Moody’s urge to work with and through the identity of beauty queen to refute racist ideology. Hence, she enters into womanhood through an altered understanding of what it means to be a woman because she does not have the luxury of experiencing the normativity that beauty usually bestows on normative white women.

Rather than continuing with a narration of the moment as a blissful entrée into normative gendered womanhood or capturing the prize of African American beauty, Moody uses this part of the narrative to highlight the ugliness of racism. Moody inhabits the role of beauty queen while questioning racist ideology. Her attention to the racist
underpinnings of the parade begins her process of disidentifying with her civil rights subject position.

As Moody re-constructs the parade, she describes how the band played “Dixie” (Emmett 1860) and “Swanee River” [sic] (Foster 1851) and highlights the vestiges of slavery. As Moody observes, it seemed like the whole town sang along with “Swanee River” [sic] As they sang, the white people looked as though they were yearning for the past, while the African Americans were melancholy. Here Moody begins the process of engaging with a proper civil rights subject identity. She suffers silently during the Southern ritual of yearning for the past through the songs “Dixie” and “Swanee River” [sic] Moody gets chills all over her body and feels sick after the ritual. She writes:

I sat there wondering, trying to get some meaning from the song as I listened closely to the words…There was something about “Swanee River” that touched most of those old whites singing along with the band. There was also something that made the old Negroes even sadder. … The feeling that the song conveyed stayed with me all evening, and I was cold. I shivered throughout the rest of the parade. (108-109)

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9 “Swanee River” [sic] actually titled “Old Folks at Home” (1851) is a song written by Stephen Collins Foster, a Jewish man from Pennsylvania. He was heavily influenced by musical theatre and minstrel songs. This song was made the Florida State song in 1935. Its lyrics were amended in 1997 because they were considered offensive to African Americans. In 2008, Florida changed its state song (The Jackson Free Press. Jacksonville, Fla.: Aug 14-20, 2008. Vol. 23, issue 15. HYPERLINK "http://proquest.umi.proxy.lib.ohio-state.edu"http://proquest.umi.proxy.lib.ohio-state.edu).
This moment highlights African Americans being called to engage in the project of normalization as a way to prove their humanity. Moody participates in these rituals of normalization by becoming a queen and allowing herself to be “transformed.” However, she cannot entirely embrace their intent because she cannot experience the rituals without questioning them. Moreover, Moody articulates a bodily rejection of Southern rituals when she writes that she got chills when the band played “Dixie” and “Swanee River” [sic]. The coldness becomes more pronounced when she is crowned. When Moody leaves directly following the game, she is symbolically rejecting the rituals of normalizing herself into a civil rights subjectivity; rather than reveling in the moment, she recoils and feels sick.

Within the narrative, normalization is written as a process that is to be avoided and questioned. As Micheal Warner’s *The Trouble with Normal* argues, the problem with normality is that it is the enemy of autonomy. According to Warner, normality stifles expression through its shaming of desire. Judith Butler’s *Bodies That Matter* argues that standards of normality are inevitable within culture. However, she also argues that a queering of those constructed standards is also inevitable. Butler advocates that groups combat the problematic aspects of normality through imagining new identities as their next horizon, rather than enact the brutality of exclusion and unintelligibility on the *other*.

Moody has another poignant experience with the normalization of brutality during her teen years. This experience serves as a precursor to Moody’s rejection of the brutality
of normality. Wanting to leave Mississippi in search of higher wages and new experiences, Moody goes to New Orleans where she has family. Moody has a hard time finding work and is about to leave when someone tells her about a job paying a lot of money. Early the next day, Moody and Sis, her aunt, are picked up in a truck to go to the undisclosed location of the work site. When they arrive, they see people outside picketing—disputing their wages. When Moody goes inside of the chicken factory, she finds out that they slaughter, clean, and package chickens for sale at grocery stores. The work is brutal. After the first day, Moody swears that she will never go back because the work is too hard and the hours too long. Her first task at the factory was to pull out the chicken’s intestines on an assembly line. By the time Moody left, she was covered with chicken blood and guts. Moody’s narrative makes the point that the factory attempts to make its workers complicit in brutality through demanding that they work at a fast pace. Furthermore, the atomization of tasks in the factory and the pace of the work, combined with relatively high wages solicit complicity in the brutalizing task.

Although Moody acknowledges that the money is not worth the amount of labor and the horrible conditions of the job, she does not have the luxury of turning down the monetary incentive because of her family’s financial situation. She pays psychologically for continuing to work at the chicken factory. After working there, she can no longer eat boxed chicken because of what she witnessed. More importantly, this portion of the narrative illustrates that anyone can be transformed by the normalization of brutality.
Overhearing a conversation between two of the butchers, Moody is struck by the pleasure they find in killing chickens. The slaughterhouse employees engage in the routinized killing of chickens, which transforms them into killing machines. Similar to the 1963 social science experiments of Stanley Milgram, where participants were asked to deliver a shock to person in another room under the direction of an authority figure, the chicken factory asks workers to perform harmful actions. In Milgram’s experiment, sixty five percent of people continued to shock another participant until the experiment was halted by the researcher, despite the pain they believed they were inflicting. The results illustrate that most people obey authority even when it is harmful to others, when directed by an authority figure. Moody’s participation illustrates that even she, a person who will eventually make a career out of disobeying authority, sometimes does not have the will to resist authority figures and social structures. Later, she realizes that doing brutal work changes a person. Moody states:

I shall never forget the slaughterhouse…. The taut faces of the two men who stood at the door haunt me still. They stood there grasping chickens by the neck and knifing them one after the other, their eyes sparkling with what looked to me like pleasure. During the breaks I often overheard these same two men cracking jokes: “I musta killed three thousand of them motherfuckers already” one would brag….I felt sick every time I looked into the slaughterhouse or saw the men who worked there. (167)
Moody’s experience working at the chicken factory stays with her; she never forgets it. This moment highlights the problematic combination of obedience, authority, and normalization. By not questioning authority and being lulled into a job because of socio-economic need, one could very easily be transformed into anything. Although Moody complies and continues to perform the brutal work, she also learns to be a critical questioner of authority. This point in the narrative signals another change that informs her entrance into the movement and contributes to the queerness of her subjectivity. Moody recognizes that normality can be problematic, in its ability to transform terrible acts into everyday innocuous activities. This queer moment signals a change in Moody’s thinking about the ways that hate and racism operate as normalized patterns of interacting in Mississippi. It allows her to begin thinking about how a person can change their circumstances by refusing to participate in societal constructs. I argue that this moment aids Moody in her search for a life outside of societal scripts and reject her mother’s identity.

As Andrews, Anderson, McKay, and Hudson have argued, Moody rejects her mother’s identity and way of life. I argue, nonetheless, that she gains the resolve to create her civil rights subjectivity through her relationship with Lola and Lily White. Not only do these two friends give Moody the tools to reject her mother’s identity, they also facilitate her entrée into civil rights subjectivity, albeit queerly. Although Lola and Lily White are an important part of Moody’s development, her first encounter with them is
imbued with transphobia. When Moody meets Lily White, she is confused. She stares at Lily White. Later, Moody has a similar experience when sees Lola for the first time. This time she asks her Grandmother Winnie: “Winnie, is that a woman or a man?” I asked uncertainly” (Moody 174). Moody’s first encounter and subsequent friendship illustrates her willingness to accept, rather than abject difference. Just as the narrative takes the reader into an understanding the struggles of a young activist whose interest is to end racism, I argue that the inclusion of Lola and Lily White is an effort to highlight the limits of the racial progress narrative. Lola and Lily White exist on the edges of the African American community and represent the need for a more progressive political stance in terms of difference within minority communities.

