Masculinity In Comparative Black Literatures

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MASCULINITY IN COMPARATIVE BLACK LITERATURES

Doctor of Philosophy

English Department

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ABSTRACT

This project examines the ways in which Black men in Africa and throughout the African Diaspora define themselves as gendered beings in their fiction and drama beginning with Richard Wright’s publication of *Native Son* in 1940 to Mariama Ba’s *So Long a Letter* published in 1980. Black men created a transnational dialectic concerning their masculinity which involved the creation and criticism of several types of masculinity. In Chapters 1 and 2, I discuss the theoretical and the historical framework for this project. In Chapter 3, I discuss the first type of Black masculinity which was based in opposition to Euro-American stereotypes about African men and Black men in the New World. In chapter 4, I examine how Black male writers recognized the diversity within Africa and the Diaspora and consequently created masculine characters who reflected their local cultures. In Chapter 5, I analyze texts by Black women that critiqued Black men for silencing Black women in their texts. In Chapter 6, I discuss texts that feature Black male protagonists who grasp toward a definition of masculinity which actually depends upon gender complementarity and community harmony rather than individualized notions of masculinity. The concluding chapter explores a vitriolic disagreement between James Baldwin and Eldridge Cleaver and summarizes previous chapters. I have included an Appendix with other texts and issues which concern Black masculinity for future studies.
DEDICATION

I dedicate this work to Leroy “PaPa” Jefferson Sr. (1925-2003), my beloved grandfather, and Damien Ray Gibson (1973-2008), my brother who was lost too soon.
ACKNOWLEDGMENT

I would like to thank my dissertation chair, Dr. Adetayo Alabi, for believing in the project and for his guidance. I would also like to thank the dissertation committee for its recommendations. I would also like to thank Dr. Verner Mitchell and Dr. Earnestine Jenkins, both of the University of Memphis, for offering both guidance and support throughout this process. I would also like to thank the University of Mississippi for granting me the 2011 summer research award.
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CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

Out of the fact that European well-being had been, for centuries, so crucially dependent on this subjugation had come that racisme from which all black men suffered.

James Baldwin in “Nobody Knows My Name”

I. Black Masculinity Scholarship

In this project I explore how Black men use literature to interrogate identity and constantly articulate and explore what it means to be a Black man in the modern world. I focus on fiction and drama specifically for several reasons. Choosing to focus solely on drama and fiction written by Black men not only limit the scope and length of this project, but adheres to Abiola Irele’s argument in *The African Imagination: Literature in African and the Black Diaspora* that Black fiction and drama are often direct re-presentations of socio-historical experiences and confrontations with Euro-American societies that have been refracted through the prism of African and Black Diaspora literature. Second, fiction and drama allow for a bit more creative liberty than poetry, which is often succinct and very structured; writers are free to create new worlds in poetry, but always within that highly-structured framework. Third, unlike autobiography and other works of nonfiction, writers may creatively use historical events in order to tell their stories from certain perspectives.
Given the creative liberty and freedom in the fictional and dramatic worlds, I explore why Black male writers present protagonists and characters who seemed to have internalized Euro-American racist, patriarchal values and who continue to replicate marginalization inside their homes and communities by ignoring or silencing Black women who love them. In this sense, I am also extending the works of Black feminist critics such as Barbara Smith, Deborah McDowell, and bell hooks who ask that feminists view the texts Black males create about themselves in a cultural framework so that readers may understand how Black men across the Diaspora can recreate the same repression xenonormatively that they claim to detest when it is ontonormative.¹

I became interested in Black masculinity as an undergraduate while taking courses in African and African American literatures. Questions of colonial/postcolonial African identities arose frequently in the African literature class, especially in the modern-day literature. Yet, that identity, especially when being formulated by a postcolonial philosopher, was almost always male. There was little to no room or space made available for the female African identity. In the African American literature classes, gender was not discussed explicitly throughout. For instance, slave narratives seemed slightly subversive on gender; freedom from the atrocities of slavery drove the discussion, but issues of gender lie slightly beneath the surface. However, I noticed that female and male narratives seemed bifurcated according to gender. Female narratives focused not only on themselves, but on slavery’s effect on their respective communities whereas male narratives seemed more focused on slavery’s impact on the individual and the development of acceptable gendered norms. Male writers, particularly Frederick Douglass, seemed preoccupied with forming and crafting a masculine identity for themselves and combating popular images of Black men in white American antebellum
literature. In this literature, Black males were usually portrayed as passive, cowardly, ignorant, and effeminate. Black male writers attempted to destroy this image. They not only spoke for their brothers and sisters in bondage, but also attempted to engage the white male philosophers and writers who claimed people of African descent had no histories or human identities and were not real men, but some kind of faux men. The lingering preoccupation with masculine identity in African American and Black Caribbean identity lasted long after Emancipation and it intrigued me. It seemed that proclaiming Black masculine agency to the Euro-American hegemonic masculinity that denied it culminated in claiming the ultimate subjectivity.

Meanwhile, policies of European colonialism in Africa created similar conditions of suffering and oppression which manifest themselves in many anti-colonial, and even post-colonial, texts written by African writers. After the height of the Atlantic Slave Trade, European powers made sufficient advances into the African interior and expanded their territories as far as the current-day Congo. In 1889 at the Berlin Conference, after several centuries of exploitation, European powers officially divided the African continent among themselves with complete disregard of traditionally respected boundaries by Africans. Colonialist literature about Africa shared the same disregard for African peoples. In Euro-American literature, images of Africa appear as virginal territory for white men to conquer and tame while African people themselves serve as parts of the backdrop. Aside from an occasional grunt or yell, African people have no authentic voices in these texts. Texts like Conrad’s *Heart of Darkness*, Miller’s *Death of a Salesman*, and Hemingway’s *Old Man and the Sea* portray Africans as servants or objects. These prescribed roles evoked from African writers a response that is remarkably similar to that of their New World counterparts: a preoccupation with identity. From the autobiographical series produced by Wole Soyinka to the complicated fiction of Ngugi wa Thiong’o and Chinua
Achebe, the African writers that I studied seemed just as concerned with masculine identity as their North American counterparts. Studying Caribbean literature for graduate studies, I found the same pattern among Black male writers like Walcott, Lamming, and Cèsaire. The identity at hand—the one that must be reclaimed with much urgency—was always an individualistic, masculine identity instead of the more communal ones crafted by Black female writers. In fact, the Black male writers in Africa and the Black Diaspora seemed to create a transnational conversation with one another based on the loss of and reclamation of Black masculine identity when read together. Colonialism, like slavery, evoked a response from Black men. They conversed with one another while writing directly to the Euro-American patriarchal hegemony which denied them full masculinity, or the ultimate subjectivity.

This preoccupation with masculine identity extended past the nineteenth and into the twentieth century. As Europe and America prepared to enter World War II under the guise of spreading democracy for all peoples of the world, people of African descent in Africa and across the Black Diaspora continued to suffer marginalization at the hands of Euro-Americans via colonialism, neocolonialism, and policies of segregation and Apartheid. In the Euro-America popular imagination, Black people continued to be represented as objects, servants, background props, and bumbling foils who served to heighten the masculinities of their white American masters. In these texts, only the Euro-American man, who was surrounded to a certain extent by masculine Black bodies, was a real man.

According to historians, Euro-American patriarchal discourse defined the ideal man as learned, legally/economically/politically powerful, able to control his sexual urges, and of Anglo-Saxon descent. Very few white American men achieved this ideal, but they had a whole body of subordinate men against which to elevate themselves. Antithetical to this ideal of white
Masculinity was the image of the Black man: ignorant due to enslavement laws and colonialist policies which excluded him from a quality education, legally/economically/politically powerless because those same laws and policies denied him any serious justice or political participation, and unable to control his sexual urges due to the primitivism Euro-American people believed lived in the blood of the children of Africa. These images and stereotypes were often popularized through literature like the *Tarzan* series and later, films such as D.W. Griffith’s *Birth of a Nation*. With the proliferation and popularity of these types of dehumanizing images, Black males sought to create a transnational system that would help combat them in political and artistic ways.

Using the unifying and oppositional principles of Pan-Africanism, Black men used their writings to create a unified, transnational dialectic to articulate an authentic identity that combats the dehumanizing images crafted by Euro-American writers which circulated globally via new technology such as film. However, Black male writers soon learned that identity formation, however, is not an easy feat and it occurred in several phases within the literature. First, Black male writers in Africa, the Caribbean, and the United States use their texts to craft definitions that are oppositionally defiant of Euro-American patriarchal discourse. These portrayals of Black masculine protagonists are either confrontationally oppositional, or they embrace Africa as a symbolic utopia that was ruined at the hands of Euro-American men; they imagine a type of purely patriarchal masculinity that feature Black males as the controlling patriarchs of land, women, and children. However, some Black male writers warn of the unrealistic nature of both these models, and caution Black male writers and Black males generally about silencing Black women. Unfortunately, early definitions and models are often predicated upon truncated Black female voices. They also theorize that Black masculine identity cannot be totalizing or
monolithic as in the oppositional definitions because Black people in Africa and throughout the African Diaspora are not monolithic people. This type of essentialism is exactly what Euro-American males forced upon African peoples; therefore, Black writers should avoid this impulse even with the most positive intentions. The second type of Black masculine identity, based upon the assessments made above, was one based upon the protagonists’ specific geographical, cultural, and historical experiences relative to their locations within the African Diaspora. Yet, there was no room allowed for Black female voices in these configurations, either. Black female writers often stood witness to the psychological castration, economic exploitation, and daily frustration of Black men crafted texts that feature sophisticated and empathetic Black male characters while holding them accountable for their crippling chauvinism. Their texts challenge their male coevals to create models of masculinity that do not replicate the oppression inherent in Euro-American supremacist patriarchal thinking, and simultaneously criticize dominant, racist ideology which also promotes gender inequality. Last, some Black male writers crafted texts in response to the challenges of Black feminists. These texts feature revolutionary Black masculine characters who realize that in the face of the splaying effects of modernity and the disillusionment following independence, they must address individual sexism and respective societal notions of gender inequality in order to achieve any kind of political, economic, or social progress. They start by trying to redefine masculinity based upon the sharing of political, economic, and social leadership with Black women. This process continues at the present moment, since Black men face economic crises in our modern global market at a much higher rate than their Euro-American counterparts. Black feminist scholars also continue to press Black men to question the “rightness,” to borrow a term from bell hooks, of patriarchal definitions of masculinity.\textsuperscript{5}
As explicitly stated above, masculinity is not a static entity. It is dynamic even in societies where a group of men constitute a socio/politico-economically subordinate group. Yet, many feminist scholars write as if masculinity, maleness, and patriarchy are monolithic, normative features of any society. Masculinity is a constructed gender, the same as femininity or femaleness. Definitions of masculinity are “deeply enmeshed in the history of institutions and economic structures” (Connell 29); yet, few studies address the constructedness of masculinity. In the introduction to their two-volume study, A Question of Manhood: A Reader in U.S. Black Men’s History and Masculinity, historians and critics Hine and Jenkins seek to address this “lacuna in gender studies” (1). They claim that the same forces which shape femininity and femaleness also shape and change masculinity and what it means to be a man: “[t]he realm of courtship and marriage, the home and family, men’s relationship to women and to each other, sexuality, religious beliefs, and cultural expression – plays an equally important role in creating masculinities” (1). Therefore, a study which focuses on constructed masculinity is equally important as those which focus on the construction of femininity. As institutions are questioned and economic demands change, so do definitions of masculinity.

Most early studies on masculinity accept Euro-American standards as the universal norm. R. W. Connell, a preeminent scholar in masculinity studies, challenges this assumption in much of his scholarship by asserting that, “In a white supremacist context, black masculinities play symbolic roles for white gender constructions” (80). White masculinity forms a hegemonic masculinity, according to Connell, with all other masculinities being subordinate. However, “hegemony…does not mean total control” (Connell 37), and subordinate men often find ways to gain voice and agency from their marginalized positions. Regardless of the severity of the circumstances, the oppressed manage to speak in defiance to the hegemony, and when this
pertains to subordinate men, subordinate men often defy their oppressors either through word, deed, or both. In that sense, I agree with Connell and other scholars who proclaim that masculinity is dialectical: a two-way conversation between the hegemonic masculinity and subordinate ones. African and men of African descent use their writing to speak back to the hegemonic masculinity, creating a dialectic with the hegemonic culture and ideology and a transnational conversation with one another. This creates a multiplicity of masculine identities instead of a single definition.

Because of the multiple definitions created in oppressive conditions, there is never one totalizing definition of masculinity even amongst subordinate men. This explains why masculinity scholar R.W. Connell uses the plural term, “masculinities,” in most of his publications. Like hegemonic masculinity, Black masculinity varies based upon geographical location, culture, and history; which is why I explore Black masculinity in a comparative framework here. Much scholarship available on Black masculinity may focus on one geographical region and may not necessarily privilege those definitions in literary texts. For instance, Marlon B. Ross’s Manning the Race: Reforming Black Men in the Jim Crow Era offers in-depth textual analyses of Black male-authored literature, but his research focuses solely on African American men and the texts they produced during the Jim Crow era. He also defines masculinity as a “culturally contested arena” (1). This broad definition, while useful, allows scholars to cover many facets of Black masculinity aside from literature. For example, in Hazel V. Carby’s Race Men, textual analyses range from the writings of W.E.B. DuBois to the image of Black masculinity as portrayed by African American actor Danny Glover in the popular 1990s Lethal Weapon movie series. Belinda Edmondson’s Making Men: Gender, Literary Authority and Women’s Writing in Caribbean Narratives is a study of gender notions in the literature of
Black Caribbean men and women. The first half focuses on masculine identity in the writings produced by Black males while the second half highlights femininity as defined by female writers. While this book is centered around literature specifically, it relies upon Victorian Era definitions of gender which may not apply to the entire Caribbean archipelago. Finally, a more recent collection of essays about African men, *Masculinities in African Literary and Cultural Texts*, edited by Helen Nabasuta and Tuzyline Allen applies the same broad cultural approach to African masculinities that Ross’s book uses. Though it focuses on African masculinity, they also include textual analyses of film in addition to oral and written literatures produced by various African nations in different regions of Africa.