Judith Butler and Cathy Cohen’s work on the queer subjectivity are important to understanding how Lola and Lily White function in the narrative and within African American freedom struggles. Butler’s *Bodies that Matter* argues for the propagation of resignifications of gender performance that do not repeat the violence of exclusion, rather they create a community where “the violence of exclusion is perpetually in the process of being overcome” (1993, 53). I argue that Moody’s narrative is a place where the violence of exclusion is perpetually being overcome. In the case of the African American community, issues surrounding non-normative sexuality are at the discursive edges of the mainstream political agenda. Cathy Cohen’s *The Boundaries of Blackness: AIDS and the Breakdown of Black Politics* argues that the refusal of the African American political
elite to consider non-normative sexualities under the rubric of the African American community’s concerns creates “secondary marginalization” (1999, 27). Secondary marginalization within the African American community entails black elites “replicating a rhetoric of blame and punishment…direct[ed] at its most vulnerable and stigmatized” community members, according to Cohen (1999, 27). Although Cohen uses this concept to discuss the future of black politics and the AIDS epidemic, it is also helpful in thinking through Moody’s encounters with the African American community’s political and discursive limits and works through her personal transphobia to overcome it.

In working through transphobia, Moody is able to include transgender people within her narrative. This points the reader to think about the discursive limits of anti-racism efforts. Furthermore, it is Anne’s friendships with Lola and Lily White that give her the ability to disidentify with civil rights subjectivity, by enabling her to work on, with, and through this identity. Moody recounts the beginnings of her friendship with Lily White and attendance at her performance:

I got to know Lily White first. He told me his real name was James and soon he let me call him James outside of the dining room. We had many conversations during out breaks. He talked mostly about his nightlife and about his career as an “exotic” dancer. Lily White was his stage name. I agreed to go to one of his performances… As Robert and I made our way through the customers, I noticed that most of them were homos…..I
looked to the stage and I was shocked. James didn’t look like James… If I hadn’t known him I would have sworn he was a woman with that wig and costume he wore. (180-181)

Initially, Moody exhibits both trans- and homophobia as evidenced in her use of the term “homos” and shock at Lily White’s performance. She has a hard time understanding how Lily White could transform so completely on stage; but Moody’s attendance of the stage performance represents her initial break with transphobia. Later, she becomes open to friendship with Lola. Moody learns about Lola from Lily White. Lola, who Moody describes as the “helpless fragile type,” is a male-to-female transgender person, who works at a café with Moody (182).

When Moody begins her friendship with Lola, she has not embraced normative female gender performance; she does not dress in a hyper-femme style. Ways of dress may be seem inconsequential, but when one considers the discursive weight that African American female bodies carry in the politics of racial uplift, adherence to middle class notions of proper gender identity through dress and behavior becomes a place of judgment. When Lola scolds Moody about her adherence to female fashion norms, it is more than just helpful hints. Lola is ushering Moody into embracing womanhood and aiding her in creation of a civil rights subjectivity. Moody recounts her interaction with Lola:

Lola gave me a good sermon on why I insisted on being ugly. He talked
about me from head to toe. He commented on my hair, the sagging clothes
I wore to hide my body, and even the shoes I wore. He finally convinced
me that I could look much better so that evening, I stopped at a beauty
shop and had my hair cut and bought some mascara. Before long Lola also
had me wearing straight dresses and uplift bras. (182-183)

Due to Lola’s advice, Moody rejects her mother’s identity and embraces a subjectivity
that would allow her to be culturally intelligible as a civil rights subject. However,
because Moody comes into this subjectivity through a transgendered mother figure, Lola,
her civil rights subjectivity is inherently queer. Here, I use queer to emphasize that
Moody enters “womanhood” through the encouragement of a person who inhabits a
borderlands subjectivity, a subject position that is able to see the non-coherence of
identity due to their marginality within multiple identity groups. Moody enters into the
identity category “woman” through the urging of Lola, a person who entered the category
against cultural norms. Therefore, Moody is never under the cultural illusion that women
constitute a coherent group. In other words, in terms of gender, Moody is never a part of

Examining both the history of race and gender, and the construction of the
African American Civil Rights Movement, one can see that it is imperative that Moody
learn to present herself as a reflection of normative femininity because this presentation
style allows Moody the mobility to move within the world of the African American
middle class. Without the knowledge of how to enter and navigate the world of the African American middle class, Moody would have remained in Centreville without the tools to transform her existence. Furthermore, she would not have participated in the project to end American racism and African American disenfranchisement.

The malignment of the African American female body makes the project of adhering to normativity important within the movement. Female bodies that adhered to the normative standard of female gender presentation were imperative to the struggle for civil rights because African Americans were attempting to subvert racist discourse. Moody embraces a new presentation style through her transgender-other mother, in order to participate in the anti-racist struggles. When Moody tries to re-integrate into her family while taking time off from the movement, she finds herself different and unable to meld with them. She writes, “I couldn’t understand why I seemed so strange to everyone. All of a sudden, I found myself wishing I was in Canton, Mississippi again working in the Movement with people who understood me. Here among my own people, I seemed crazy because I was grieved over problems they didn’t even think about” (Moody 352). When Moody is with them she finds herself longing to be working with the people in Canton towards getting the right to vote. Moody is now queerly located within her family. She is one of them, and yet starkly different. Becoming a woman has left her alienated from her family of origin, but it has also given her a new family of people that are like-minded. This gives her the perseverance to continue to critique social standards. Because Moody’s
entrée into womanhood is queered, she is able to engage in a critique of the movement in ways that have only recently come to scholarly attention.

As the first person from Centreville, Mississippi, to participate in anti-racist struggles, who was not killed or run-out of town, Moody eventually critiques the African American Civil Rights Movement that made her exit from her hometown possible. Questioning both the leadership style and the professed goals, Moody argues that the Civil Rights Movement needs to address economic issues in addition to voting rights. After the March on Washington, where Martin Luther King Junior makes his speech, “I Have a Dream,” Moody leaves thinking that the Movement needs more leaders and less dreamers. Furthermore, she wonders if people are better off leading themselves rather than following visionary leaders. Additionally, Moody critiques the Movement’s lack of focus on poverty. Working in Canton, Mississippi, taught Moody that the Movement needs to be able to provide an economic alternative for its participants to maintain their livelihoods outside of systemic racism. What is illustrated in Moody’s multiple critiques of the Movement’s trajectory and ideology, is her ability to maintain a queer stance towards it, while participating in achieving its goals. Her civil rights subjectivity is queer, in that she is never fully subsumed in the identity.

In conclusion, Anne Moody’s narrative subjectivity is queered through her disidentification with the normative civil rights subjectivity. Though she works with and through the identity of normative gender performance, she utilizes that performance to
enable her to reject her mother’s identity through going to college and participating in the anti-racist movement. Rather than allow the panopticism of African American racial uplift enacted through beauty culture to operate on her body, Moody subverts it by utilizing her normative gender performance to allow her to escape her circumstances. Through embracing normative gender performance through her other-mother, Lola, Moody is able to remain a questioning subject throughout the movement. Despite the pull of racial uplift projects, Moody understands that any social group can succumb to the brutality of normalization. This narrative is an example of a discursive space where queerness is not abjected, rather it is embraced for all that it has to offer.
Chapter 4: African American Women’s Representations and Aggressive Femininity: Beals’s Gun-Toting Granny

Melba Pattillo Beals’s *Warriors Don’t Cry: A Searing Memoir of the Battle to Integrate Little Rock’s Central High* is a narrative that chronicles Beals’s experience as one of the first African Americans to attend Arkansas’s premiere public high school. As the title suggests, the text represents the desegregation of Central High as an act of engaging in war. Written as a 30 year retrospective, Beals uses her memories, diaries, and newspaper articles to construct her narrative. Beals begins *Warriors* with photographic images taken during the integration of Central High, which capture her family, the Little Rock Nine, and the Arkansas National Guard troops sent to keep them out of the school. The written portion of the narrative begins at the 30-year reunion of the Little Rock Nine at Central High that was coordinated by then Arkansas Governor Bill Clinton. Beals recounts struggling with reconciling her status as an honored guest with the memories of
her year at Central, which she characterizes as a “hellish torture chamber” (Beals 1994, xx). Moving between the present moment and past terrors, Beals brings the reader into her experience of Central. Although she gives the reader more information about her life before the integration, the bulk of the narrative is a memoir that chronicles the year spent at Central high school, so what emerges is a coming of age story that is colored by racism.

What is striking about this memoir is the difference between Beals’s representation of herself as a “proper civil rights subject” and that of her Grandmother India, as a more complex civil rights identity that has largely been ignored. Grandmother India is a woman who quotes the Bible, but will take up arms to defend her family. She is a complicated representation of black femininity that transgresses African American middle class notions of proper womanhood because she is willing to protect her family with a shotgun, while pursuing an integrationist agenda. Her identity is not often associated with the public memory of the African American Civil Rights Movement. Proper middle class womanhood within the African American community meant exhibiting the styles of dress and behavior that challenged racial stereotypes. The differences between the two representations of black femininity within Beals’s text tell a larger story about female representation in the African American Civil Rights Movement. As I explained in Chapters 2 and 3, my conception of black civil rights subjectivity for
black women is about upholding standards of normative womanhood that bolster heteropatriarchy.

By examining the narrative of *Warriors*, I argue that Beals both participates in and troubles the notion of the idealized civil rights subjectivity. My examination focuses on how Beals uses the representation of her Grandmother India to propose new ways of looking at the intersection of black femininity and civil rights subjectivity. I argue that Beals’s representation of Grandmother India queers the representation of proper civil rights subjectivity because it refutes the binary between violent and non-violent protest representations that has become a fixture in popular representations of the African American Civil Rights and Black Power Movements. Moreover, Black Feminist theorists, such as, Patricia Hill Collins (2000), Beverly Guy-Shefthall (2002) and Lisa Collins (2002) have highlighted the problematic over-representation of black women as aggressive, which has perpetuated the de-humanization of African American women. This chapter will examine the tension between the project of humanizing black women in popular representation and the move towards more complex understandings of black femininity through the lens of aggressive femininity. Throughout my analysis of these two representations, I consider previous scholars’ theories on the representation of black femininity, aggressive femininity and female masculinity.
My theory of civil rights subjectivity draws from Kevin Gaines’s theorization of the black middle class subject laid out in *Uplifting the Race: Black Leadership, Politics, and Culture in the Twentieth Century*. According to Gaines, the black middle class subject is constituted by both the African American community’s notions of a respectable citizen and white American social ideals of class distinction. Therefore, the black middle class subject is one who is invested in both individual social mobility and community advancement. The prominent belief among the black middle class was that if they could gain the favor of whites through racial uplift, they could re-claim the citizenship rights granted during the Reconstruction. This new subjectivity, civil rights subjectivity, calls patriarchy’s *others*, namely, women, queer people, people with disabilities, and gender variant people, to perform normativity for the sake of the race.

Civil rights subjectivity is constituted by a subject position perpetuated by the African American middle class leadership that asks African American women who participated in the Civil Rights Movement to mimic the bodily-stylings of white women in order to gain access to the American body social. Furthermore, these standards of propriety, piety, submission, and domesticity were cast as norms one met not only for herself, but for the betterment of the race. Not meeting these standards meant, for some, that they would not be considered a “good” representative of the race, and might be judged unfit for representing African Americans in the struggle for civil rights. Although Civil Rights subjectivity was perpetuated by the leadership within the African American middle class, it is a standard that becomes self-policed through the internalization of its standards of feminine behavior and heteronormativity. Moreover, I argue that although African American women were subjected to a racialized heteropatriarchal surveillance, as
I demonstrate in my reading of Beals’s *Warriors*, they were able to use their subjectivities to oppose American racism through circumscribed agency.

The mechanisms of surveillance in Beals’s life are both community and politically situated. Like Bates and Moody, Beals is policed by both the African American and white communities. She is expected to represent the African American race as a respectable citizen, while each community has specific demands that is places on her body. The white community expects a docile body. Within the African American community, there are two different expectations put upon Beals one portion of the community believes that she should be a shining example of her race, while the other wants her to drop out of the integration effort to appease the white community.

Additionally, Beals’s behavior is policed by Bates and the NAACP throughout the integration process. They need the student to testify in court, consent to interviews by reporters, and behave a certain way in school in order to forward the goals of integration. Specifically, Governor Faubus cites that race riots would break-out in the schools if African Americans were allowed to attend. The African American students that were selected to attend had to testify to the courts that they did not feel like their lives were threatened by participating in the integration effort, even when they knew that it was not the case. Furthermore, many of the interviews with the African American students and reporters were conducted at Daisy Bates’s house, where the students would gather to talk about their experiences and expectations.

Lastly, another mechanism of political surveillance was enacted against Beals’s mother. Mrs. Beals, a school teacher for a neighboring school district, was instructed to pull her daughter out of Central High school, or risk losing her job. She did not comply
with her principal’s orders and was removed from her position for a short time. Mrs. Beals was later reinstated.

Beals is affected by this racialized heteropatriarchal surveillance which is apparent in her need to represent herself and the other members of the LRN as “good citizens” and individuals. Within the text, Beals attempts to represent herself as someone who has a normative girlhood, despite the many incidences where her coming of age is colored by racism. The effect is that of a doubling in Beals’s story where the narrative tells one story of a girl whose life was changed by participating in the integration of Central High School and another story of a girl whose life is deeply affected by racist acts beginning with her birth. The multilayered story becomes more complex when one considers the added dimension of Grandmother India, who is Melba’s biggest support throughout the year she attends Central; however, the type of subjectivity Grandmother India represents flies in the face of proper civil rights subjectivity Beals assigns to herself.

The representation of Beals’s Grandmother India is a sharp contrast not only to Beals’s textual representation, but differs from the violent/non-violent dichotomy in Civil Rights-Black Power Movement representation. As Hasan Jeffries’ *Bloody Lowndes: Civil Right and Black Power in Alabama’s Black Belt* argues, the history of African American protest does not always adhere to the dichotomy of violent versus non-violent protest. Jeffries explains that Lowndes is both exemplary and unique because

[T]he freedom struggle in the county was emblematic of local struggles throughout the region. The arch of black protest followed the same general trajectory—there was an explosion of organizing after emancipation, an
eerie absence of visible protest during World War II era, and the emergence of a genuine social movement in the mid-1960s...At the same time, the freedom struggle in the county was distinct. Traditional leaders—preachers, teachers, and businesspersons—were peripheral to the movement, whereas outside organizers played a vital role. African Americans also rejected nonviolence and embraced armed self-defense. Although they never created a formal defense group...they were fully prepared to meet violence with violence. (4)

Through examining the history of African Americans’ struggles for human and civil rights, which Jeffries articulates as freedom rights, in Lowndes County, Alabama, he finds that African Americans participated in the electoral system and demanded rights through both non-violent protest and the utilization of force. Jeffries’s text represents a move towards complex understandings of African American freedom struggles and allows for a complex character like Grandmother India to be theorized because she embraces both violent and non-violent protest methods. Grandmother India is a subject who is interested in integration, but is willing to take up arms to protect her family and forward this “non-violent” form of protest against white supremacy. Speaking of John Hullett, a man who took up arms to protect NAACP members, similar to Grandmother India, Jeffries writes,

After Alabama banned the NAACP in 1956, he joined ACMHER, which filled the organizational void created by the absence of the nation’s leading civil rights group. As the Birmingham movement intensified in the late 1950s, so did Hullett’s activism. Although he never participated in
public demonstrations, he guarded mass meetings, watched the homes of movement leaders, including that of firebrand Rev. Fred Shuttlesworth, and protected visiting dignitaries, most notably Dr. Martin Luther King Jr.—all of which he did with a .12—gauge shotgun by his side.” (29)

“We Were Individualists”

Beals attempts to represent herself and other members of the Little Rock Nine as normative Civil rights citizen-subjects who believe in the American meritocracy. In other words, Beals attempts to represent them as normative civil rights subjects who believe in America’s ideals of equality. Beal writes, “We nine grew up to be productive citizens, with special insights about how important it is to respect the value of every human life” (Beals 1994, 2).