There is some scholarship of a comparative framework currently available. Carol Boyce-Davies’s *Black Women, Writing, and Identity* is a useful study which explores the continuities and divergences in transnational Black women’s literature. Adetayo Alabi’s *Telling Our Stories: Continuities and Divergences in Black Autobiographies* and F. Abiola Irele’s *The African Imagination: Literature in Africa and the Black Diaspora* use a comparative framework to discuss points of contact and departure in Black literatures throughout Africa and the African Diaspora. These texts are the foundation of my project because they acknowledge the dynamic historical/geographical/cultural differences that produce various Black literatures while expounding upon the similarities and continuities as manifested in the literatures produced by those of African descent. Alabi articulates why this perspective is necessary: “This perspective is particularly important because it unites all Black cultures that have been divided into various groupings for the economic benefit and administrative convenience of various colonial powers” (36). While we must acknowledge that geography, history, and culture do produce real differences in Black literatures, we must also explore how they are similar. Contemporary
scholars suggest using literatures to study both divergences and continuities. Irele makes the case for a more detailed analysis of imaginative works and identity and Black literature: “The larger question of a Black identity provides the background for these efforts, the presumption being that such an identity would find its clear and most profound expression in works of the imagination produced by Black writers” (4). The attempts to craft an identity are “manifested in one form or another in the imaginative expression of Black writers” (Irele 3). I use the foundation provided by Irele and Alabi to explore continuities and divergences in Black male-authored fiction and drama.

II. Terminology

Feminist scholars have produced volumes of work that clearly define and differentiate between the biologically-defined category, “female,” and socially constructed concepts of femaleness. Only recently has the same critical attention been turned upon men and masculinity. First, the term “masculinity” has never been truly defined outside of opposition. One is masculine because one is not feminine; but what it means to be masculine has evolved from one historical epoch to the next, and attempts to create a single definition of it are ambivalent at best. The ambivalence surrounding the term is not necessarily negative. On the contrary, this ambiguity concerning the word serves as evidence that masculinity and patriarchy are ideological and they can be questioned and challenged. They are not unchanging, monolithic ideas set in historical stone. Their mutability makes them suitable for scholarly interrogation.

Second, I use “masculinity” because other terms like, “manhood,” “maleness,” and “patriarchy” are ladled with limiting connotations (and sometimes, denotations). For instance, “manhood” is most often used in an ontological sense to mean a state of being. Webster’s Dictionary Online further defines “manhood” as “the condition of being an adult male as
distinguished from a child or female.” This definition is in opposition to notions of femininity, as I stated earlier, but in societies that practice Euro-American patriarchal discourse, Black men are traditionally not acknowledged as adult males; hence the racist term in reference to even the oldest of Black men within those societies, “boy”. “Maleness” connotes some kind of biological sexual determinant: a Y-chromosome, testes, or a penis. The Oxford English Dictionary Online defines it as “virility” or “the quality of being the male sex,” but in a racist society, simply having a penis does not guarantee that one is a man.; meeting biological requirements does not necessarily translate into phallic authority. “Patriarchy” suggests a system in which men rule and govern society based upon the subordination of women. Logically, this term could have been a fitting choice for this project, but this study centers around Black men’s literature. African and Black Diaspora men were not considered the ruling class during this time of interregnum, a time when the old regime has not died but no longer retains nominal control, even in countries where Black people are the majority (Caribbean nations such as Jamaica, or African nations such as Nigeria or South Africa); therefore, Black men do not constitute a legitimate patriarchy in white supremacist discourse. Put differently, Black masculine identities have long been considered subordinate masculinities; therefore, I did not choose the term “Black patriarchy.”

Finally, I use “masculinity.” My choice is based upon Connell’s definition in *Masculinities*. According to Connell, masculinity may be difficult to define, and “to the extent the term can be briefly defined at all, is simultaneously a place in gender relations, the practices through which men and women engage that place in gender, and the effects of these practices in bodily experiences, personality and culture” (71). Here, Connell collapses biology and social constructedness to define masculinity. It involves both public and private practices, and the
masculine body \textit{does} as much as it \textit{is}. As a marginalized group of men, Black males must do, be, and speak simultaneously; hence I find that Black “masculinity” is the most suitable term for this project.

III. Pan-African Reading Strategy

In looking for points of contacts and departure in this project, I deploy a Pan-Africanist reading strategy in addition to a postcolonial one. For most of the books discussed in this project, the cultures and countries in the texts are not totally colonized, but not yet free. They are in a state of interregnum as stated above. In the texts which do historically qualify as postcolonial, these societies are nominally free of the metropole, but are totally dependent upon its former colonizer economically and culturally.

Though traditional use of the term “postcolonial” connotes British colonialism, the Caribbean archipelago and African nations complicate this notion and make impossible the use of the term in this manner. There are those nations in the Caribbean and Africa which did not experience British colonization, but were colonized by other European powers that include France, Spain, Portugal, and or even Dutch countries such as Belgium or the Netherlands. Haiti, a former colony of France, with its rather early independence from a European colonial power and subsequent American occupation, is more familiar with American-style imperialism than with British rule or rule by any other European power.\textsuperscript{6}

Critics and historians alike have been rather reluctant to classify African Americans alongside other postcolonial populations, though many writers seem comfortable doing so. The writings of Langston Hughes for the \textit{Chicago Post} and Malcolm X’s autobiography comfortably link the African American population with other colonized peoples in India and Asia. I also agree with Ashcroft, Griffiths, and Tiffin in \textit{The Empire Writes Back} that “the phenomenon of
African American society is not a consequence of colonization; it is a consequence of colonialism” (202). Slavery in the Americas predates the status of the United States as a country; colonialism and slavery existed simultaneously. Though the United States gained its freedom from Britain via the Revolutionary War of the 1770s, people of African descent remained enslaved for nearly 100 years thereafter. Therefore, I apply the term “postcolonial” to African Americans in this project. African Americans remained legally colonized inside the United States via Black Code, Jim Crow, and segregationist policies for another 100 years after the Emancipation Proclamation of 1865.

Ashcroft, Griffiths, and Tiffin do articulate another deployment of the term “postcolonial” in The Empire Writes Back. They use it to “cover all the cultures affected by the imperial process from the moment of colonization to the present day” (2). Indeed, two popular anthologies, The Post Colonial Studies Reader, also edited by Ashcroft, Griffiths, and Tiffin and Colonial Discourse and Post Colonial Theory, edited by Patrick Williams and Laura Chrisman include theorists and philosophers from the Francophone and Hispanic traditions, as well as some African American theorists. Though Césaire, Fanon, Senghor, and Glissant are also included among those collections of essays dedicated to postcolonialism, most of their writings predate articulations of postcolonial theory and are written specifically based on the African and Africa Diasporic confrontation with European powers of imperialism; their nonfiction and artistic literature hail from the earlier Pan-Africanist framework. The experiences many Pan-Africanist writers incorporate such as slavery, Black Code and Jim Crow laws, and Apartheid are particular to Black populations within the Diaspora and are not always included in all colonialist experiences. Therefore, I apply a Pan-Africanist reading strategy in addition to postcolonialism in order to cover those experiences particular to Black people.
At its inception, Pan-Africanism was a political and artistic/cultural oppositional discourse that served to unite all oppressed people with Black skin regardless of country of origin. As a political force and a cultural movement, Pan-Africanism developed in the New World among African Diasporic people in response to attempts by Enlightenment philosophers to excise Africa from History.\(^8\) For instance, Hegel’s “Thesis on Africa” is an oft-quoted example of the internecine racism of the colonial enterprise that James Baldwin references in the epigraph to this essay. According to Hegel, Africa’s geography isolates its people from the rest of the world. Historians agree that “this isolation excludes Africa from the theatre of history that of course, in Hegel’s mind is the European world” (Babacar 85). Likewise, in his Virginia papers, Thomas Jefferson claims that people of African descent lack the intellect to produce art and are therefore somewhat less than human. Louis Sala-Molins, author of *Dark Side of the Light: Slavery and the French Enlightenment*, also claims that major and minor French philosophers –Condorcet, Raynal, and Diderot –championed ideas of freedom and democracy for French people while attesting to the inferiority of Africans and sanctioning the use of Africans for slavery. Rousseau and Montesquieu also claim that Africans should not have equal protection under French law because of their alleged inferiority.\(^9\)

Involuntarily taken from their own cultures and homelands, sold in “mixed lots,” and told that they were not part of the human race because of their ancestry, many Africans in the New World began to grasp for some kind of authentic identity in their new environments.\(^10\) They recognized that their shared oppression and enslavement were based solely upon their African ancestry. From this knowledge, Africans in the New World created images of themselves based on positive notions of Africa. This concept of positive images grew among African people in the New World, and “the Pan-African concept as well as the movement was born and grown in the
Western world in the 18th century. At that time, the goal of Pan-Africanism was to regain the racial identity and pride of black people that was lost because of slavery, colonialism, and social oppression” (Metaferia 300). Because the goal of many slave traders was to blot out prior knowledge of African history and culture, and due to the lost communication of “mixed lot” sales, much practical information about ancestral homelands were lost to Africans in the New World. Even the concept of Pan-Africanism itself is not based upon one tangible African culture. Instead, the concept of Pan-Africanism and positive images of Africa were derived from an earlier, Biblically-based movement, Ethiopianism. Ethiopian political scientist, Getachew Metaferia defined the early Ethiopian movement as a political force derived from “the concept of Ethiopia, was a reference to the Black race or to the continent of Africa” (301). Africans in the New World, having very limited knowledge of their ancestral homes (if any knowledge of it all), used the Bible to create Edenic images of Africa as a mystical land. As early as the poetry of Phyllis Wheatley, which appeared in the late 18th century, Africa is a distant symbol, lost and inaccessible to its descendants and imaginable to none but the writer. Other literary manifestations of Pan-Africanism include texts from the Harlem Renaissance, the Francophone Negritude Movement, and the Black Arts Movement.

Politically, proponents of Pan-Africanism developed their own goals and were split between two factions: the formal, intellectually elite vision of W.E.B. DuBois and his call for Black leadership at Pan-African Congressional meetings, and Marcus Garvey, founder and leader of the United Negro Improvement Association, a more populist movement. The division between the two factions was one of vision. Pan-Africanist scholar Colin Legum claims that elite political leaders did not agitate for political rights immediately, but viewed their goals as a framework for future progress. Marcus Garvey called for immediate and complete Black
separatism and economic self-reliance. The UNIA published papers that reached the masses. W.E.B. DuBois and other Black Diaspora leaders called official Pan-African Congresses with “the liberation of Africa, the emancipation of all Blacks of the diaspora, and the unity of black people” (Metaferia 300) as stated goals. These goals were the driving forces at the Pan-African Congresses of 1900, 1919, 1923, 1927, and 1945. For example, Jomo Kenyatta, Kwame NKrumah, and George Padmore were very active in organizing the Congressional meetings, took on leadership positions throughout the African Diaspora, and often served as advisers to one another. Though the two men were bitter enemies, Marcus Garvey shared most of DuBois’s vision of Pan-Africanism. Between the UNIA papers and the Pan-African congresses, ideas of Pan-Africanism disseminated throughout North America, the Caribbean, and Africa.

Because of the historical conditions that spawned Pan-Africanism, it is almost impossible to separate the literature from its politics. From its inception then, there was an implicit alliance between Pan-Africanism theory, practice, and literature. From the slave narratives of Mary Prince and Olaudah Equiano to David Walker’s Appeal to the fictional writings of the Harlem Renaissance, this alliance has always been an underlying assumption. The alliance became explicit at The Conference of Negro Writers and Artists in 1956 in Paris when writers met to collectively declare their intentions to use their art to fight oppression in which the writers drafted a resolution of their artistic/political intentions. The writers state in their resolution: “We have weighed our cultural heritages and have studied how they have been affected by social and general conditions of racialism and colonialism. We maintain that the growth of culture is dependent upon the termination of such shameful practices” (Resolution quoted in Legum 212). In other words, they intended to use their writings to help end discrimination against people of
African descent and to write about the ravages of colonialism and oppression upon the respective cultures of those people.

Though I choose to deploy a Pan-Africanist reading strategy in tandem with postcolonialism to this project, this strategy is not without its problems. First, Pan-Africanism is very atavistic, with most academics dividing into cultural and political schools of thought. Theorists like Molefi Asante define it as a cultural response to Euro-American hegemonic discourse by focusing on the history of African civilization, including ancient Egypt. Others like Colin Legum traditionally define it as a transnational political movement that culminated in the Pan-African Congressional meetings. For my purposes, I combine the two forms because “more often than not, it has been a combination of the two” (Kelley 42). Second, though this discourse is a unifying discourse, it does not account for the differences found in African and Black Diaspora cultures. There are major differences, for instance, between African American culture, where Black people are a small minority and Euro-Americans constitute an overwhelming majority, and Jamaican culture where Black people are the majority, but British culture remains hegemonic. Brathwaite and Glissant both claim that these differences must be acknowledged, but insist that African and African Diaspora cultures share a commonality in oppression due to Black skin and African ancestry. Third, some of the definitions are clearly oppositional, and oppositional definitions run the risk of being counterproductive, Fanon warns. In defining themselves only in opposition to Euro-American culture, Pan-Africanists often seem to concede that white culture is the norm, becoming entangled in a Hegelian master-slave dialectic in which neither side wins total independence, and the two opposing sides form a symbiotic relationship of perpetual dependency instead. Fanon suggests in Wretched of the Earth that African and
Black Diaspora writers step outside the circle by looking to their own cultures, histories, and traditions for an authentic identity.

IV. Why a Serious Study of Black Masculinity

Despite its shortcomings, Black male writers continued to rely on the underlying principles of unity found in Pan-Africanism to inform their writings and identity formation. They incorporated “Pan-Africanism politics as the construction and reconstruction of a diasporic identity” (Lemelle and Kelley 2). In his essay “Princes and Powers,” James Baldwin reports on The Conference of Negro African Writers and Artists, listing participants and the country or Diasporic culture they represented:

Behind the table at the front of the hall sat eight colored men.

These included the American novelist Richard Wright; Alioune Diop, the editor of Presence Africaine and one of the principal organizers of the conference; poets Leopold Senghor, from Senegal, and Aime Cesaire from Martinique, and the poet and novelist Jacques Alexis from Haiti. From Haiti, also, came the President of the conference, Dr. Price-Mars, a very old and very handsome man. [143, emphasis mine]

Baldwin quotes what he believes adequately sums the reasons for the conference by paraphrasing Diop’s assessment that “out of the fact that European well-being had been, for centuries, so crucially dependent on this subjugation had come that racism from which all Black men suffered” (Baldwin 144, emphasis mine). I used emphasis here to underscore the fact that the meetings and the entire conference were male-dominated; there were no Black females at this conference to represent the experiences of Black women, only two unnamed female journalists.
for Black newspapers. In addition the topics overwhelmingly addressed the Black male confrontation with oppression and colonialism, and most speakers directly addressed the brethren in the room with little to no mention of Black female experiences and identities.