Beals recounts memorable moments where her entrance into maturity intersects with racist social sanctions. Expectations about what her junior year of high school would have been, had Beals not attended Central High, are prevalent throughout the text. Through mentioning period television shows, teen magazines, heterosexual daydreams, dates, and historical events—the narrator creates a 1950s world that adheres to the archetypical coming of age narrative. Beals situates herself as a “good girl,” who reads Seventeen Magazine, watched television shows such as Lucy, Sid Caesar, and The Hit Parade, and has a great affinity for Grapette Cola. She often uses fantasies about having a normative girlhood to ward off her negative thoughts about integration. One fantasy that she relies on is about a boy named Vince. She dreams of being his girlfriend and the
social capital it could bring. She also fantasizes about the re-unification of her divorced parents. Here Beals writes her imagination of heteropatriachal familial unity devoid of racist realities. Neither the return of her father, nor her relationship with Vince could make her life perfect. These representations are an attempt to bring the reader into an understanding of the narrator as a normative American teenager, but Beals was not a normative teenager.

Beals was an African American teenager that lived in the segregated American South. Her life had some of the trappings of middle class identity, but it also moved outside of those boundaries. She states:

> Within our community, we were considered middle-class folk. The middle-class label was mostly because of Mother’s teaching job. It didn’t mean we had lots of money or lived without struggling to pay our mortgage or the bills….Certainly we were not considered radical integrationists or people who made waves. We were quiet churchgoing folks. (Beals 1994, 13)

Here Beals is making the obvious point that she and her family were not “radical” freedom fighters. Rather, they were “churchgoing” people, which implies that they are good citizens, a good family. More importantly, Beals casts being radical as something that was shunned. Rather than emphasizing the courage it took to participate in integration efforts, Beals highlights her family’s quiet nature, which also suggests their inherent modesty. This statement also points to Beals’s understanding that there is something to write against, which is the representation of African American freedom struggles as the work of “radicals.” But there is good reason to suspect Beals’s family of
radical behavior because her mother obtained an advanced degree from the University of Arkansas. Beals writes, “My mother was one of the first few blacks to integrate the University of Arkansas, graduating in 1954” (1994, 4). In order to obtain this degree Beals’s mother also participated in an early integration effort. This fact points to Beals’s family legacy of participating in freedom struggles. Below is Beals’s account of Mother Lois’s experience at the University of Arkansas,

When she began graduate school, our people couldn’t attend classes with whites at the University of Arkansas. After much grumbling and dickering, white folks had begun to allow small departments to integrate, class by class….Mother began meeting with a few others from our community who were also determined to be admitted to the graduate school of education at the university. At the time, they were attending extension classes but in a separate space set aside for our people. Sometimes we got telephone calls from people warning us not to push any further to integrate the university. Nevertheless, Mother Lois continued her meetings and her classes. I will always remember the night she causally looked up from her papers to tell us she would be one of the first of our people to attend the University of Arkansas. There was a nervous quiver in her voice… “I can’t turn back now,” Mother said. “Forward is the only way our people can march.” (Beals 1994, 12)

Mother Lois spoke of her act of integrating as a “forward march,” indicating that she understood that it was a symbolic fight for rights; she is not naïve about what she is
doing. Ultimately, Mother Lois’s degree affords Beals’s family a place among the black middle class.

Beals’s mother was a schoolteacher with an advanced degree, but her grandmother was a domestic worker. Her father worked on the railroad and refused to finish college, which is the reason posed for her mother leaving him (Beals 1994, 24). There are aspects of middle class normativity, but they are thwarted by the social historical constraints of African American life in the 1950s. Beals not only situates herself and her family as normative, individuated subjects, who are worthy of respect, but she extends this analysis to her Little Rock Nine peers and their families in the following passage:

All of our folks were hardworking people who had to struggle to own their own homes, to provide a stable life for their families. We shared many of the same family values traditional to all small-town Americans. Our parents demanded that we behave appropriately at home and in public. I couldn’t imagine that any one of us would ever talk back to our folks or other adults. All of us were churchgoing; all of our parents demanded good grades in school. Although none of us had a lot of money; we had pride in our appearance. Most of all, we were individualists with strong opinions. Each of us planned to go to college. (Beals 1994, 35)

The need to state explicitly that they were “individualists” who knew how to behave and shared values with all small town Americans, illustrates that Beals’s project is to write against the stereotypical notions of blackness. These stereotypical notions of African
Americans that attempt to characterize them as poor, lacking morality and family values, cast Beals as the opposite of the idealized white citizen subject. Furthermore, she is writing against the idea that they were influenced to participate in the movement by Communists or Communist rhetoric, which was a concern during the 1950s among those who opposed integration. Not only is Beals writing against the negative discourse about African Americans, she situates herself, and the LRN within a project of racial uplift. The on-going project aims to resituate blackness in American culture, or at least for the purposes of situating certain “worthy” black subjects at a distance from this negative discourse.

The Trouble with Racism

Though Beals attempts to emphasize the normativity of herself, her family and fellow LRN peers, the troubles of being an African American living under racial segregation literally began for Beals at birth. Born with a doctor induced head injury, Beals almost died because white nurses refused to “coddle niggers.” Later, when Beals was five-years-old, she dreamed of riding the merry-go-round that was designated “Whites Only.” At eight-years-old, she gets in trouble with the police because she used the whites only restroom at a department store. The havoc that Beals believes integration brought to life began on the day Brown v. Board was decided. Beals was 12-years-old on that day. After school, she lay in a field daydreaming. Her daydream was interrupted by a white man, who propositioned her with candy and then attempted to rape her. This portion of the narrative is
important because it brings into question the notion that integrating Central High School was a story of innocence lost for Beals. Her life was shaped by racialized and sexualized violence before Beals participated in the integration of Central High School.

The incidents with the nurses, in the department store, and the attempted rape suggest that living in an apartheid state, where black lives were taken for granted and black bodies were viewed as worthless, did not allow African Americans the luxury of childhood innocence. These previous examples suggest that Beals’s innocent existence in a segregated South could never exist, which illustrates that her yearnings for a normative girlhood were a fantasy because racism and sexual violence plagued black life.

The coming of age story in *Warriors* is full of yearnings for normative girlhood. This chapter asserts that the yearning for normativity and innocence by the narrating “I” can be viewed as a literary device that acts as a point of identification for the reader. Beals’s intended audience is people who had normative 1950s childhoods, that were not interrupted by racist violence, namely white Americans. The contours of Beals’s life before integration were anything but normative. The segregation of Little Rock and the violence visited on African American life did not allow for the normative narrative to take place. The normative narrative is just a narrative; no coming of age can fit those parameters.

*Warriors* relies on the coming of age narrative with a focus on the representation of the author as a person who was destined for greatness. Beals writes,
So fifteen years later, when I was selected to integrate Central High,

Grandmother said, “Now you see, that’s the reason God spared your life.

You’re supposed to carry this banner for our people.” (5)

Similar to many American coming of age narratives, Beals is anointed to do something
great on behalf of her people, but the greatness bestowed comes with tremendous
suffering at the hands of a segregated school system and society. Beals writes that
integrating Central High made her grow up faster than other teens. She states,

My eight friends and I paid for the integration of Central High with our
innocence. During those years when we desperately needed approval from
our peer, we were victims of the most harsh rejection imaginable. The
physical and psychological punishment we endured profoundly affected
all our lives. It transformed us into warriors who dared not cry even when
we suffered intolerable pain. I became an instant adult, forced to take
stock of what I believed and what I was willing to sacrifice to back up my
beliefs. (Beals 1995, 2)

In the passage above, Beals explains her feelings about how the integration of Central
High school changed her teenage years. Rather than being innocent teenagers, Beals
categorizes them as warriors who do not get the acceptance they expected during their
formative years. They have to endure pain and suffering in school at the hands of racist
peers, teachers, and the larger community. Here Beals articulates another characteristic of
the normative civil rights subjectivity, in her plea for normality under a racist regime that
is invested in her suffering. She paints herself as a noble sufferer who endures personal
pain on behalf of the entire race.
Blacks with Guns and Grandmother India

Unlike Beals’s representation of herself is her representation of her Grandmother India, who is not a typical civil right subjectivity; rather, she is an aggressive black woman with a gun. I juxtapose the representations of Beals and Grandmother India to highlight the differences in adherence to normative civil rights subjectivity. Before I discuss Grandmother India, I delineate the conundrum of representing aggressive black femininity. The conundrum of representing black women as aggressive in a powerful light is that it is the most controlling representations of black women in Western civilization. According to Patricia Hill Collins’s Black Feminist Thought: Knowledge, Consciousness, and the Politics of Empowerment, the Jezebel stereotype is characterized as a sexually aggressive woman. Stereotypes of black women as aggressive either sexually or through career ambitions have served socially, and culturally, to control black women throughout American history. The Jezebel or whore image cast black women “as having excessive sexual appetites” (Collins 81). As Collins argues, the Jezebel image is dangerous for black culture because she exists in the liminal space between heterosexuality and homosexuality because of her insatiable sexual appetite.

The Jezebel image bolsters the malignant connection between race, sexuality, proper womanhood, and the exploitation of black women’s bodies by white men during enslavement and beyond through justifying rape because of black women’s sexual appetites. Furthermore, the Jezebel is symbolic of the ways that African Americans stand outside of white normative sexual economies. According to racist logic, they are thought of as a population that is to be exploited because of their sexual appetites. Similarly,
according to racist logic, the matriarch is also represented as a sexually aggressive woman, who emasculates black men by not allowing them to be “Black patriarchs” (Collins 82). Collins writes that, “the matriarch represent[s] a failed mammy, a…woman who dared reject the image of the submissive, hardworking servant” (75). Moreover, the matriarch is commonly represented as an “overly aggressive, unfeminine” woman (75).

Kara Keeling’s *The Witches Flight: The Cinematic, the Black Femme, and the Image of Common Sense* argues that examining cultural production through a queer common sense enables alternative perceptions of mainstream media. Through theorizing the black femme, Keeling attempts to make visible an alternative set of practices that may be present within representations of revolutionary activity. Keeling’s theorization of the black femme is instructive because she takes up the question of why African Americans turned to self-protective measures after the Civil Rights Movement, more specifically, how this image came to be celebrated within cinematic representations. In her delineation of how representations of African Americans with guns became a part of cinematic history, Keeling raises important questions about dominant perceptions of African Americans as civil rights advocates and noble sufferers who did not fit with the image of blacks with guns. Keeling writes,

> Blacks with guns was a new appearance of the Black, not his destruction…Unable to force blacks with guns into the common memory-images that they habitually called forth in order to recognize a black as the Black, the press and those assembled had to stop and think: If the Civil Rights Movement had secured the black’s full citizenship, why did he pick up the gun? How could slavery, share-cropping, silent suffering, gospel
singing, Aunt Jemima, Uncle Tom, Topsy, “We Shall Overcome,” cotton picking, illiteracy, “massa lovin,” cannibalism, watermelon-seed spittin’, white-woman chasing, non-violent resisting, Mammy, and Jezebel give way to blacks with guns? If “shame and self contempt,” “nausea,” and the soul stirring sadness of Negro spirituals pervades the black’s being, from where did the Afros, guns, and “black pride” spring?...The cinematic appearance of blacks with guns made visible one of the black’s alternative pasts, rendering a past called forth to support the habituated perception of the black “not necessarily true.” (Keeling 74-75)

Grandmother India, as we will see in the later portion of this chapter, was a woman who also defies previous representations of African Americans as noble sufferers because she takes up arms and makes the alternative past the Keeling writes about visible. Beals represents, under one-roof, the complexities of African American identity and the politics of black freedom struggles. Grandmother India highlights the ways that representation of African Americans who participated in the movement and those who supported participation in the movement were not entirely adherent to non-violence as a method of resistance.

Similar to the people of Lowndes County that Jeffries examines, Grandmother India wants integration, but knows the cost of racialized violence and takes up arms against it. Because Grandmother India is an older woman who is a single, religious, and a domestic worker, some may be tempted to read her as a mammy or a matriarch, but a closer examination reveals that her representation in
Beals’s text gives her a much more nuanced character. Although Grandmother India works as a domestic in the American South, she is not a mammy. Collins argues that controlling images such as the mammy are harmful to black women because they are “designed to make racism, sexism, poverty, and other forms of social injustice appear to be natural, normal, and inevitable parts of everyday life” (2001, 69). Furthermore, Collins argues that the image of Mammy has operated as a disempowering image because it bolsters the idea that the proper role for black women is that of an obedient servant to whites. The controlling image of the mammy, Collins argues, “represents the normative yardstick used to evaluate all Black women’s behavior. By loving, nurturing, and caring for her White children and “family” better than her own, the mammy symbolizes the dominant group’s perceptions of the ideal Black female relationship to elite white male power” (Collins 2001, 72). Mammies are charged with teaching their black children deference when interacting with whites, therefore maintaining racialized oppression through transmitting a set of racialized manners. These racialized manners encourage deference to white supremacy in social, political, and interpersonal interactions.

Grandmother India lives at home with her family, takes an active role in raising her children and grandchildren, and she is willing to protect her family from harm with the aid of a gun. As Collins describes the Mammy as “the faithful, obedient servant,” Beals’s representation of Grandmother India is much more
complex than that of the mammy (2001, 72). The complexity of Grandmother India’s representation is that she projects an aggressive black femininity is held in high regard within her family. Although Beals writes herself as a devoted granddaughter, she sees no contradiction in Grandmother India’s lessons on religion, forgiveness, and her willingness to protect the family with deadly force.

The first time Grandmother India’s gun makes an appearance in the narrative is after Governor Faubus’s televised speech announcing that he has called the Arkansas National Guard to “protect” Central High School. Beal writes,

“He’s stirring up trouble by talking about trouble,” Grandma added.

She was right, as usual. Following that speech, calls from telephone hecklers began to drive us wild. Several times during the days and nights before school opened, those voices growled at me. “Niggers don’t belong in our schools. You all are made for hanging,” one harsh voice shouted the first time I picked up the receiver. On the night of the governor’s speech, the phone didn’t stop ringing. One caller said he knew our address and would be right over to bomb the house. Grandma went directly to her room, where she took the shotgun she called Mr. Higgenbottom from its leather case in the back of her closet. That night, she set up her guard post near the window to the side yard where she thought we were the most vulnerable. She sat in her rocking chair beside the antique mahogany
end table given her by her mother. After a moment of contemplation and prayer, she stretched her embroidery work tightly over its hoop. With her needles and threads, she settled down for the night with Mr. Higgenbottom across her lap. She sat as erect as those heroic soldiers I’d seen in magazine pictures. (Beals 1994, 39)

As the passage highlights, Grandmother India was a woman of many talents. She understands that Governor Faubus was authorizing racialized violence in his speech. His actions authorized the terrorizing phone calls and threats of those whom Beals refers to as “hecklers.” After one caller says that he will bomb Beals’s residence, Grandmother India gets her shot-gun out, determines the best strategic place to watch for any would-be attackers, and sets up her own guard post. Here is a complex representation of a woman who is religious, but willing to use deadly force to protect her family, and does needle-point embroidery while she guards the house. This representation is unique in that it juxtaposes weakness and strength in its use of the gun and the embroidery. Grandmother India is fierce and God-fearing. When her family is being threatened she does not call a man to come and protect them, rather she goes and gets a “man” she can trust, Mr. Higgenbottom, her shotgun.

Although Beals is under the surveillance of the white community while she is in school, she is under Grandmother India’s surveillance when she is at home. Not only is Grandmother India a fierce character during the early days of crisis at
Central, she remains a source of strength for Beals throughout the narrative.

Grandmother India’s sayings are the inspiration for the title of the text, *Warriors Don’t Cry* because she tells Beals to be a warrior, not to let anyone see her tears, and to draw her strength from God. After Beals is prohibited from meeting a friend at the community center because of the threats on her life, she cries in her bed. Grandmother India says,

“You had a good cry, girl?” Her voice was sympathetic but also one sliver away from being angry… “You’ll make this your last cry. You’re a warrior on the battlefield for your Lord. God’s warriors don’t cry, ‘cause they trust that he’s always by their side. The women of this family don’t breakdown in the face of trouble. We act with courage, and with God’s help, we ship trouble right on out.”…

“But nothing. Now, you get yourself together, read the Twenty-Third Psalm. And don’t ever let me see you behave this way again.”