Likewise in the literature, suffering, oppression, and identity erasure experienced by peoples of African descent are articulated in masculine terms. Fanon, in his most famous essay, “Fact of Blackness,” describes the suffering and oppression of all Black peoples in terms of brotherhood: “Yes, all those are my brothers—a ‘little brotherhood’ imprisons us all alike” (*BSWM* 124). He quotes Hughes, Wright, Senghor, Himes, and Césaire throughout the book in order to demonstrate how writers describe and combat the sufferings of all African and African Diasporic people. His choice of writers stretch across several historical epochs in literary history: the Harlem Renaissance, Negritude, and Urban Realist eras, but all of his selections are from Black male writers. As with the conference, there are no passages from African and Black Diaspora women writers here to represent the experiences of women of African descent. The organizers of the conference as well as the writers and theorists in attendance privilege the male experience as the universal norm: much in the same way that Euro-American experiences and definitions of manhood and maleness are privileged over subordinate masculinities.

In most Pan-Africanist literatures produced by Black males, the male experience of subjugation is the norm. The writings seem to “prove” Carol Boyce Davies’s claim that “the tactical assertion of Blackness in US contexts has been equated with Black manhood and therefore has been at the expense of, but also with the participation of Black women” (6). Davies does not relegate her charge of sexism with African American men; she expands her claim to include other Black populations. She acknowledges that in many theoretical/philosophical writings, “certain versions of African nationalism, Pan-Africanism and
Afrocentrism become discourses which turn on the concept of a uni-centricity and imply the exclusion or subordination of women’s issues…” (7-8). Given the absence of female voices at the Congress and the very masculine writings of Fanon, Wright, Senghor, Cèsaire, Brathwaite, and Glissant, some of the major architects of Urban Realism, Pan-Africanist thought and Negritude, I am inclined to agree with Davies. Even in fiction and drama, where African and Black Diaspora men are at liberty to imagine new worlds of racial and gender equality, the silence and silencing of women in the texts are thunderously piercing. Though this tendency to silence Black women has been traditionally read by Black feminists as manifestation of Black male sexism and chauvinism, perhaps the absence of female voices in the world of Black male fiction and drama can be read another way. Some Black male writers may use their characters “to critique the destructive nature of male power” (Joyce 549), a point of conversion in many texts written by men of African descent. Interestingly, another point of convergence is that identity erasure is likened to castration, which may be why much Pan-Africanist theory is articulated in masculine terms. To reclaim identity is to reclaim the psychological phallus, or the dignity embodied in manhood. Furthermore, many justifications for enslavement of Black people are gendered justifications directly mention African males’ perceived inability to properly subdue and dominate African women. In some West African societies, women traditionally work outside the home and even share roles (though some are very limited) in the political systems of their societies. To many European historians, philosophers, and ethnographers, because African males accepted women’s contributions to their societies, they were not properly men, but effeminate versions of European men who knew how to properly suppress European women. Black men in the New World and in Africa attempted to speak directly to this erroneous perception.
Like any study done in a comparative framework, a study of Black masculinity should not mean “monolithic” masculinity. Being a Black man in Nigeria or Senegal is inherently different from being a Black man in the Caribbean or the United States. The conditions against which each population of men asserted their “manhood” also varies from region to region. Black men in Africa experienced oppression in one way and Black men in the New World experienced it in others. For instance, “[i]n Africa, colonialism, with its emphasis on assimilation and expropriation, asserted white culture to the African peoples it sought to conquer” (Davies 7). Leaders in Europe viewed Africa as a vast reserve of raw material for trade. During the Cold War, both the United States and the former Soviet Union engaged in a competition for arms and market and targeted Africa for its seemingly limitless market potential. The United States interfered in the politics of various African nations in much the same way as it did in the Caribbean and Latin America during the Cold War. Again, the wishes of the people in those African nations were casually disregarded by the Euro-American powers which drew boundaries. It is against this backdrop of paternalism and colonialism, steeped in the “racism” which Baldwin references, that African men asserted their own identities.

Chinua Achebe explains the need for African masculine assertion in his critical essay, “An Image of Africa: Racism in Conrad’s Heart of Darkness.” Achebe insists that Conrad portrays Africa as a land of silence and frenzy. In doing so, the text “projects the image of Africa as the other world, the antithesis of Europe and therefore of civilization, a place where man’s vaunted intelligence and refinement are finally mocked by triumphant bestiality” (Achebe 1785). Alongside European ideals about what constitutes masculinity and ultimately, civility, African men are utterly depraved, bestial, sexually licentious, and unable to defend themselves against outside forces; therefore, in spite of their fabled sexual potency, African men are
portrayed in colonial literature as effeminate and weak, deserving of colonization and European civilizing influence.

Nonetheless, African men retained their own ideas about masculinity through their own literary tradition. In Africa, the oral epic significantly informs the construction of masculinity in society as well as written literature.¹⁵ Historians and critics of the oral epics such as Thomas Hale acknowledge that “African oral epics appear as ‘masculine’ texts not only because their heroes are men, but also because these narratives have been told almost exclusively by men known regionally as griots” (Hale 26). From the Epic of Sundiata to the Epic of Askia Mohammed, griots weave stories of heroic deeds performed by men through acts of bravery during battle or other feats of superhuman strength. Other characteristics include an impeccable sense of justice, honor and honesty, and the ability to rule over others benevolently without tyrannical impulses. A proper African hero, according to the griots, is implacable in demeanor, but not cruel to those he may rule. Poet and critic Tanure Ojaide defines this oral construction of masculinity as “a conglomerate of virtues and characteristics built around the traditional expectations of being a man and the glorification of virile values” (66). Like the oral texts, masculinity is an integral part of written texts produced by African authors. Literary critic Simon Gikandi writes that masculinity “lies at the center of the key texts of African literature, defining the natures of cultures, traditions, and experiences and signaling the complexity of contexts and texts” (295). Yet, masculinity is presented as part of a complex system of reciprocity between male and female in the works of many African writers; it is not the sole normalizing force.

Unlike many of the oral texts, the written African texts produced by men and women and often feature characters of both genders. The men are also more than warriors and heroes; they
are husbands, lovers, fathers, friends, workers, and community leaders. In short, the men in the written narratives are part of complex societies in which even their patriarchal powers are limited by the interplay of masculine and feminine contributions. To paraphrase Gikandi, what appears to be simple binary oppositions between masculine and feminine in the literature is really a portrayal of interdependency; masculinity and femininity share a dialectic relationship. In a relationship based upon mutual dependency, “there is a sense in which men in society collectively define masculinity for themselves, but they are always cognizant of the influence of women in their definitions” (Lewis 95). Thus, any man with aspirations of great leadership must both recognize and appreciate the contributions of women to the respective society.

Texts like Wole Soyinka’s *Death and the King’s Horseman* and Tutuola’s *The Palm Wine Drinkard* are heavily informed by the African oral tradition and espouse traditional African patriarchal values. On the other hand, texts like p’Bitek’s *Song of Lawino Song of Ocol* also orally-inspired, deconstructs the destructive effects of the acculturation of European definitions of masculinity. Contemporary African writers use impotency to denote inept African male leaders who simply adopt colonialist traditions that are not only racist, but built upon a system of gross gender inequality. For instance, Ousmane’s text, *Xala* pits a group of villagers against a modern-day African leader and business man who is impotent. These leaders do not change the systems that hinge upon and reproduce inequality in their own societies; they simply replace the color of the faces in charge and perpetuate the inhumanity of colonization.

In the New World, men of African descent experienced attempted identity annihilation through enslavement. However, many African traits survived the Middle Passage and manifested themselves in the cultures of New World Africans. The African root is prevalent in Caribbean nation language, African American cuisine, and the syncopated drum rhythms found
throughout the Black Atlantic. Also, many slaves originate from warrior cultures, such as the Asante nation, and arrived with those ideals of gender roles and division of labor. Some of the very first slave narratives, like that of Venture Smith, manifest a nuanced type of masculinity that is remarkably similar to those found in the West African oral epics. Oloudah Equiano, who experienced the Middle Passage, subsequent enslavement in the United States, extensive travel in the Caribbean, and also a form of indentured servitude in Britain, also crafted a masculine identity similar to Smith’s in his narrative. Considered the very earliest slave narratives of the New World, they also shared the same masculine traits as their oral African predecessors of bravery in the face of adversity, fearlessness during battle, and honesty and frankness in business transactions. Smith and Equiano even implied that their African masculine identities were superior to that of their European counterparts’. Both of these writers were also aspiring entrepreneurs and incorporated several instances in which Euro-American men were dishonest in business.

Many historians agree that building a system of global-style capitalism by conquering and subduing foreign lands and peoples, and ultimately designing an international system of slavery using a brand of brutality the likes of which the world had never known prior was largely a European, male undertaking. Regardless of the privilege and status African males may have enjoyed in their home lands, once captured and sold into slavery, their definition of masculinity became subordinate to the Euro-American sense of masculinity. Historians also recognize that slave masters also targeted Black masculine identity for total eradication, and “an important goal of slavery was to prevent the emergence of a sense of Black manhood. The slaveholders realized that the solidification of a robust Black masculinity could prove detrimental to the institution of slavery” (Morris xiii). In order to prevent this, many slaveholding societies passed laws which
severely restricted Black men. For instance, some states within the United States forbade Black men from owning guns or hunting or fishing to supplement their families’ diets with wild game. However, Black men did protest their conditions orally, physically, and through writing; therefore, Hine and Jenkins are absolutely correct when they state that “[slavery] was the ground on which black men were forced to assert their masculinity identity” (1) in the United States of America.

The Caribbean saw the worst of the global plantation system and colonialism with the almost total annihilation of the Arawaks and Caribs people, obliteration of an entire linguistic system, and the introduction of forced slave labor that supported an entire mercantile capitalist system based upon the production of sugar. Against the mostly Black male bodies in the Caribbean, European men developed a very complex system of patriarchy, and “this European male domination of the social relations within Caribbean society laid the foundation for the institutionalization of gender inequality in the region” (Lewis 103). In addition to gender inequality, the slave labor system set up racial disparities, with Black bodies doing the manual labor of sowing seeds of global capitalism, and European men reaping the benefits.

Continued discrimination after slavery prompted in Black Caribbean men an “occasion for speaking,” to quote Caribbean theorist and writer George Lamming. Throughout the Caribbean, Black men began to adopt and appropriate Shakespeare’s The Tempest. In Telling Our Stories, literary critic Adetayo Alabi declares “that those most violently objectified by slavery insist, like Caliban, on their rightful status as speaking subjects” (53). Black Caribbean men identify mostly with Caliban, the slave who performs most of the manual labor but who is objectified by Prospero, the invading European in Shakespeare’s play. As Alabi points out, in Caribbean appropriations of Caliban, his voice is not construed to support Prospero’s notion of
imperialism. The figure of Caliban, since he represents those who are enslaved, also transcends island differences. After all, Black people, regardless of linguistic and cultural differences from island to island, are present in the region solely due to enslavement. Therefore, as George Lamming theorizes, this makes Caliban suitable to speak for all subordinate Black men. The Prospero/Caliban trope is common in Black male-authored literature in the Caribbean.

Meanwhile, in a post-slavery United States of America, the early cleft of white American men from Europe allowed white American males to define themselves independently of European ideals of masculinity. Instead, white masculinity was based upon success in the capitalist system rather than genealogy and feudalism. In fact, one key tenet of white American masculinity is independence. These factors combined to form notions of the “Self-Made Man” or the “Masculine Achiever.” Though America has always been a multicultural country of immigrants, the Self-Made Man or Masculine Achiever Model is one built upon the exclusion of other non-white, non-Anglo-Saxon, non-Protestant masculinities, and “in this way, white men sought to limit the extent to which they were forced to deal with competition from the diverse masculinities that were actually the norm in America” (Hine and Jenkins 14). From its formative stages, white American masculinity was plagued with the insecurities produced by the unstable nature of nascent capitalism, but an entire body of people was available to white men of the United States with which to contrast and allay their economic insecurities. Slave men, not women, were the antithesis to white masculinity. Black slave men were seen as a form of severely subjugated masculinity: weak and effeminate, trapped in a perpetual state of childishness and adolescence, and not intellectually equipped to be a masculine achiever in a free, democratic, capitalist society. Craig Wilkins in his essay “Brothers/Others Gonna Paint the White House Black,” lists how white American males elevated their own image by crafting
unflattering ones of Black males. Wilkins claims that white American male contrasted their own images with “the naturalized image of the brutal, base, highly sexualized, aggressive, animalistic, angry male is constantly broadcast through airwaves…to an all-too-receptive public” (Wilks 199-200). Such stereotypical images created the object while they named it. Black men became rapist beasts in need of civilizing and/or violent eradication.

Like most contemporary scholars, the works of Foucault inform my thinking concerning colonial/postcolonial writings. In his works, Foucault extends the work of poststructuralists such as Roland Bathes by claiming that discourse not only names objects, but defines as it names. Black people present a seemingly tailor-made case for Foucault’s logic in that they were stereotyped and objectified first by humanist philosophers and religious writers and further dehumanized by the law. In Playing in the Dark: Whiteness and the Literary Imagination (1992), Toni Morrison outlines what she calls the “Africanist presence” in white American literature. Black people only exist “as the objects of an occasional bout of jungle fever…to provide local color or to lend some touch of verisimilitude or to supply a moral gesture, humor, or bit of pathos” (Morrison 15). According to Morrison, weak, effeminate African American men are cast alongside independent, rugged Euro-American men to elevate a particular image of whiteness. More specifically, bumbling Black men, with their unintelligible utters, serve as comic relief to independent, articulate white men. In Euro-American literature, Black men are servants and boys, regardless of age or education/skill level. Once again, the first slave narratives worked to destroy these images of Black men as foils by relying upon African-derived definitions of masculinity. In A Narrative in the Life and Adventures of Venture, a Native of Africa: But Resident Above Sixty Years in the United States of America. Related by Himself by Venture Smith, he counters this foil by carefully describing several facets of his African home
and its society and the democratic ideals of his people. As in the oral epics, Smith describes his father as a fearless warrior, honest person, and empathetic ruler. These African ideals of masculinity in the early male-authored slave narratives became the basis upon which African American men based their notions of masculinity. In subsequent generations, Black masculinity within the United States was based upon “manly self-assertion” (to borrow a term from W.E.B. DuBois) in the face of gross injustice.\textsuperscript{17} This notion had a range of definitions, from physical confrontation with oppression to honorable military service to voting and participating in civic duties.

Unfortunately, in addressing Black masculinity as defined by Black male literature, I do not address all subordinate Black masculinities in this project. For instance, I do not address homosexual masculine identities amongst African and Black Diaspora men. I do, however, realize that among the marginalized and subordinated men, homosexual men are further repressed by the acceptance of heterosexuality and virility as ontonormative definitions of masculinity. Scholars such as Connell conclude that homosexual men may be marginalized due to the perceived femininity exhibited by gay men (the fact that I use the term “homosexual masculinity” may strike some as an oxymoron). I feel that a study of Black male authored homosexual writings produced by an always-already marginalized masculinity deserves more than one chapter; it deserves a work of its own. In that sense, regrettably, my work is incomplete, and would be incomplete even if I dedicated a chapter to this type of sub-subordinate masculinity.

Theoretically, my work follows the writings of various Pan-Africanist philosophers, including Fanon, Césaire, Brathwaite, Senghor, and Glissant.\textsuperscript{18} I follow \textit{Fanon’s Black Skins White Masks} and \textit{The Wretched of the Earth} very closely while occasionally borrowing terms
and concepts from European philosophers Foucault, Althusser, and Gramsci. In *Discourse on Colonialism*, Césaire expands racism past individual countries or even continents to indict the whole of Western civilization. He especially targets the philosophers, calling them “the Western humanist, the ‘idealist’ philosopher” (3). Césaire claims that the philosophers have done the most harm by constantly referring to non-European people as “inferior” and European peoples as “superior.” European superiority is created by colonialist text, Cèsaire states. He provides an example of how these texts create racial biases by analyzing the works of French philosopher Pierre Gourou. Cèsaire writes:

From Gourou, his book *Les Pays Tropicaux*, in which, amid certain correct observations, there is expressed the fundamental thesis, biased and unacceptable, that there has never been a great tropical civilization, that great civilizations have existed only in temperate climates, that in every tropical country, the germ of civilization comes, and can only come, from some other place outside the tropics, and that if the tropical countries are not under the biological curse of the racists, there at least hangs over them, with some consequences, a no less effective geographical curse.

[12]

 Whereas many philosophers, sociologists, and religious officials use biological racism to justify enslaving and colonizing Africans, Gourou uses geography; claims of African lack of development due to geographical isolation is still a manifestation of Gourou’s racial biases toward European superiority. Cèsaire lists some sub-Saharan empires of Africa which most Europeans tend to ignore or discredit in their writings.19 Furthermore, Cèsaire claims that racism
is the determining and driving factor behind all colonial enterprises: “Colonialist Europe has grafted modern abuse onto ancient injustice, hateful racism to old inequality” (8). Regardless of the religious and philosophical justifications for colonialism, it is steeped in racism, injustice, and inequality, according to Cèsaire. The results of colonialism are cruelty, violence, and barbarity for the colonized as well as the colonizer. According to Cèsaire, this is true of European colonialism as well as the type of cruel imperialism practiced by the United States which “far surpasses” (8) that of its European counterparts.

Fanon’s *Black Skins White Masks* speaks specifically for people of African descent. Fanon unites all people of African descent in a common struggle against racism and physical brutality: “In America, Negroes are segregated. In South America, Negroes are whipped in the streets, and Negro strikers are cut down by machine guns. In West Africa, the Negro is an animal” (Fanon 113). He also draws the same conclusion as Cèsaire:

> All forms of exploitation resemble one another. They all seek the source of their necessity in some edict of a Biblical nature. All forms of exploitation are identical because all of them are applied to the same “object”: man. When one tries to examine the structure of this or that form of exploitation from an abstract point of view, one simply turns one’s back on the major, basic problem, which is that of restoring man to his proper place. Colonial racism is no different from any other racism. [88]

Race-based slavery, colonialism, segregation, and apartheid are all derived from racist notions which claim that those of African descent are somehow inferior to Europeans, according to Fanon. More specifically, Fanon writes that racism certainly affects Black men. He uses himself
as a case study to demonstrate the inner, psychological effects of racism, writing, “a man was expected to behave like a man. I was expected to behave like a black man –or at least like a nigger” (114). According to Fanon, to behave “like a black man” is to acknowledge that Black men are somehow inferior to white ones.

V. Chapter Summaries and Texts

In this chapter, Chapter One, I lay out a brief literary review, theoretical framework, and terminology for my study of Black masculinity. In Chapter 2, “The Inhumane Legacy of the Enlightenment: Racialized Degendering,” I explore the process by which African males were named as less than masculine when compared to European males by Enlightenment philosophers, subsequently degendered, and codified into Plantation law as objects rather than human beings. I use Hegel’s “Thesis on Africa,” Bartolomè de las Casas In Defense of Indians, Thomas Carlyle’s Occasional Discourse on the Nigger Question, Thomas Jefferson’s Notes on the State of Virginia, and writings by French philosopher Marquis de Condorcet to demonstrate how philosophical tracts used the “weakness” of African males to justify enslavement, the increasingly restrictive plantation laws which accompanied it, and subsequent colonization.

These writings also provide the opposition that men of African descent fought with their writings.

In Chapter 3, “Black Men, Oppositional Definitions, and Primordial Africa,” I discuss how African and Black Diaspora men respond to the subjugating discourse with their fiction and drama. I use Wright’s Native Son, Césaire’s A Tempest, and Amos Tutuola’s The Palm-Wine Drinkard. These narratives embrace and subvert popular stereotypes concerning men of African descent in the white American imagination: the Black rapist beast of the United States, inarticulate and creaturely (meaning somewhat human but mainly animalistic) Caliban of the
Caribbean archipelago, and tropical Pleitocene era Africa. In subverting these stereotypes these texts spawned a transnational, oppositional dialectic to dehumanizing portrayals of Black men.

In Chapter 4, “Black Masculine Identities: From Their Own Histories,” I explore culturally-derived models of Black masculinity. I discuss Achebe’s *Things Fall Apart*, Lamming’s *In the Castle of My Skin*, and Ellison’s *Invisible Man*. Achebe’s and Ellison’s texts are more than just narratives of Black masculine identity exploration; they serve as warning tales for African and African American men, respectively. These tales warn of the consequences of normalizing and choosing an individualistic performance of masculinity that subjugates Black women. Lamming’s semi-autobiographical writing demonstrates Césaire’s notion of verrition, another strategy available to Caribbean writers for identity formation for Black men in the New World.²⁰

In Chapter 5, “Black Men and Black Women: Concerns of the Heart(h),” I discuss Black male characters created by Black female authors. I explore the empathetic Black male characters created in Ba’s *Song Long a Letter*, Marshall’s *The Chosen Place the Timeless People*, and Hansberry’s *A Raisin in the Sun*. Because Black women in Africa and throughout the Black Diaspora do suffer silencing and marginalization at the hands of Black men, it is important to study the texts that Black women produce during this times of upheaval as well. Each of these narratives extends beyond simply listing or displaying the brutalities and emotional hardships Black women face at the hands of Black men. They neither present Black men as two-dimensional oppressors nor do they substitute a ruling matriarchy for patriarchy. These writers, instead, are “mindful of the ways in which colonialism and slavery have affected the Black male” (Joyce 552). They recognize the role that Euro-American discourse plays in destroying African and Black Diasporic homes, and craft empathetic Black male characters in their
narratives. Though the protagonists hold the men responsible for their own individual actions, they understand that ultimately, the internalization of Euro-American standards of masculinity destroys their homes and may even kill them.

In Chapter 6, “Out of Necessity: Black Men Evaluate Definitions of Masculinity,” I examine the conditions which prompt Black men to rethink how they define themselves in relation to women. I discuss Ousmane’s *Gods Bit of Wood*, Roumain’s *Masters of the Dew*, and Gaines’s *In My Father’s House*. Even if some men are not of the ruling class of men and therefore comprise a subordinate masculinity, they do benefit, inevitably, from institutionalized patriarchal practices in their respective societies. Therefore, many men remain silent about gender inequality until something prompts them to speak. During intense times of transition, these masculine revolutionary Black heroes learn that women should participate equally in political affairs, sometimes the very survival of an entire people depends upon the contribution of women in their societies. The struggle for freedom from oppression is incomplete if gender inequalities are not addressed.

In Chapter 7, Conclusion, I discuss the very public and often personal rift between James Baldwin and Eldridge Cleaver. Cleaver vehemently attacked James Baldwin because Baldwin, in his many critical essays about Blackness in the United States, challenges African American males to evaluate their own chauvinism. Baldwin claims that contemporary American ideals of masculinity are linked to violence, colonialism, and imperialism. He also writes of how these ideals have affected him as a Black homosexual man. Cleaver interprets Baldwin’s warning that Black males must accept male and female contributions to their personal well-beings and their societies as a direct affront to total Black identity. Apparently, according to Cleaver, Black masculine identity is the only identity people of the Diaspora should write about. I end the
chapter by discussing Gibreel Kamara’s recommendation of gender complementarity. It stands in total opposition to Cleaver and reaffirms Baldwin’s solution to paralytic, oppositional definitions of gender generally and masculinity specifically.

Because Black men continue to protest their scripted roles and redefine themselves through literature and film, I do not intend for this project to be exhaustive. I want, more than anything, for this dissertation to be the start of academic dialogue concerning transnational definitions of Black masculinity as created by Black male writers. Though I am concerned about the plight of Black women in Africa and the Black Diaspora, I feel that a deconstruction of masculinity is long overdue. According to Black sociologist Robert Staples, who has produced works on Black masculinity, in order to confront the sexism that Black women often face at the hands of Black men, it is best to understand the various factors behind it. Rather than address the system which produces the identity erasure experienced by Black men, many social scientists simply blamed Black women for their “complicity” in the ideological castration of Black males.

In choosing texts for this project, I selected texts that best demonstrate the particular way in which Black men define themselves. Also, I use James Baldwin, one giant of Black male writing who foresaw the sexism inherent in Black male-authored texts almost sixty years ago, in a theoretical capacity. His collection of essays edited by Toni Morrison is priceless in thinking about this dissertation. My chapters are arranged by progressive definition: from oppositional definitions to those based on local cultures to a complementary one that uses the inclusion of female contribution to total redefinition of masculinity. Finally, since I am writing of African Americans as part of a larger, Diasporic people, I have tried ardently to avoid partaking in that cultural hegemony by making the African American male experience of racism and discrimination as the essential experience. Beginning in Chapter 3, I try to reverse the traditional
geographical slave trade triangle: I begin in the United States of America before discussing the Caribbean, and then moving my attention to an African text. In chapters 4, 5, and 6, I have made an attempt to discuss the African text first, the Caribbean, and then the African American text. This is a literary reversal of the traditional slave trade route, which began in Africa to load human cargo, stopped at the Caribbean to sell some human stock there, and travelled with human cargo to the United States of America. Forcing myself to write in this way helps me not only tear down my own biases, but to understand the connectedness of African and Black Diasporic cultures. Though they have been separated and sectioned for Euro-American economic and administrative purpose, and later, for academic ones in the Western academy, the cultures really make more points of contact than many in the West recognize.


2 Using writing as an assessment, European philosophers claimed that Africans were not literate; therefore, they were not human. Until recently, with the work of many literary, anthropology, and historical scholars, European standards did not recognize African orality as a valid form of literature. Once in the New World, slaves learned to read and write not only to obtain freedom, but to “prove” their humanness. Subsequent laws in the United States made it illegal for people of African descent to learn to read.

3 I am aware that the Black Diaspora includes Black people in Canada, South and Central America, Brazil, and Europe. I chose American, African, and Caribbean writers to limit the focus of my dissertation and because of references common among the authors. For instance, Fanon quotes Cesaire, Himes, Hughes, and Wright in Black Skins White Masks. Langston Hughes translated Masters of the Dew by Jacque Roumain. Richard Wright dedicated White Man Listen to his friend, Eric Williams, Chief Minister of the Government of Trinidad and Tobago at the time.

4 Like many of the Euro-American texts I mentioned above which contain very racist elements, Birth of a Nation is still currently being taught in Western universities for its artistic value.

5 From Feminist Theory from Margin to Center.

6 Haiti received independence from France in 1804, but was subject to American invasion due to America’s Monroe Doctrine, which allowed America to interfere in the affairs of other countries in close proximity to the United States of America should it feel threatened by European powers in those other countries. American forces began to occupy Haiti in 1915, and basically established slave-like conditions. When American forces left the country in 1934, Dominican Republican dictator, Rafael Trujillo, developed a special brand of racism against Haitians called “antihaitianismo.” In 1938, he ordered the slaughter of Haitians living on the Dominican side of the border for three days, killing between 20,000 and 30,000 Haitians as they tried to escape. It became known as the Parsley Massacre. A strong ally of the United States government, Truillo never officially stood trial for the massacre. It is the subject of Edwidge Danticat’s The Farming of Bones (1998).

7 While the United States of America champions freedom, it is the only democratic nation in the world to establish itself alongside slavery. Also, postcolonial theorists Ashcroft, Griffiths, and Tiffins also refer to the United States in the same way that the sociologist Gunnar Myrdal did: as a “white man’s country.” This is testament to the subordinate position that minorities, including African Americans, occupy in the Euro-American imagination.
I use an uppercase “H” to denote the hegemonic ideological grand narrative that Euro-American cultures create, perpetuate, and protect regarding themselves and their own histories.

Many of the doctrines articulated by Rousseau and Montesquieu heavily influenced the French and American revolutions. Their ideals were written into government constitutions around the world, and are taken for granted as democratic principles today. For instance, Rousseau’s *On the Social Contract* outlines why democratic governments must separate church and state, and include participation from the people. Montesquieu was one of the first philosophers to note the importance of having three equally important branches of government.

“Mixed lots” refers to different language groups. Slave traders often separated Africans based on their languages in order to prevent an uprising. Therefore, in some Black Diaspora populations, the European tongue became the only tool with which the slaves could communicate.

This is derived from Psalms 68 verse 31 which says, “Princes shall come out of Egypt; Ethiopia shall soon stretch out her hands unto God” (King James Version).

Jomo Kenyatta became first president of Kenya. Kwame NKrumah became first president of Ghana, and George Padmore served as advisor to NKrumah.

Leopold Senghor was a Pan-Africanist and poet, but he also became the first president of the Republic of Senegal, for instance.

In *Ecrits*, Lacan moves away from Freud and theorizes the phallus away from the body. Having a penis, according to Lacan, does not guarantee one a phallus. The phallus is equated with power and authority in the Lacan configuration.