“Yes, ma’am.”…From then on, I knew I could only cry when no one would hear me. (Beals 1994, 57)

Encouraging Beals to be strong, Grandmother India attempts to prepare her for the brutality she will face as a participant in the effort to desegregate Little Rock’s public high school. However, this preparation is also an attempt to cut Beals off from her emotional life and to create a “strong black woman” persona.

Grandmother India’s character gives this advice to Beals,
Even when the path is long and the path is steep, a true warrior does not give up. If each one of us does not step forward to claim our rights, we are doomed to an eternal wait in hopes those who would usurp them will become benevolent. The Bible says, WATCH, FIGHT, and PRAY.” (1994, 3)

This advice does two things for Beals’s character: it motivates her to stay with the integration effort even when times get rough; however, it also makes Beals hide her emotions from her family because she is trying to live up to an ideal of the “strong black woman” who does not show her emotions even though she is still a child.

This very complex grandmother, who owns a shotgun, does embroidery, and quotes the Bible, is pushing and molding Beals into a normative civil rights subject through her advice. Although she pushes Beals, Grandmother India has a few unorthodox methods of teaching her to be a lady. One of these unorthodox methods was taking Beals to the local wrestling matches. Grandmother India and Beals would dress up and sit with their gentlemen suitors at the match, but once the matches got exciting, the two would lose themselves in the emotional highs of the match, waving their fists and shouting at the competitors. Once the match was over, Grandmother India tells Beals, “That’s the way a body gets rid of aggression without misbehaving. Now Melba, straighten yourself up, honey, time to present ourselves as the ladies we are” (Beals 1994, 82). Grandmother India knows that
there is a bodily urge for aggression that must be excised; she chooses to excise it through the vicarious experience of wrestlers. She encourages Beals to do the same.

What is evident from Grandmother India’s interactions with Beals is that she is actively involved in constructing black femininity. Grandmother India is advising Beals to be feminine while acknowledging that so-called masculine traits such as aggression exist in female bodies as well. Another example of this construction of femininity is exemplified in Grandmother India’s use of vanilla as a perfume. Grandmother India tells Beals, “A little vanilla behind the ear always helps a woman’s femininity” (Beals 1994, 67). Clearly wearing the vanilla is a symbol of femininity for Grandmother India, but it illustrates the construction of femininity at the individual level because it must be taught. Although Grandmother India is invested in Beals becoming a lady, she embodies characteristics that break with the values of “piety, purity, submissiveness, and domesticity” such as being an expert marksman (Welter 1966, 152).

Beals recalls that Grandmother India became an expert marksman because her husband worked on the railroad and was away for long periods of time, so he taught her to shoot a gun. Grandmother India is not ashamed of her break from traditional notions of femininity, instead she is proud of it because it allows her to protect her family in times of need. When Beals’s mother asks if she can guard the house, Grandmother India tells her no because she does not know how to shoot
and “[t]his is no time for on-the-job training (Beals 1994, 61). The question is what does it mean to embrace and be proud of aggressive femininity when you are an African American woman?

Examining the iconography of African American women, scholars Beverly Guy Sheftall, Sander Gilman, Jennifer Morgan, and Lisa Collins have respectively found that black female bodies have been fetishized as hypersexual within Western aesthetic culture. Beverly Guy-Sheftall’s “The Body Politic: Black Female Sexuality and the Nineteenth-Century Euro-American Imagination” argues that the black female body has been put on display as an example of the animality of black sexuality. Examining European art and travelogues, Sheftall finds that many compared African Americans to apes and this crucial link allowed them to write black women as “the antithesis of virtuous, European women” (Sheftall 21).

Examining the phenomena of the African women and the European medical community, Jennifer Morgan’s “Some Could Suckle Over Their Shoulder,” Anne Fausto-Sterling’s “Gender, Race, and Nation,” and Sander Gilman’s “Black Bodies, White Bodies” illustrate that black women’s categorization as hypersexual and masculinized has been used to justify colonization, capitalist expansion, and criminalization. Each author highlights how the classification of black women as Hottentot’s has had a lasting effect on the image of African American women in popular culture and ideas about white female sexuality and the need to regulate it.
Based on the “flawed science” used during early Western encounters with black women, it is clear that adhering to notions of proper womanhood could be an attractive strategy to combat racist stereotypes of African American women as hypersexual and masculinized. But what happens to black women who are aggressive, masculinized, androgynous, or butch in a project of racial uplift that seeks to erase them?

A partial answer to this question comes from Kara Keeling’s *The Witches Flight: The Cinematic, the Black Femme, and the Image of Common Sense* which argues that examining cultural production through a queer common sense enables alternative perceptions of mainstream media. Specifically, she argues that queer black women, specifically the lesbian butch/femme creates an opening in representation that breaks away from heteronormativity, which provides viable alternatives to compulsory heterosexuality, alternative organizations of society “outside of capitalist exploitation” (Keeling 144). Keeling explores various representations of black femininity and how it is regulated in cinematic representation.

Within representation of the Civil Rights Movement there have been no representations of black femininity that veer away from heterosexuality. There are probably multiple reasons for this, but the one that this chapter will explore is that of the fear associated with embracing masculinity and aggressiveness in a female body, which activates racialized anxiety about black sexuality as sexually
aggressive. This creates a conundrum or empty representational space for African American women who are not traditionally feminine because they are often positioned as aberrations who are deemed not acceptable representations for the race.

The fear of being represented as aggressive has its roots in the discourse of slavery that haunts black women’s bodies in that they are often seen as sexually available objects in the Western world. Moreover, recent representations of black women such as Iyanla Vanzant and Caster Semenya illustrate how the Western logic of black women as always already aggressive, influences how black women are perceived. How might black women use the representation of aggression to enable new modes of interacting with representations and re-thinking historical frameworks.

Teresa Nance’s “Hearing the Missing Voice” proposes a taxonomy of African American women’s roles in the Civil Rights Movement. She argues that African American women’s roles in the movement mirror those that they held during slavery and reconstruction, which are that of the Mama, activist, and friend. A woman who acts as a “Mama” to people in the movement is characterized as someone who provides food and shelter, while the activist organizes for social justice, and the friend supports other black women’s domestic responsibilities to enable movement participation. My question is where does a woman like Grandmother India fit in to this taxonomy? She could be characterized as a hybrid
of the Mother and the friend roles, but what of her penchant for shooting. Not a formal member of the movement, Grandmother India enables Beals’s participation in it through her care-work and protection. I argue that Grandmother India is an example of an alternative femininity that challenges proper civil rights subjectivities.

Knowing this history, reading Grandmother India’s character as revolutionary, I employ the theorizations of queer studies and Queer of Color critique, which grapples with gender insubordination and the possibility for creating a world beyond the gender binary. The foundational work of Judith Butler and Cathy Cohen provide a critical frame through which to view Grandmother India. Butler’s *Gender Trouble* argues that gender is constantly being constructed by culturally available standards, rather than by some essential standard of woman or man. Later, Butler’s “Imitation and Gender Insubordination” asserts that heterosexuality is always re-asserting itself as natural through the constant re-inscription of the “collusion of sex, gender, [hetero]desire” which writes all people outside of heteronormativity who do not end up neatly desiring the opposite sex. The sanction for not being gendered properly is to be marked as non-normative and deficient. Butler asserts that this is the fallacy of heteronormativity because no one actually fits, everyone must perform gender, sexuality, sexual identity, but some people will perform it in a way that disrupts the binary logic of gender.
Grandmother India disrupts the binary logic of Civil Rights and Black Power subjectivities because she embodies both violent and non-violent forms of protest. However, Grandmother India also exists outside of what is conventionally considered queer. Cathy Cohen’s “Punks, Bulldaggers, and Welfare Queens” advocates for reconsideration of what it means to be queer in the US. She argues that queer activists who have only considered sexual minorities to be queer, should open up the definition and organize on behalf of all of those who have been excised as non-heteronormative, such as “welfare queens.” Cohen is interested in the creation of a coalitional politics under the rubric of queer that fights for everyone that stands outside of the white, upper-class heterosexist system.