For this project, I also use West African constructions of masculinity, since many slaves in the New World originated from the coast of West Africa. Many historians believe that these traits did survive the Middle Passage, and can be easily accessed in a text like the slave narrative of Venture Smith, an American slave who wrote his story via amanuensis during the late 1700s.

Xala literally means “curse of impotency” in the Wolof language.

Found in *Souls of Black Folk*, particularly the essay “Of Mr. Booker T. Washington and Others.” DuBois repeatedly refers to the right to vote and agitation for political rights as “manhood rights,” and accuses Mr. Washington of giving away Black “manhood rights” with his program of industrial training and delayed political equality for African Americans.

Though Brathwaite, Soyinka, and Baldwin are vociferous critics against Negritude and protest-style literature, I include them here because their criticism of oppositional definitions did help to further the conversations which revolved around Black masculine identity.

Some of the greatest trading empires of West Africa include Ghana, Mali, and Songhay. In the east, Axum and Kush also developed into large trading empires. There was already vibrant trading between the empires of East and West Africa when the Europeans finally made inroads into the interior. Césaire references the Sudanese (in East Africa), Yoruba, and Songhay empires specifically.

According to J. Michael Dash, “verrition,” as Césaire uses it, means to “sweep clean” culturally.
CHAPTER 2: THE INHUMAN LEGACY OF THE ENLIGHTENMENT: RACIALIZED DEGENDERING

The details and symbols of your life have been deliberately constructed to make you believe what white people say about you.

James Baldwin in *The Fire Next Time*

In this chapter, I discuss the paradoxical link among chattel slavery, the growth of mercantile capitalism as a global system, and the emphasis on individual freedom and universal humanism as espoused by Enlightenment philosophers. I use the writings of philosopher and activist Bartolomé las Casas, Hegel’s “Thesis on Africa,” Thomas Carlyle’s 1853 article, “Occasional Discourse on the Nigger Question,” Thomas Jefferson’s *Notes on the State of Virginia* (1781), and the works of French philosopher Nicolas de Condorcet as translated and discussed by political philosopher Louis Sala-Molins to examine some of the original philosophical justifications of the use of Africans as chattel slaves.

I return to chattel slavery and Enlightenment philosophy for several reasons. First, they irrupt onto the world stage roughly simultaneously; second, they are in perfect contradiction to one another; third, chattel slavery introduces Africans to the New World as objects of capitalism, and this slave work force, at its inception, was overwhelmingly composed of African men; fourth, based upon Enlightenment beliefs of European superiority and African inferiority, legislative acts codified Black male objectification into law;
fifth, in order to properly study the types of texts produced by any oppressed group, especially texts written as counter-discursive protests, I feel that it is pivotal to explore the philosophical and historical conditions that produced those texts. For instance, when Black males proclaim, “I am a man,” who and what are they talking to? Sixth, the Transatlantic Slave Trade and much Enlightenment thought developed and ended around roughly the same era, but their effects lingered well into the mid-twentieth century when anticolonial activity became widespread throughout the Diaspora and in Africa. Last, Pan-Africanism, as a viable political counter-narrative to the racialized degendering effect of the Enlightenment developed roughly simultaneously with the Black male literary tradition.

Placed outside of humanity by social reformers, clergy, and philosophers, and legally created as an object outside the law by Plantation legislation, yet pivotal to the burgeoning capitalist system, the slave became more than just an object of commerce and production in Enlightenment discourse; the slave was an ultimate factor in Europe’s politico-economic campaign to establish itself as culturally superior to the rest of humanity. Enslavement of Africans was rationalized and justified by Enlightenment philosophers. Though considered champions of freedom, liberty, and universal humanism, many Enlightenment philosophers held the same racist views as others in their respective societies. Proslavery Enlightenment views often resurfaced both in philosophical writings and in subsequent Plantation laws. Cast in the shadows of the Enlightenment, the African slave who was without legal recourse or voice became the ultimate subaltern “Other.” However, a closer study of the Enlightenment shows that its writings about slavery add another dimension to its justification of slavery which does not include the African ability to form a state or their lack of a written culture. Enlightenment
writings show well-defined European ideals of gender inequality which Europeans tried to impose on other cultures.

In Chapter 1, I use Foucault’s idea that discourse not only names an object, but creates and defines it simultaneously. He first articulates this in *The Archaeology of Knowledge and the Discourse of Language* and extends this premise further in the *History of Sexuality: Will to Knowledge* by using the rhetoric surrounding human sexuality to demonstrate that discourse not only names and defines an object, but that the hegemonic class employs the discourse surrounding the object to maintain its power, economic dominance, and/or an uneven social order. Discourse is thus creator and instrument. It supplements and furthers the ahistorical feel of any particular ideology that it serves. I intend to follow Foucault’s example here using Black subordinate masculinity and the rhetoric surrounding it. I begin with Fanon’s assessment from his famous essay “The Fact of Blackness,” which explicitly states that the Black man is predetermined. To paraphrase Fanon, the Black man is made through hegemonic discourse: through anecdotes, stories, tales, lies, stereotypes, and even laws. He declares:

> And so it is not I who make a meaning for myself, but it is the meaning that was already there, pre-existing, waiting for me. It is not out of my bad nigger’s misery, my bad nigger’s teeth, my bad nigger’s hunger that I will shape a torch with which to burn down the world, but it is the torch that was already there, waiting for that turn of history. [134]

James Baldwin also addresses this feeling of being constructed “always-already” in the epigraph of this essay. In one of his most famous pieces, *The Fire Next Time*, Baldwin cautions his
nephew about the things that have been scripted upon his Black male body before he even utters one word.

The naming of African men as less than human and their creation as objects outside of the law for economic exploitation was a deliberate process. Once the Trans-Atlantic Slave Trade began and the economic benefits from chattel slavery increased, Enlightenment philosophers provided philosophical “reasons” for race-based slavery. One particularly insidious and lasting justification for enslavement of African men used by Enlightenment philosophers was the notion that they are somehow less “manly” than European men. This rationalization, featured in Hegel’s “Thesis on Africa” is based upon the fact that African cultures, particularly those along the West Coast, practiced a more egalitarian system of gender than European cultures. To the European philosopher, this made African men appear feminine and African women appear more masculine. African labor divisions simply did not fit Enlightenment notions of gender, and philosophers could not find a European cultural model in order to make a comparison. Therefore, Enlightenment philosophers rationalized that African men were not “real” men, and should be enslaved and made to support European men. The way in which African males were portrayed by philosophers and the policies they influenced is a process I call racialized degendering.

In her essay “Theorizing Ruptures in Gender Systems and the Project Modernity in the Twentieth Century Caribbean,” Violet Barritteau focuses on the effect of European Enlightenment thought and gender inequality upon the New World. First, Barritteau paraphrases the key principles of the Enlightenment as follows:

The belief that rationality is the mechanism or means by which to achieve autonomy.
The notion that an individual and citizen is a male household head.

The separation and differentiation of society into the private sphere (world of dependence) comprising family and kinship groups and the public sphere (world of freedom) comprising work, economy, and the state.

The gendering of that differentiation so that women are posed in opposition to civil society, to civilization (Flax 1990: 6). [34]

Integral to Barriteau’s essay are separation of the private and public space. The private space belonged to women, and the public domain strictly belonged to men. African men shared the workspace –the public arena –with African women. According to European Enlightenment notions of gender, African men did not properly dominate the public sphere and excise women from that sphere, or the “world of freedom,” and since they did not belong to the public sphere, they were undeserving of citizenship in the New World, or in the case of colonialist policies, in Africa.

One of the more insidious, ridiculous examples of racialized degendering of African males is Hegel’s notoriously racist “Thesis on Africa” from The Philosophy or History. I could have chosen Kant here, who is equally racist, but I use Hegel because “his explanation of slavery is philosophy doing the work of history” (Diggins 219). He uses historical “facts” in order to philosophically justify enslavement of Africans. Historians cannot be sure of where Hegel obtained his secondary sources for the intractably grotesque piece on Sub-Saharan Africans. Other philosophers and historians declare that “the book has been posthumously published and that he relied on the paucity and insufficiency of the anthropology of the time” (Camara 93). According to Joseph McCarney in Hegel on History, Hegel “has for the most part to rely on the
tales of travelers, officials, and missionaries eager to highlight the primitive and exotic…” (142).

He never personally visited Africa; that much is evident in his writings. Despite the paucity of information concerning the interior of Africa, Hegel cruelly assesses the cultures of the West African coast. Some historians theorize that Hegel used a fantastically bizarre travel story of a non-descript African government in order to stereotype all African males, and to rationalize Europe’s total disregard of traditionally-respected African governments.

Ensconced in Hegel’s racist language is implicit gender inequality. Though historians and philosophers have provided a plethora of information debunking Hegel’s racism concerning Africa, his gendered language has remained relatively unnoticed. First, Hegel attacks the validity of African kings by implying that kings and their rulership actions are dictated by the will of the people and actually has very little to do with actual phallic authority. When the king fails to do the bidding of this people, according to Hegel, the people punish him in a most peculiar manner: “Sometimes also a deputation is sent, which intimates to him, that the burden of government must have been very troublesome to him, and that he had better rest for a little. The king then thanks his subject, goes into his apartments, and has himself strangled by the women” (97). Thus, the African king, according to Hegel, is not a legitimate patriarchal king, since he allows women to kill him. Since they use brute strength, strangulation, rather than a weapon to kill a man, African women are masculine. By labeling African kings as weak rulers and even weaker men and African women as possessors of unusual upper-body and hand strength, he completely inverts the traditional European gender division and successfully degenders African people.

Hegel further degenders Africans in this thesis by lending legitimacy to an even more bizarre tale. He retells a myth about female domination in a nondescript African culture:
Tradition alleges that in former times a state composed of women made itself famous by its conquests: it was a state whose head was a woman. She is said to have pounded her own son in a mortar to have besmeared herself with the blood, and to have had the blood of pounded children constantly at hand. She is said to have driven away or put to death all male children…Captives in war were taken as husbands: pregnant women had to betake themselves outside encampment; and if they had born a son, put him out of the way. [97]

Upon first glance, it is very difficult to separate this from one of the many myths about Amazonian women prevalent in Western literature of antiquity. However, Hegel, as a philosopher, lends credence to this tale in order to draw a conclusion which rationalizes African enslavement. African women are murderously masculine and sexually deviant; therefore, slavery for Africans “is itself a phase of advance form the merely isolated sensual existence –a phase of education –a mode of becoming participant in a higher morality and culture connected to it” (99). According to Hegel, slavery humanizes Africans because African males learn to be more like men by virtue of contact with European men –even the most dehumanizing form of contact, and African women learn to be properly subordinate to men.

Perhaps Hegel’s aversion to African culture cannot be attributed to racism alone, but also to his adherence to strict notions of gender domains as listed by Barriteau. Though historians cannot adequately verify where Hegel may have heard or read such ridiculous tales of African female domination and murder, they have long recorded that “it was the rule, however –not the exception –that the African female, in both indigenous African cultures and in what becomes her
‘home,’ performed tasks of hard physical labor” (Spillers 467). The notion of women who also share the public domain with men, in any culture, is diametrically-opposed to Enlightenment discourse on gender, because “[i]deologically women’s gender-role identity was confined to that of homemaker, nurturer and reproducer of the labor force” (Barriteau 40). The propensity for some African cultures to practice a more egalitarian division of physical labor between men and women in contrast to the grand vision of gender inequality of the Enlightenment served to further “Other” people of African descent in European discourse.

During the era of European colonialism, the accumulation of material wealth became increasingly associated with socio-economic progress, and philosophical writings like Hegel’s served that agenda well.¹ Spain was a global powerhouse after discovering new lands, building trading posts, and establishing settler colonies far away from the Iberian Peninsula.² Thus, Spain became the first European country to embark upon a global mercantile capitalist venture. However, Spain’s new venture did not come cheaply, because “large scale production required extensive resource mobilization and strategic entrepreneurial planning” (Beckles 778). Capital and initial production equipment came from the mainland while natural resources were extracted and refined from the colonies. The finished product was then shipped back to the main land and consumed by a growing European middle class. As a global power, Spain held several successful plantations established off the coast of Africa and the Iberian Peninsula by the early 1500s. There were successful, large-scale sugar cane producing plantations in the Canary Islands, Madeira, Sao Tome, and the Cape Verde islands. At first, the Spaniards used native labor alongside Moors and sub-Saharan Africans, “but very quickly Africans became the dominant slave labor force on the estates” (Klein and Vinson 15). African slaves, already familiar with Spanish custom and laws were known as ladinos, “or ‘Europeanized’ African
slaves to distinguish them from the bozales, or non-Europeanized Africans” (Klein and Vinson 14). Many ladinos were highly-skilled on the sugar mill plantations, helping to make them successful. These early sugar cane plantations served as models for sugar producing ventures in the New World. Thus, Klein and Vinson assert that the idea of a plantation was firmly rooted in the Americas long before the invention of the triangular slave trade.

Meanwhile, in the New World, the Spanish used Native Americans in a brutal ecomienda system, mainly for mining and leatherworking. The plantation owners “quickly discovered that Hispianola’s soil and climate brought along on [Columbus’s] second voyage in 1493, and Spaniards began milling cane sugar commercially on the island between 1505 and 1515” (Guitar 44). Of course, sugar cane labor is brutal, and is still commonly known throughout the New World as “the farming of bones.” Many Native Americans died due to the brutal labor and exposure to European diseases such as small pox. Bartolomé de las Casas, social reformer, priest, and historian for the region, often appealed to the Spanish crown for the release of Native Americans from the encomienda and ingenio (Spanish word for sugar cane plantations) systems. The Spanish acquiesced, but was left with a problem: “[t]he modern plantation required, for its optimal running, the existence of an army of unemployment workers” (Fraginals 6). In order for any mill to be economically profitable, it required a large cheap (in the case of slavery, free) labor force.