Considering Butler and Cohen’s work together, I ask what does it mean for African Americans to do gender differently? What are the costs of doing heteronormativity differently? For Grandmother India the cost is that her complexity is not remembered.

Not only was Grandmother India a woman who engages in traditionally masculine behaviors, she also queers the practice of Christianity in that she engages in spirit cleansing rituals that she enacts without the ordination of any religious body. Moreover, she uses these rituals to help Beals heal from the trauma of her attempted rape and integration. Grandmother India says to Beals, “Now you soak a while, child. When the water goes down the drain, it will take all that white man’s evil with it.” She had a curious look on her face, one I’d never seen before.
Then she said something that made me realize just how awful things really were. ‘We’ll burn the clothes you took off’ (Beals 1994, 27). Here Grandmother India attempts to help Melba heal through the cleansing ritual of entering water, from which she will exit purified because the evil will leave with the water.

This ritual illustrates the ways that African American women use Christian rituals for multiple situations that the church does not address. Moreover, Grandmother India is appointing herself with the power to heal and grant passage from one state of being to another. Furthermore, this incident puts Grandmother India in conversation with other characters, such as Xuela Claudette Richardson from Jamaica Kincaid’s *Autobiography of My Mother* and countless other women of color characters, as theorized in *Granny Midwives and Black Women Writers: Double-Dutched Readings* by Valerie Lee, who use women’s ways of knowing and healing to navigate the world and subvert dominant powers. Similar to the baptism ritual that transforms common sinners into a member of the Christian church and available to seek the salvation offered by Jesus, Grandmother India seeks to transform Beals from a rape victim into “one of his [the Lord’s] good girls” through a bath (Beals 1994, 27).

Another illustration of Grandmother India’s cleansing rituals happens at the end of the school year at Central. While Beals’s mother gives her a dress to signify the end of an ordeal, Grandmother India gives Beals an opportunity to attempt to let go of the pain of integration. Grandmother India and Beals have a private
ceremony to signify the end of the year at Central where they burn Beals’s books. Beals writes,

“Well, praise the Lord.” Grandma India said, her arms wide open to receive me. “You see, you made it” “Well, well, young lady, welcome to summer.”… Early on Wednesday morning, I built a fire in the metal trash barrel in the backyard, fueled by my school papers. Grandma had said it would be healing to write and destroy all the names of people I disliked at Central High: teachers, students, anyone who I thought had wronged me. It was against the law to burn anything at that time of the year, but she said a ceremony was important in order to have the official opportunity to give that year to God. Grandma India stood silently by my side as I fed the flame and spoke their names and forgave them. After a long moment she walked over to water her flowerbed. The four o’clocks were blooming purple and red. We stood together for what must have been half an hour, with only the sound of the crackling fire and the garden hose. (303)

Grandmother India nourishes, admonishes, surveys, and heals Beals throughout the text. Their dependence on one another illustrates the ways that non-violent protest relies on the protection of those willing to sacrifice everything to forward the goals of integration. However, representations like that of Grandmother India
have been mis-remembered and forgotten, but recent scholars are willing to alter public memory to unearth the complexities of the movement for freedom and black subjectivity.

In conclusion, despite Beals’s attempts to represent herself and the Little Rock Nine as normative, individualists, her inclusion of Grandmother India’s complex representation illustrates that this text attempts the double move of bolstering Civil rights subjectivity, while it undermines it. This chapter is a beginning of reclaiming aggressive, masculinized, androgynous, or butch civil rights activists that have been mis-remembered or not remembered at all. Utilizing a queer of color lens to read *Warriors* yields new understandings of the complexities of black femme and civil rights subjectivities. Keeling writes that

The black femme haunts previous black lesbian and other feminist and womanist projects insofar as these have been predicated on the construction of a collective that is or might become recognizable according to particular characteristics assumed to be common to the collective. Challenging affectivity to recognize the Black in the black femme, the appearance of the black femme makes visible that the set of what appears as black is problematic. (143)

As Keeling asserts when we closely examine the representations of black femme subjectivity, we are able to dismantle monolithic assumptions about blackness,
which creates a space to be recognized as complex subjectivities that fall outside of normative assumptions.
Conclusion: Black Women, Life Narratives, and Citizenship

Black Women are presenting complex narratives of subjectivity that must be explored further by scholars because they add to the complexity of the grand narrative of the Civil Rights Movement. By taking these narratives under serious scholarly consideration, we can begin to understand the unique positionality that African American women face when they make rights claims.

This project extends Gaines’s theories of the black middle class subject to theorize a black civil rights subjectivity. While Gaines’s black middle class subject is constituted through the African American community’s notions of a respectable citizen and white American social ideals of class distinction, I theorize a black civil rights subjectivity that is constituted through the same ideals with an emphasis on racialized heteronormativity that is maintained through a politics of surveillance. The black civil rights subjectivity solidifies patriarchal concerns as the highest priority within African American community politics and creates a space that is ideologically hostile to patriarchy’s non-conforming “others.”

Bates, Beal, and Moody write with, and through, the disciplinary gaze that attempted to regulate sexuality, gender performance, and political goals. Each woman
navigated those discourses to fight against racism and sexism and create complex self-representations. Daisy Bates recreates herself through autography, where she reverses the paradigm of white supremacy to position herself as the speaker for powerful white men. Bates constructs a self-representation with and through power, which is demonstrated in her enactment of the disciplinary gaze over the students during the integration of Central High School.

Anne Moody recreates herself as a queer woman who rejects her mother’s identity to create her civil rights subjectivity with the help of her other-mother, transgendered woman, Lola. Her interactions with Lola usher Moody into womanhood. By rejecting her mother’s dependence on men, and adopting Lola’s fiercely independent stance on life, Moody becomes unafraid of social ostracism. She is not shackled to heteropatriarchal norms, instead Moody finds her life’s meaning by working for justice.

Melba Patillo Beals, writing many years after the movement, writes her self as a hyper-normative teenager who suffers immensely because of her participation in integration. Beals’s self-representation is contrasted with the representation of Grandmother India. As the chapter title suggests, in gun-toting, and Bible-quoting, this older African American woman represents a subjectivity that is not often given the spotlight in popular narratives of the African American Civil Rights Movement. She is a queer character because she traverses the line between violent and non-violent protest within the body of an older African American woman. Within the narrative, Beals positions Grandmother India as a more important figure than her actual mother in her upbringing.
By examining the works of Daisy Bates, Anne Moody, and Melba Beals we learn that black women are creating complex subject positioning within their representations of the Civil Rights Movement. They bring a complexity that is often overlooked in the popular narrative of the movement. This complexity is a direct result of their negotiations with what it means to be a “proper” civil rights subject. While each woman brings a unique perspective to this subjectivity, it is apparent that they are all called to be “respectable” members of their race and gender. Black female subjectivity is often viewed through a negative light, by both the dominant society and within the African American community. These women negotiate the impulse to restrain black female subjectivity by creating space for queer subjectivities to blossom alongside their representations of respectability.

By examining these texts through a queer analytical framework, I am able to analyze heteronormativity and heteropatriarchy during this historical moment. Moreover, this dissertation thinks through the ways that female subjectivity is complicated by notions of normative sexuality, even when the women are not members of the Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, and Transgender community. Sexuality Studies and Queer theory are areas that need to be brought into dialogue with Black Studies and Black Feminism. I view this project as a step towards that direction. By examining this particular historical moment, which is ripe with respectability pressures, African American women’s self-representations provide sites from which to parse out how they dealt with those pressures and queered them.

By examining the heteronormative underpinnings within African American women’s autobiographies that emerge from participation in the Civil Rights Movement, I
find that women who make rights claims often inhabit queer subject positions. These women are invested in challenging heteropatriarchy and do so through calling on a mixture of feminine and masculine qualities, and move between queer and normative representations of themselves. Similar to the African American women who sought to preach in African American churches, before these institutions were willing to allow women to take the pulpit, these women of the civil rights era behave in ways that are deemed unacceptable by community standards and violate the norms of respectability. But by calling on God and Christian ideals these women join forces with others, who are interested in change, and violate the norms for the greater good of the community.