Having successfully argued that native populations such as the Caribs and Arawaks were indeed human, Las Casas suggested the use of Africans to fill the void. His writings show that he was unsure of the full humanity of African people. In his masterfully-crafted text In Defense of Indians (1553), Las Casas defines three kinds of barbarians: any reckless man who disregards
order, those without a written language to correspond to their spoken one, and those without a clearly-defined government or state. Of the three, Las Casas identifies the latter as the worst:

Finally, caring nothing for life in a society, they lead a life very much like that of brute animals. Since they fall so far short of either men in intellectual capacity and behavior, they are inclined to harm others. Barbarians of this kind (or better, wild men) are rarely found in any part of the world and are few in numbers when compared to the rest of mankind, as Aristotle notes at the beginning of the seventh book of *Ethics*…Therefore, for the most part, nature brings forth and produces what is best and perfect. Rarely do natural causes fail to produce the effects which follow from their natures. Seldom is man born lame, crippled, blind, or one-eyed, or with soles on top of their feet, as some were in Africa, according to the testimony of Augustine and others. [33-34]

Because most African kingdoms along the West Coast of the Continent were mainly oral, this automatically qualified them as the worst barbarians, according to Las Casas. Using second-hand, more than likely exaggerated information from travel narratives, Las Casas lists Africans in his text as those possessing of some sort of degraded humanity or less than fully human. In that case, he approved of substituting Africans for Native Americans and successfully lobbied the crown to change their policy. In *History of the Indies* (1527), Las Casas explains how he accomplished his task: “at that time the clergy man [Las Casas] enjoyed the favor of the King and was in charge of promoting the Indian cause; thus he procured black slaves in exchange for
Indian freedom” (257). With the blessing of Las Casas, the first African slaves were shipped en masse across the Atlantic for the sole purpose of working on sugar cane plantations.

Many of the first slaves transplanted to the New World plantations were ladinos who were accustomed to certain civil liberties under Spanish law. As the demand for sugar escalated on the global market, so did the need for labor. Ladinos, accustomed to limited freedom and movement, did not readily adjust to the harsher work demands and restrictions of their mobility. In 1522, they revolted on Hispianola. Afterwards, Spanish authorities began importing bozales because they were unfamiliar with both the Spanish civil liberties and the New World terrain. However, the population of African men exploded, outnumbering the Spanish on several islands. The growth of the population caused Las Casas to regret his decision. Benitez-Rojo, Spanish Caribbean historian, explains in *The Repeating Island* that “Las Casas had been precisely among those who had advised the crown to introduce black slaves in the New World’s first plantations, and was, at the same time, one of the first to lament the consequences of the slave traffic” (85).

In *Historia*, Las Casas equates the presence of Africans to a plague on the European islands:

> Before the mills, we used to think that unless he were hanged a Negro would not die. We had never seen any die of illness; like orange trees, they take to this land better than to their native soil. But after they were put in the mills, the work and the cane syrup concoctions they drank caused such deaths and illnesses among them that they escaped their misery by fleeing to the woods and from there they cruelly attacked the Spaniards. No small Spanish settlement was safe and this was another plague sent to the island.

[258]
He deftly captures the economic need, the resistance offered by the ladinos and bozales, and the ensuing terror experienced by white Spaniards, but it is rather chilling and telling that Las Casas, a clergyman, likens African people to a punishment from God. For the first time, European writers and island dwellers labeled Black men as things to be feared and demanded better protection from them.

After the rebellion on Hispaniola, Caribbean Spaniards demanded laws to help plantation owners and overseers better control slave populations. The new laws increasingly restricted the limited freedoms enjoyed by the slaves. According to Lynn Guitar in her recent essay about the New World’s very first plantations, “Boiling It Down,” the new ordinances worked to keep slaves from other ingenious, restrict slave movement (many slaves, especially the ladinos, could simply walk away from the plantation and return at their leisure), prohibit them from bearing arms, eliminate the selling of services by slaves, and require ingenio supervisors to keep strict records of their slaves. This is the first instance of African slaves, particularly the male slaves, being required by law to be recorded as pieces of inventory alongside animals and equipment.

Creating laws that listed African men as pieces of inventory ensured that slaves would never reach humanity or manhood, the highest possible form of subjectivity. While many of the laws targeted slaves generally, many others were passed with the specific purpose of limiting Black males since much of the workforce on plantation was Black males. A brief review of the historical records of the earliest New World Plantation inventory records quickly reveals that most sugar cane plantations were mainly run by males of African descent, alongside a few Native American males. Therefore, many of the general laws targeted the male population. For example, a graph provided by the 1985 study of Engerman, Fraginals and Pons of the Spanish Caribbean, Between Slavery and Free Labor: the Spanish-Speaking Caribbean in the Nineteenth
Century, reveals that male slaves outnumber their female counterparts by more than double on some ingenios. General laws were passed at first; for instance, one law declares that slaves in the Spanish Isles could no longer gain manumission through marriage or military service, and children of slave mothers followed the condition of the mother, even if the father were free. Though Spanish slaves retained some recourse through the Spanish court system, the courts increasingly ruled against slaves and in favor of ingenio owners and supervisors, according to historian Belinda Edmondson. Finally, ordinances were passed which sanctioned the use of force through iron collars, whippings, or even death for slaves who failed to follow these new laws. Other laws were more gender specific; for example, in order to appease the male slaves, the Catholic Church recommended that husband and wives be kept together. For those slaves who had no wives, Queen Juanna and Emperor Charles sanctioned the importation of more females, hoping that the affection between man and woman would keep males on the plantation without much use of force. The measures quickly spread throughout the rest of the Caribbean.

European nations passed these ordinances before the United States or Brazil established themselves as major contributors to the global, mercantile capitalist system through slave labor. This is why Klein and Vinson state that “well before the massive transplantation of Africans across the Atlantic, the American slave plantation system had been born” (Klein and Vinson 16). Once profitability of the product and economic need for free labor with which to produce it were established, the legal precedent soon followed, but not before African people were named barbaric and African males on the islands listed as plagues and pieces of inventory. Old World philosophers crafted the negative portrayals of African males while the New World plantation codified them into law. The New World Plantation then became a system of negative differentiation that not even the rational thought of the Enlightenment could penetrate.
In her groundbreaking essay “Mama’s Baby, Papa’s Maybe,” Hortense Spillers claims that any kind of African identity, specifically gender differentiation, was temporarily suspended in the Middle Passage. A closer examination of slave ship drawings and other representations of the earliest Africans brought to the New World show an extreme degree of degendering. The bodies are humans, with the children’s bodies drawn as smaller than adults’, but it is impossible to distinguish between the sexes. In many slave ships, care is not taken to record names, age, and sexes of the Africans travelling forcibly to the New World, and “under those conditions, one is neither female nor male, as both subjects are taken in ‘accounts’ as quantities” (Spillers 466). Once disembarked from the slave ship and onto New World soil, people of African descent became gendered once again. African males became work objects, and African females became both work object and work incentive for the males. Peter Kolchin also notes the extreme racial inequality that slavery was based upon in his study on New World slavery, American Slavery, 1619-1877, “on the global and the individual level, the racial character of New World slavery was significant: that slavery was predicated on new, unequal relationships between Europe and Africa and between white and Black” (6). In addition, it also rested upon Enlightenment ideals about what constitutes masculine and feminine behavior. In spite of deep linguistic and cultural differences in these European powers, they shared one plantation commonality in the New World: refusal to recognize African males as men based upon European gender roles. African men are faux men in Enlightenment and colonialist literature in that they possess penises and may be as old as their masters, but their sharing of public space with African women ensures that they do not possess proper phallic authority. Yet, in a plantation economy, even the slightest recognition of Africans as men, rational human beings who deserve to be in the sphere of
freedom and heads of households could wreak economic havoc. How can pieces of inventory be human, let alone the ultimate human, men?

Proponents of the TransAtlantic Slave Trade used their racialized ideas about African males’ lack of masculinity to argue against the abolition of the slave trade. In an acutely racist satirical essay “Occasional Discourse on the Nigger Question,” Thomas Carlyle argues that slavery must continue because African males are simply not men based on several benchmarks for masculinity. First, he claims that those of African descent do not deserve freedom in the West Indies because they did not make the West Indies profitable. He claims that the islands lay uncultivated and wild “till the white European first saw them, they were as if not yet created – their noble elements of cinnamon, sugar, coffee, pepper black and grey, lying all asleep, waiting the white Enchanter who should say to them, Awake” (Carlyle 674-675). Carlyle, using a fictional speaker, then recounts the heroic deeds of the various British explorers who first “made” the Caribbean:

…heroic white men, worthy to be called old Saxons, brown with a mahogany tint in those new climates and conditions. But under the soil of Jamaica, before it could even produce spices or any pumpkin, the bones of many thousand British men had to be laid. Brave Colonel Fortescue, brave Colonel Sedgwick, brave Colonel Brayne –the dust of many thousand strong old English hearts lie there; worn down swiftly in frightful travail, chaining the Devils, which were manifold. [676]

In “taming” the West Indies for large-scale agricultural operations, Carlyle argues, white men are entitled to the produce and the freedom the lands offer, even if those things are obtained through
chattel slavery. Diametrically opposed to brave, economically successful white men, according to Carlyle, are lazy Black males who he refers to repeatedly as “Quashee,” “cattle,” and “pig,” among other derogatory names. Second, Carlyle claims that men of African descent cannot be free in the West Indies because they did not venture from their home continents to wrest the lands from their indigenous inhabitants or provide the capital with which to conduct large-scale agricultural operations. Of Black men and the islands he writes: “Quashee knows himself, whether ever he could have introduced an improvement. Him, had he by a miraculous chance been wafted thither, the Caribals would have eaten, rolling as a fat morsel under their tongue; for him, till the sounding of the Trump of Doom, the rattle snakes and savageries would have held on their way” (674). Not only does he strip even hypothetical agency from African males by writing they would have “wafted” to the islands instead of sailing there like European men, he also declares that African males would not have been successful in subduing the Caribs and Arawaks enough to install any colonies.

Last, Carlyle argues that Black males are not men and do not deserve the same freedoms as white men because they had not formed a state in the New World. He uses the first and only Black republic in the New World, Haiti, a relatively new and struggling nation at the time of his essay: “Haiti –with little or no sugar growing, black Peter exterminating Black Paul, and where a garden of the Hesperades might be, is nothing but a tropical dog-kennel and pestiferous jungle” (Carlyle 675). Carlyle does not mention European powers’ frequent interference in Haitian affairs. He also does not mention any of the kingdoms of Africa, either out of ignorance or sheer disrespect and disregard for the authority of African rulership. Based on these assessments, Carlyle recommends that chattel slavery continue. Carlyle determines that Black males should do the hard physical labor of a global supply-demand based economy in order to free European
thinkers to construct and support greater social development. Carlyle asserts that culture belongs only to European men, while inferring that African men are devoid of any culture and should be relegated to the body and not the mind.

If racialized degendering were a litmus test for the British and Spanish Enlightenment philosophers and activists, the French and Americans failed it also. Louis Sala-Molins, in his scrutiny of French Enlightenment thinkers Condorcet, Montesquieu, Rousseau, and Diderot describes this hypocrisy very metaphorically in his book, *Dark Side of the Light: Slavery and the French Enlightenment* (2006):

The Enlightenment composes the music, fills it with the most beautiful harmonies of a grand symphony to the glory of Reason, Man, the Sovereignty of the individual, and universal Philanthropy. This score is being beautifully performed until suddenly a black man erupts in the middle of the concert. What at that point becomes of Man, Sovereignty, Reason, Philanthropy? They disappear into thin air. And the beautiful music pierces your eardrums with the gratings of sarcasm. Clearly, the crucial test case for the Enlightenment is the slave trade and slavery. [8]

Sala-Molins posits that, slavery and neither Jews nor women, are the real testament to Enlightenment philosophy. Sala-Molins claims that French philosopher Condorcet in his work, *Code Noir*, explains that slavery is mutually beneficial for both master and slaves. His arguments are not much different from those English and Spanish philosophers. In doing so, he concedes that Africans are not humans, and contact - any contact - with Europeans serves to humanize them, and turn European men into benevolent patriarchs. Condorcet works to “prove” his point
by claiming that “[the master] rushes to his plantation to shed his tyrannical ways, to don the authority of the just and humane sovereign to commit himself to making human beings out of his slaves” (Condorcet in Sala-Molins 24). As the master becomes accustomed to God-like authority, Condorcet reasons, the vices of the master disappears, and the slaves become more human. Sala-Molins points out that Condorcet paints a picture of African frenzy akin to that in Joseph Conrad’s *Heart of Darkness* in his philosophical writings. Plantation life offers a sharp contrast to Africa, which he calls “the rustic but innocent simplicity of patriarchal life” (Condorcet in Sala-Molins 25). Condorcet claims that Africans are even happier in plantation life than in the freedom of their homelands.

Couched in Condorcet’s comments is also gender when speaking of the plantation master. In Condorcet’s configuration, plantation society is a patriarchal society, one designed for the socio-economic benefit of European males. Legally, he defines African men in essentially the same way as other philosophers: as males who are not and cannot be men in the European sense. A patriarchal life would benefit African males in much the same way it does certain other European classes according to Condorcet. In the tradition of Las Casas, Condorcet questions the mental capacity of Black males by comparing them with “madmen” and “idiots” of European society, those who need constant supervision and do not belong in the public sphere: “Thus there are natural rights of which very young children are deprived as are madmen and idiots” (Condorcet in Sala-Molins 18). Based upon this assessment, Condorcet recommends that emancipation for slaves should be delayed until Black males reach the age of 35 and are somewhat capable of providing for a household economically.

Though historians have produced many works which prove that Thomas Jefferson, a United States president and slave owner, also left behind valuable philosophical works, they
have traditionally ignored his explicit racism. Based upon the biological data at the time, Jefferson concluded that people of African descent were “naturally” inferior to Europeans. While historians and philosophers make a case for an “American” Enlightenment, “Jefferson’s failure to see the errors in his own mode of reasoning on racial equality suggests a great deal about the pathos of the Enlightenment” (Diggins 207). Like the European Enlightenment, historians, critics, and philosophers are also hesitant to discuss the racialized degendering so blatantly obvious in Jefferson’s philosophical writings. For instance, Jefferson observes in *Notes on the State of Virginia* that “comparing [Blacks] by their faculties of memory, reason, and imagination, it appears to me, that in memory they are equal to the whites; in reason much inferior, as I think one could scarcely be found capable of comprehending the investigations of Euclids” (139). Jefferson does not note that under plantation law, production of slave scholars was made not only impossible, but illegal. Therefore, the basis of his argument is unfounded. In order to prove the validity of his biological racism, Jefferson compares American slavery to that of Roman slavery. He argues that though Epictetus, Terrance, and Phaedrus were slaves, they excelled in reason. He attributes this to the Romans’ skin color, which he considers white, and does not feel that enslavement is enough to dull reasoning. When he compares the Romans to African slaves he declares that “It is not [the slaves] condition then, but nature, which has produced the distinction” (140). Nature, and not European racially biased reasoning, created the African as the anti-reasoning “other,” Jefferson rationalizes.

Yet, Jefferson tries to reconcile his love of freedom and individual liberty with his status as a slave owner. In order to do so, like most Enlightenment philosophers, he turns to racialized degendering by labeling Black women as sexual deviants and relegating Black males to the body even in literary criticism. Jefferson’s “views on race may have been derived from his own
‘libidinous energy’ which he unconsciously transferred to the ‘aggressive’ and ‘crudely sensuous’ Black women; thereby projecting onto the Negro a ‘lower’ nature that he denied himself” (Diggins 212). Like Hegel, Jefferson masculinizes Black women, but he does not state that Black males are effeminate because of the “crudely sensuous” nature of Black women. Rather, he acknowledges their physical bravery, as well as the affection African men feel for African women. But, he repeatedly declares that Black males take action both in war and love without much reasoning beforehand. He then turns to literature produced by an African American slave, Phyllis Wheatley, and an Afro-British man, Ignatius Sancho in order to “prove” his theory. He scornfully announces that Wheatley’s poetry is more emotional, religious rhetoric unworthy of criticism at all before quickly turning to the male’s text. He analyses Sancho’s work writing:

Ignatius Sancho has approached nearer to merit in composition: yet his letters do more honor to the heart than to the head…He is often happy in the turn of his compliments, and his st[y]le is easy and familiar, except when he affects Shandean fabrication of words. But his imagination is wild and extravagant, escape incessantly from every restraint of reason and taste, and in the course of its vagaries, leaves a tract of thought as incoherent and eccentric, as is the course of a meteor through the sky. His subjects should often have led him to a process of sober reasoning: yet we find him always substituting sentiment for demonstration. [140]

Even in highly nuanced literature, Jefferson cannot bring himself to recognize the intellectual capacity of males of African descent. He attributes Sancho’s literary productions to mere
mimicry, and implies that Sancho, a Black man, cannot use reason to create any quality literature. Jefferson’s analysis places Black male authors and Black males in general, outside of reason. According to Jefferson’s logic, “the captive Black man was in a double bind. If he strove to assimilate white culture, he only proved his dependency on that culture; hence Jefferson’s haughty dismissals of the intellectual accomplishments of writers like Ignatius Sancho and Phyllis Wheatley” (Diggins 215). Using his literary analysis of Sancho, Jefferson concludes, like the aforementioned philosophers, that slavery is actually beneficial to the enslaved if they are of African descent. According to Jefferson, Black men simply do not possess the intellect to wield phallic authority and must learn to at least mimic the way Euro-American men wield such authority.

Because the freedoms and personal independence treasured by Enlightenment philosophers shared a symbiotic relationship with chattel slavery, the Enlightenment contained the kernels of its own demise (some historians say that since chattel slavery was established in the United States before its independence, the Enlightenment was dead on arrival there). On the one hand, Enlightenment philosophers valued reason, the ability to self-govern, and maintenance of strict gender divisions—with femaleness being understood as inferior—as prerequisites for freedom and entry into the public sphere. On the other hand, economic demands and Plantation law assured Euro-American men that only they could partake in the public sphere. They designed laws so that no other males, especially not the ones who toiled away on the Plantation, offered them any kind of economic or patriarchal competition. The Enlightenment, then, left behind a paradoxical legacy: freedom, liberty, and universal humanism alongside chattel slavery, racialized degendering, Euro-American patriarchal supremacy, and the African as the ultimate “other.” The equality and liberties enjoyed by Euro-Americans rested upon the work-worn
shoulders of Native Americans, and later, African slaves. A universal necessity of plantation law in the New World, whether the lands belonged to Britain, France, Spain, America, or Portugal was the philosophical castration and economic bondage of Black males. This trend continued long after the Enlightenment and slavery ended. Though the plantation ended, the laws that initially legalized Black male dehumanization continued in order to keep a pliable workforce. After slavery ended, newer forms of discrimination and exploitation ensured that Black masculinity comprised a subordinate form of masculinity in the United States and throughout the Black Diaspora.

As the economy shifted from mercantile capitalism to industrial capitalism or a market-driven economy where industrial machinery replaced the need for many hands, chattel slavery was no longer as profitable and came to a close. Though many historians pontificate on the moral reasons for ending slavery, historians like W.E.B. DuBois note that those reasons were partly driven by the change in economic demands, and European powers turned once again to Africa: this time for raw materials and new markets. A newer form of economic exploitation developed as slavery died: “While the slave trade helped the growth of mercantile capitalism in England, colonialism supplied the tropical raw materials demanded by the second phase of capitalism, namely industrial capitalism” (Ekey 100). In many places the labor requirements, due the heavy extraction of raw materials, remained practically unchanged from slavery to freedom, particularly in the Caribbean and the American South. Historian Fraginals explicitly links the exploitation of manual workers and newer, industrial capitalism, stating, “as a result of the industrialization process, the productivity of the agricultural worker, especially that of the cane cutter, remained the same, for, as mentioned, the methods of cultivating and harvesting had not evolved” (5). In the American South where the cash crop was cotton, harvesting it still
required manual labor. Ex-slaves simply became sharecroppers in a system that was as restrictive as the plantation. In Africa, extracting of resources such as diamonds, gold, lumber, sugar, and tea also required dangerous manual labor, preferably done by masculine Black hands. In order to support economic demands, European powers implemented laws that resembled those of the plantation. Historians agree that “on the ground in Africa, colonialism made use of the same institutions as the slave trade” (Ekeh 100). During the 1880s, and well into the 1900s, European governments subjugated indigenous African populations by force and Parliamentary acts that were remarkably similar to New World plantation laws. The laws and their enforcement certainly shared the same objective as plantation laws: to keep the mostly masculine labor force pliable and dependent upon a plantation style of economics and injustice both on the continent and in the New World.

When laws failed to subdue the Black labor force, hideous violent tactics were deployed against Black males. In addition to Black Code and Jim Crow laws in the United States, and clearly racist colonialist laws and practices in the Caribbean and throughout Africa, Black men faced ritualized violence, castration, and lynching at the hands of white American men. Trudier Harris in *Excorsing Blackness: Historical and Literary Lynching and Burning Rituals* focuses on the ritualistic aspects of the violence. She argues that there was the collective psychological need to maintain Enlightenment notions of European superiority. This was often achieved through ritualized, communal violence against mostly young, Black males: “It was very early conveyed to all Blacks, and especially to Black men, that full humanity was not to be granted to them…Most central to this discussion is the emasculation of Black men” (Harris 29). In North America, lynching became the ultimate physical and symbolic denial of Black male adulthood. Through word and heinous deed, the hegemonic culture declared that “Black men were things,
not men, and if they dared to claim any privileges of manhood, whether sexual, economic, or political they risked execution (Harris x). In those conditions, Black men could not hold any phallic authority.

Some suppression techniques were peculiar to certain regions of the Black Diaspora. In the Caribbean, historian Moon-Ho Jung writes in *Coolies and Cane: Race, Labor, and Sugar in the Age of Emancipation* that “British West Indian and Cuban planters began hiring Asian workers in the 1830s and 1840s to ease and to delay the end of slavery without interrupting production” (4). European landlords gave Asian employees legal contracts, higher wages, and socio-economic benefits while denying their Black counterparts similar benefit. In Africa, in some places, Black males were actually beaten and whipped in order to force them to continue working. Others obtained work under less oppressive conditions, but the work itself was often brutal and risky with only the most dangerous jobs reserved for African men. Apparently, in Africa, the United States, and the Caribbean the racism which ushered in the Enlightenment lingered long after it and slavery ended. Post-emancipation, Black males were still viewed by the hegemony as “faux men” and were given subservient jobs with meager wages to reflect these attitudes. Questions about the humanity of Black people remained.

One of the measures of humanity and reason during the Enlightenment was literacy, particularly writing. Many slaves struggled to prove their humanness by learning to read or producing literature while facing very difficult obstacles, including the threat of physical punishment or death. By proving that they were literate and thereby human, some slaves won their freedom. For economic purposes, masters ended this practice in most slave-holding societies in the New World. Yet, slaves continued to learn to read illegally, using their writings to speak for them in a form of protest alongside rebellions and other acts meant to undermine the
plantation economic and legal system. The long history of discursive emasculation certainly influenced the literature produced by Black people. Trudier Harris states how history, violence, and politics work in tandem in literature produced by Black people, writing that “Black writers begin with the realistic depictions of violence in their history, then move to a political level where such depictions become statements of the oppression of a people” (x). Also, Leopold Senghor describes the aesthetics of Pan-Africanist writings that is true of most early writings produced by Africans in the New World even before “Pan-Africanism” entered the lexicon; they serve as an art form in which art, history, and politics coalesce to become a re-presentation of life as a person of African descent in the New World.

Since plantation law started in the New World, it logically follows that Pan-Africanism also began in the New World. Pan-Africanist historian Colin Legum declares that “it developed through what Dr. Shepperson described as ‘a complicated Atlantic triangle of influences between the New World, Europe, and Africa’” (14). However, the Black literary tradition was sharply differentiated between the sexes. Whereas Black females tended to talk about the atrocities committed against the communities where they lived, Black males tended to write on a more individualistic level, listing the physical and psychological ramifications of their oppression on their development as men. They also tend to speak directly to the discourse that emasculates them. A perfect example of this writing is David Walker’s “Appeal” which appeared circa 1839 in the United States. In his fiery essay, Walker incorporates American slavery as part of a global system of oppression, recognizes the global systemic oppression of Black men in particular, and speaks directly to emasculating Enlightenment discourse using Thomas Jefferson’s *Notes on the State of Virginia*. Walker’s writing is indicative of the Black masculine direct challenge to Enlightenment discourse:
I therefore ask the whole American people, had I not rather die, or
be put to death, than to be a slave to any tyrant, who takes not only
my own, but my wife and children’s lives by inches? Yeah, would
I meet death with avidity far! Far!! In preference to such servile
submission to the murderous hands of tyrants. Mr. Jefferson’s
very severe remarks on us have been so extensively argued upon
by men whose attainments in literature, I shall never be able to
reach, that I would not have meddled with it, were it not to solicit
each of my brethren, who has the spirit of a man, to buy a copy of
Mr. Jefferson’s “Notes on Virginia,” and put it in the hand of his
son. For let no one of us suppose that the refutations which have
been written by our white friends are enough – they are whites – we
are blacks. We, and the world wish to see the charges of Mr.
Jefferson refuted by the blacks themselves, according to their
chance; for we must remember that what the whites have written
respecting this subject, is other men’s labors, and did not emanate
from the blacks. [236]

Though the “Appeal” artfully uses Biblical rhetoric, Walker makes obvious the laws that prohibit
Black men from being heads of household while watching their wives and children also perform
hard labor for white masters. Walker also refutes Jefferson, a slave owner, by speaking to him,
specifically. Last, Walker asks that Black men take up their own pens to refute writers like
Jefferson rather than letting whites, even ones sympathetic to the abolitionist cause, to speak for
them.
Other early Black male writers, such as W.E.B. DuBois and C.L.R. James of Trinidad, also spent a large bulk of their time refuting paradoxical Enlightenment ideals about Africa and African people. For instance, J. J. Thomas “spent many years explaining and rebutting the racist Enlightenment opinions of 19th-century English intellectuals such as Anthony Froude and Thomas Carlyle (Beckles 787). These writers also equated obtaining political and economic rights, whether by peaceful protest or through a declaration of war like the Haitian Revolution, with recognition of their manhood, or the ultimate humanity. Some writers and artists, with little knowledge of their African homeland or ancestry, painted glowing pictures of pristine Africa free of European cultural contamination. Black men became warrior-kings and/or patriarchs with unlimited access to African women and domination of their households. These portrayals of Africa were usually culturally nondescript and were used strictly to counter notions like Hegel’s or Carlyle’s. Though these earlier political and autobiographical writings are not without many problems in their monolithic portrayals of Africa, they provide the foundation for what later became Pan-Africanist writings.

As slavery ended, Black writers began to engage in more creative forms of writing and literature. Autobiography remained a large part of Black literature, but Black writers also began to write novels, drama, and poetry as well particularly at the turn of the 20th century. However, as the law and discriminatory practices remained restrictive to Black people in the New World and colonialism increasingly oppressed Africans, Black writers carried the need to cry against continued dehumanization from the more serious writings into their creative literary products. For Black male writers on the continent and throughout the Black Diaspora, the literary focus remained on creating plausible Black masculine characters in addition to continued oppositional dialogue with Enlightenment era notions concerning Black masculinity –or lack thereof.
Historians often do not use exact dates for this era, but approximations. Most agree that it spans from the early 1500s and lasts well into the 19th century.

When discussing the early colonial era, I use the Iberian Peninsula because Spain and Portugal were combined under one crown.

Though History of the Indies was written at an earlier date than In Defense of Indians, publication of the text was suppressed. Las Casas originally began writing it in the 1520s, and it was planned as a six-volume work. However, it was not published until the 1560s, toward the end of his life. Many of the subjects that Las Casas discusses in the latter text became taboo for the Spanish crown. For instance, in this text, he admits that African slavery was as wrong as Indian slavery and that Africans are human just as any other people. For his revelations, some pro-imperialists within the Spanish crown labeled him as a traitor to his own country.

The Spanish operated under the old, Roman laws which recognized the humanity of its slaves and allowed them certain privileges. For example, they could marry or serve in the military in exchange for freedom, sell their goods and services, and purchase their freedom.

I use an uppercase “P” to denote the entire system throughout the New World. When most people, scholars included, think of the plantation system, they tend to think only of the American South.

This essay, originally published in Fraser’s Magazine for Town and Country in 1840, sparked a debate concerning the abolition of slavery between John Stuart Mill and Thomas Carlyle. These exchanges were collected into a pamphlet and retitled Occasional Discourse on the Negro Question. I use the essay in its original format as published by Fraser’s.

Slave historian Winthrop Jordan and American historian Adrienne Koch use Notes on the State of Virginia (1785) for their discussions of Jefferson as a philosopher. See Jordan’s White Over Black: American Attitudes Towards the Negro 1550-1812 (1968), and Koch’s The Philosophy of Thomas Jefferson (1943).

Jefferson neglects to inform the readers of his works that at the time of his writing, literacy of slaves was severely discouraged, except for reading the Bible. During early American slavery, slaves could gain manumission if they could at least read the Bible. As the institution grew in profitability, reading for slaves was made illegal, and punishable by whippings, beatings, or being sold away from families.

Historians and geneticists have proven that Jefferson conducted a long-term love affair and fathered children with one of his Black female slaves. Jefferson had difficulty reconciling his public sentiments with his private actions, mixing the domains of the public free world with the private domestic one. The many mixed-race children, not all of them products of master-slave rape, produced during slavery are visible examples of the inability of Enlightenment thinkers to reconcile public racism with private action.