Rights claims have been a tricky business for African Americans throughout the history of America. Brought as an enslaved workforce, eventually manumitted, but deemed to live as second-class citizens, African Americans have been in the business of re-claiming human and citizenship rights. This dance with the dominant community has been a long one, and because of the patriarchal relations that exist throughout the U.S., it has been assumed that claiming rights was best accomplished through measures that also reflected patriarchal norms. African American women have not idly observed the fight for broader reaching citizenship rights; they have been at the forefront of these struggles.

By using the work of Foucault, this dissertation brings post-structuralist theory to bear on the lives of Black women. In theorizing identity, some scholars have attempted to maintain the African Americans experience as a monolithic block; however, this project has examined the multiplicity of their self-representations. This is important because African American women who make appeals for increased citizenship rights are operating outside of heteropatriarchal norms that have dominated the grand narrative of
the Civil Rights Movement. By operating outside of heteropatriarchal norms and claiming citizenship rights, they draw attention to both race and gender oppression. This attention can then be used to highlight the multiple groups who do not receive the benefit of rights that should protect their lives as well.

Furthermore, the work of Michel Foucault aids this study because it addresses the ways that power operates both as an oppressive and resistant force. Foucault’s theories of power highlight the ways that power circulates. Rather than being concentrated in the hands of decision-makers, power circulates through the operations of the privileged and the marginalized. Foucault posits that power relations can be found everywhere, hence the patriarchal relations found within African American freedom struggles. They are not constituted outside of power, but through and within existing discourses that are imbued with power. Moreover, Foucault’s theories are helpful because they address the ways that members of communities internalize the discourses that surround them and work with, and through them to either obey hegemonic regimes or resist them. In the case of African American women in the Civil Rights Movement, it is apparent that they utilized prevailing discourses to secure their social location within the community, but also circumvented it in order to make rights claims.

Examining the work of African American women’s autobiographies is an important endeavor because if we are to create histories that reflect the diversity of the African American community, and the diversity of women’s experiences, we must look to their self-representations. Within the U.S., most people are taught a historical narrative that is centered around the stories of male heroes and the great men of politics. This story is a reflection of the heteropatriarchal regime, rather than an unchanging truth. The grand
narrative of the Civil Rights Movement is no different. In order to intervene in, and provide a corrective, we must begin by including the stories of patriarchy’s “others,” namely women, queers, the disabled, the poor, and immigrants. By including these stories in the narratives of U.S. history, we can begin to uncover the complexity of what happened in the past. Moreover, we are more equipped to understand diversity when we are aware of the multiplicity of stories that exist during a given time period.

However, autobiography as a genre has its problems. Specifically, it has been a genre that has reified racist, sexist, ableist, sexist, and heteronormative standards. Autobiography has been a genre that has done the work of hegemonic power regimes by creating “truths” that enforce its imperatives. Rather than reflecting a multiplicity of “truths,” many of its most celebrated works have been the narratives of great men with the ability to speak on behalf of communities. Despite the genre’s past, it has also been instrumental in telling the stories of the oppressed and marginalized. This dissertation illustrates that women, African American women in particular, have used this genre to speak back to historical narratives. They have been able to tell their stories, despite the censure to which they are subjected.

This dissertation is a beginning. It opens the field to explore more stories put forth by participants in the Civil Rights Movement, especially Black queer people, white women, other people of color, disabled people, and re-examine the stories of African American men with a new lens. This study uses an analytical approach inspired by both Walter Benjamin’s Angel of history and the Andrinka symbol of Sankofa, which both symbolize looking back while moving forward. It regards history with respect, but does not limit itself to history’s conclusions. Benjamin argues that history is always in danger
of being commodified and doing the work of the ruling regime. Like many other historical moments, the Civil Rights Movement is in that process too. It must be wrested from the homogenizing impulse in order to maintain its complexity.

Since many who participated in the Civil Rights Movement are still alive and many are just beginning the memoir and life-narrative process, there will undoubtedly be more studies of this historical moment and more narratives to explore. My hope is that people will turn to these narratives with new eyes that examine their complexity rather than homogenize them.

If we are to learn from the likes of Daisy Bates, Melba Beals, Grandmother India, and Anne Moody, we should be challenging civil rights groups’ internal politics and the national discourse on citizenship rights. Moreover, given the ongoing challenges of human rights, we should find creative ways to broaden and deepen our critiques of rights discourses. The recent firing of Shirley Sherrod presents a contemporary example of an African American woman’s self-representation distorted by patriarchal logics. Sherrod addressed a local branch of the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People. During her speech, Sherrod spoke about the intersection of race and farm subsidies at her former job. A portion of that speech was taken out of context and edited to make her appear to be discriminating against a white farmer. The truth was that her speech addressed the intricacies of race, public policy, and farm subsidies. Furthermore, Sherrod did her best to aid the white farmer. But the entirety of her self-representation was not taken into account; the complexity was not explored until after Sherrod was forced to resign from her position as the Director of Rural Development in Georgia for
the United States Department of Agriculture. Later, the entirety of her speech surfaced and many members of the media came together to ask that she be reinstated.

Upon closer examination of Sherrod’s firing it is apparent that there are racist and sexist dynamics at play. First, the reporter that produced the misrepresentation works for a conservative media outlet that is invested in racial divisions through heightening white fears. Second, both the NAACP and the Federal Government admonished Sherrod based on a misrepresentation of her speech. The NAACP condemned her remarks citing their zero tolerance policy for racism. Tom Vilsack, the head of the USDA forced Sherrod to resign from her position based on the short clip of her speech. Both of these institutions represent patriarchal leadership structures that are headed by African American and White men. The reporter who created the shortened version of her speech, Andrew Briebert, also works within a patriarchal company. Within these patriarchal leadership organizations Sherrod was not initially given a fair hearing because the complexity of her speech revealed that she is deeply anti-racist, but these words only came to the surface after she was asked to resign from her job. Neither the NAACP, nor the USDA, was willing to stand up for Sherrod or with her against this attack. Neither organization would stand against the tide to vouch for her character or service. It was not until the white family that was the subject of the story came forward to say that she had helped them save their farm that the USDA and the NAACP retracted their earlier statements condemning Sherrod.

While there was the recuperative moment that was available to her through President Barack Obama extending her a new position within the USDA, it was too little, too late. Many questions remain about this incident. The first is, why did neither
organization look to Sherrod’s record of anti-racism before passing judgment? Why did neither group examine the entire speech before rushing to judgment? This dissertation points to the fact African American women who work for increased rights are working within structures that demand a certain kind of behavior and comportment from them. When they break away from those standards they are harshly judged, risk being pushed out of the movement, or forgotten in the annals of history. Sherrod’s case is one where the African American woman became the abject within two powerful groups headed by African American men. Her shortened testimony became dangerous to both Benjamin Jealous, the President of the NAACP and Barack Obama, the President of the United States of America. Both of these men want to be perceived as decisive leaders who do not tolerate any race favoritism. Each man is also charged with the task of being race-managers and disciplining Sherrod. Although Sherrod’s full testimony points to her anti-racism, the shortened version did the exact opposite, which is why she became fodder for these two men to illustrate their tough policies on racism. Ironically, each of these men and their patriarchal organizations were lulled into firing an African American woman from a high-ranking position, to illustrate their stance on racism.

This incident demonstrates that it is women of color who feel the effects of patriarchal power trips. Moreover, the distortion of her self-representation is used to against her. But because her speech, in its entirety, is still available it is used to vindicate her. The patriarchal power structure did not vindicate Sherrod; it is her personal testimony of the past that won her the respect of the public. Sherrod’s case illustrates that ways that African American women become abjected within civil rights discourse when patriarchal organizations control power.

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This case clearly illustrates the need for scholars to critically examine the self-representations of women involved in civil rights struggles because the events of the past do not speak for themselves. More often than not, the historical record distorts the actions and words of women, queers, the disabled, and poor; therefore it is the duty of the scholar to closely examine their testimony and create a critical narrative rather than one that serves the interests of power. Civil rights movements need to be aware of the complexities of marginalization. They need to critically examine their goals to ensure that they are expanding the circle of inclusion and not marginalizing others.
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