Wheatley became the first African American to publish a book, and to garner international acclaim. In 1773, her book, Poems on Various Subjects, Religious and Moral by Phyllis Wheatley, Negro Servant to Mr. John Wheatley, of Boston in New England was published in Britain.

This is how male critics routinely dismissed literature written by women well into the twentieth century.

Like Las Casas, Jefferson concedes that enslavement of any people is wrong. Jefferson feared that the wrath of God would one day place the white men as laborers on Plantations and the Blacks as masters.
CHAPTER 3: BLACK MEN, OPPOSITIONAL DEFINITIONS, and PRIMORDIAL AFRICA

And, in fact, the truth about the black man, as a historical entity and as a human being, has been hidden from him, deliberately and cruelly; the power of the white world is threatened whenever a black man refuses to accept the white world’s definition. James Baldwin in *The Fire Next Time*

In this chapter, I discuss how Richard Wright, Aime Cèsaire, and Amos Tutuola use their texts, *Native Son*, *The Tempest*, and *The Palm-Wine Drinkard* respectively, to explore and subvert common myths surrounding Black masculinity created by white American men. Wright addresses the myth of the Black rapist beast, Cèsaire embraces the Shakespearean island creature named Caliban, and Tutuola normalizes Pleitoscene Africa. This group of writers and their texts represent a sharp departure in strategy from previous Pan-Africanist writers who often tended to ignore or directly refute these stereotypes in their political writings. Rather than ignore or overtly attack these harmful stereotypes of Black males as their predecessors, these writers showcase them in imaginative ways.
In attempting such a feat, they create a new “truth about themselves” to quote Baldwin and create an oppositional form of Black masculinity. This type of masculine definition, while effective in illuminating the complicity of white American males in creating the primitive Black beasts that they claimed to fear, also comes with limitations which I also discuss towards the end of the chapter.

In order to understand the creation of these stereotypes of bestial Black masculinity, I return briefly to slavery and its end. As chattel slavery declined in profitability in the New World, Euro-American countries involved in the slave trade ended it and replaced it with colonialism throughout the African Continent and the Caribbean archipelago, and Black Code laws in the United States. Though formal enslavement ended, the emasculating discourse surrounding men of African descent did not. In fact, at the close of the nineteenth century, it simply metamorphosed and metastasized as white American men suffered their own insecurities in the new, market-driven economy. The period immediately following the Civil War and slavery’s in the United States, Reconstruction, ushered in a proliferation of violent crimes against Black males, particularly lynchings and castrations in the United States. In the Caribbean and Africa, Euro-American men hotly debated the “fitness” of Black men to govern themselves, and justified colonialism with a pernicious brand of paternalism that closely resembled rationalization of enslavement. With the dawn of the twentieth century and the invention of film technology, attacks on Black people, particularly Black males, were popularized across the globe through films like Tarzan and Birth of a Nation.

Perhaps white American men’s increased concentration on dissemination of Black male stereotypes can be explained by the precarious position white Americans males found themselves in after slavery. According to E. Anthony Rotundo, definitions of white masculinity rapidly
evolved from a communal notion of manhood to one based on rugged individualism. In *American Manhood* (1993), Rotundo explains the difference between communal manhood and manhood based upon competition and individuality. The communal idea of manhood dominated for a very long time before the nineteenth century, an idea in which a white American man was not only responsible for the actions of the members in his own household, but was careful to maintain a certain reputation within his community for the sake of conducting business. A man was to put personal and selfish passions aside for the good of his community. A man subdued his individual aspirations in order to maintain communal harmony and to help achieve progress as a family unit. However, this idea declined with the abolition of slavery and the proliferation of a competitive market economy. According to Rotundo, “The new manhood emerged as part of a broader series of changes: the birth of republican government, the spread of a market economy, the concomitant growth of the middle class itself. At the root of these changes was an economic and political life based on the free play of individual interests” (3). Driven by the market economy, white masculine identity took on several models before the “Masculine achiever” model, or the self-made man, became the dominant male identity in the nineteenth century. The same traits American people considered selfish and defiant in the previous eras were lauded as proper characteristics of economically successful men. These characteristics were simply redefined to suit the new, free-market economy: “[i]n the new era of individualism, the old male passion of defiance was transformed into the modern virtue of independence” (3). From communal manhood to rugged individualism, white American manhood saw a rapid evolution from one form to another.

Antithetical to white American manhood was the body of newly-freed African American men, who also demanded enfranchisement and participation within the American democracy and
the new, competition-based free market economy. Many historians agree that “from the beginning, white American working-class men regarded black men’s slave status as the antithesis of the Self-Made Man, denying the existence of a different and authentic American male experience” (Hine and Jenkins 14). Slave labor built America’s capitalist system and the idea of competing with African American men as equals caused violent opposition in white American men. As America immersed itself in what Toni Morrison calls the “architecture of a new white man” (15), it added to the discourse on gender a sharp distinction between a man and a boy. Rotundo explains this new dimension: “If a man is not a man, then what is he? One answer is obvious in the context of this book about gender: If a man is not a man, he must be like a woman. But nineteenth-century men had a second answer: If a man is not a man, he must be like a boy” (20). In a racialized context, if a man were not a Euro-American man of Anglo-Saxon descent, but a black man instead, he must be a boy. Rotundo explicitly states the difference between boys and men when he writes that “Boys had enthusiasm, not judgment, and aggression without control” (21). Even when the same characteristics were seen as necessary components of white American masculinity –violent opposition and aggression, animal-like sexual virility, and the desire to remain close to nature –they were seen as boyishness in African American men. According to multiple historians and critics, “Actions expected of white men were condemned in black men” (Hornton and Hornton 384), and white men used extra-legal as well as legal methods to subdue these same tendencies in Black men. Promptly after the Civil War, many states began enacting Black Code and subsequently, Jim Crow laws, designed to limit both the physical mobility and the upward vertical mobility of Black males. For instance, many states enacted vagrancy laws that required Black males to have a permanent residence as well as an employer. These laws ensured that many African American males remain relegated to
the very plantations on which they were once formerly enslaved. They were given work “contracts” and became sharecroppers in a system of work and credit which was no better than enslavement. If Black males attempted to leave their respective plantations, normally by walking, they were arrested and charged under the vagrancy law. Punishment for violation of this law included spending up to two years in a state penitentiary where Black male prisoners were often punished to work on the convict-lease system doing grueling hard labor.

Long after Emancipation of slaves on the islands, Black male inferiority lingered.¹ The mode of sugar production changed, according to historians Klein and Vinson, but the harvesting of the crop remained unchanged, requiring many hours of manual labor by Black backs and hands. After emancipation, many of the Caribbean nations remained colonized by European countries well into the twentieth century.² Even those Caribbean nations that achieved independence and the right to govern themselves remained impoverished and dependent upon the former metropoles and the United States for economic survival. Therefore, the Euro-American relationship with the Caribbean remained that of colonizer and colonized and Black males were continuously plagued by paternalistic writings that claimed they needed guidance from European mother countries and could not be trusted to govern islands. Likewise, some writings claimed that women of African descent on the island did not know how to be subordinate to Black males and would cause chaos without the firm guiding hand of colonial systems.

In the mid-twentieth century, O. Mannoni offered a “psychological” explanation for the dependency of island nations on the metropoles during colonization in his book *Prospero and Caliban: The Psychology of Colonization* (1950). Using the Malagasy people of Madagascar, and their reactions to French colonization, Mannoni applies his theories to the colonial situation in general, especially to Black people. He claims that some races of people simply have a
“dependency complex” and others, namely Europeans, have a driving need to colonize while suppressing their own inferiority complex. These traits are simply inherent in groups of people, which make them prone to being exploited and other groups prone to exploit others, according to Mannoni: “The dependence relationship requires at least two members, and where a colonial situation exists, if one of them is the native of the colony, the other is likely to be the colonizers, or rather the colonial, for he it is who offers us the most interesting subject of study” (97).

Mannoni renames that driving need to colonize, oppress, and alienate the Other as the “Prospero” complex when he analyzes Shakespeare’s *The Tempest*. He also notes how, in Shakespeare’s drama, that “Caliban does not complain of being exploited; he complains rather of being betrayed” (Mannoni 106). According to Mannoni, Caliban does not abhor the exploitation of his labor, but the labeling of his person by Prospero as something other than a part of the human family. In short, though Mannoni uses the rhetoric field of psychology instead of philosophy or history, his justification for colonial dependence is remarkably similar to that of his predecessors discussed in the previous chapter.

Indeed, colonialist works like *The Tempest* set a standard in shaping the discourse surrounding both the ability of Caribbean nations to rule themselves and Black masculinity within the region. Because of the geography of the play, historians and academics like O. Mannoni, who compare Black men to Caliban, could very easily imagine Caliban as an inhabitant of the Caribbean islands. Much like the philosophical writings that dehumanize and degender males of African descent discussed in Chapter 2, Shakespeare presents Caliban as an unintelligent, subhumanoid creature. This portrayal is highly effective, because “although in *The Tempest* the word creature appears nowhere in conjunction with Caliban himself, his character is everywhere hedged in and held up by the politico-theological category of the creaturely” (Lupton
2). The “creaturely” being is fit only for manual labor and enslavement. In Shakespeare’s world, not only is Caliban “creaturely,” he is also inarticulate and seemingly without a written form of communication. Caliban creatureliness and his inarticulateness contrast sharply with the refinement and manners, as well as the physical form of the European characters. In this world of creatures and men, whiteness comes to signify “civilization” so thoroughly that Caliban cannot differentiate between a drunken European servant like Stephano and the royal men who wash upon the shore.

 Meanwhile, newer film technology allowed Euro-Americans to spread myths of Africa as the “Dark Continent.” As colonization of Africa advanced into the twentieth century, many images of Pleistocene Africa emerged in literature and in the recently-developed film technology of the era. Cloaked in discourse that differentiates between “civilization” and “savagery,” Africa was juxtaposed to Europe as a place which modernity never reaches. In her article “When Hearts Beat Like Native Drums,” Clara Henderson argues that, “this transference of the notion of savagery to non-Europeans coincides with the birth of colonial expansion and added a new racial dimension to the descriptions of ‘savage’ and ‘civilized’” (93). Supposedly, European cultures were the most civilized; all other cultures, particularly those nations that were populated heavily with non-Europeans such as the nations of Africa, were seen as “uncivilized”: “The tendency of Europeans to group these and other negative features under the rubric of ‘savagery’ not only served as a means of further distinguishing cultural differences between themselves and savages, but also expanded ‘savage’ into an over-arching concept used to reinforce the belief that all of these elements existed in every African” (Henderson 93). In texts and on screen these images rarely feature Africans as individuals, but as a homogenous group of semi-nude Black bodies.
that are virtually indistinguishable from primates in the surrounding jungle; images of fully-

clothed European males in the midst of African jungle vegetation signified “civilization.”

One of the most enduring legacies of this era concerning Africa is Tarzan, a popular

character from Edgar Rice Borroughs’s book *Tarzan and the Apes* (1912). According to

Bederman, Borroughs “constructed Africa as a place where ‘the white man’ could prove his

superior manhood by reliving the primitive, masculine life of his most distant evolutionary

forefathers” (220). As a white man of Anglo-Saxon descent, Tarzan represents the best of Euro-

American masculinity: he is tall, strong, and physically imposing, and has the ability to subdue

both man and animals with violence if necessary (though disdained in men of African descent).

Juxtaposed to the white man who glides through the trees in a loincloth is a body of African men

who are superstitious, effeminate, and savage. The texts also support and justify lynching men

of African descent. After Kulonga, an African, kills Tarzan’s ape mother Kala, Bederman

writes, “Tarzan lynches Kulonga by stealthily lowering a rope noose round his head, and then

jerking him, struggling, up into the treetops. To complete the grisly Southern rite, Tarzan then

‘plunged his hunting knife into Kulonga’s heart. Kala was avenged.’ Tarzan had become a

lynder” (224). After this first lynching, Tarzan regularly kills African men for goods and

clothing, particularly their loincloths, an obvious phallic symbol. In the African jungle, as well

as in the United States, lynching Black men assures Tarzan and his audience that the Euro-

American man will remain dominant in this unstable environment: “It is no accident that when

Tarzan introduces himself to Jane Porter and her white companions, he identifies himself (in big

block letters) as ‘TARZAN, THE KILLER OF BEASTS AND MANY BLACK MEN’” (226). The

According to the film, killing Black men does not make Tarzan a murderer, but is an affirmation
that his survival is based on his fitness as a Euro-American man to dominate his environment even through violent tactics.  

Pivotal to Euro-American definitions of masculinity in the Caribbean and African colonial situation is the role white women play in regards to Black males; they stood between the adaptation of local Caribbean and African cultures and maintaining “civilized” European standards in Euro-American patriarchal supremacist discourse. Perhaps the most insidious charge levied against African American men was that of the Black rapist beast, a mythological construction that hinges upon the white American woman’s body. Sadly, this brand of Black male emasculation was very effective. As Marlon Ross explains, it “settled, at its most basic level, on the sexual deviance and consequent social irresponsibility of black men’s desires and ambitions –equating or analogizing the unreliable passions and uncountable impulses of men of African descent to the unaccountable mysteries of women as legitimately disenfranchised creatures” (10-11). This image of the “boyish” adult Black male, who had an uncontrollable lust for white female flesh, was a peculiar invention of the post-bellum white American imagination that exploded across the United States: “Black rape myths began to appear during emancipation and exploded during Reconstruction, when white Americans expressed their fears of unprecedented black political power by creating the appearance of a solid white racial front” (Hine and Jenkins 39). A rash of lynching, sometimes along with the ghastly torture and castration of young, Black males swept the South; Northern media outlets generally sanctioned them. The protection of the virtues for white American womanhood from Black males became a rallying cry that reunited Northern and Southern white men during Reconstruction. In this tense climate, James Baldwin claims in his essay “The Black Boy Looks at the White Boy” that “to be an American Negro male is also to be a kind of walking phallic symbol: which means that one
A black boy to a white boy is a very complex thing” (269-270). Black males became living phallic symbols in the white American imagination; however, extralegal violence ensured that Black men remained symbolic of the bodily or overly-sexual or “boyish” aspects of masculinity and not of patriarchal authority or economic success. 

In the *Tarzan* series, an ape, Kala, raises the orphaned Tarzan. Kala showers Tarzan in unbridled motherly affection and love and shows him how to survive in the African jungle. However, an ape cannot show Tarzan the refineries that his noble blood involves, and the “savage” Mbonga women are not familiar with European culture. Jane, a European woman and love interest of Tarzan must teach him to separate himself from the African elements by acting as a proper European lady: a stark contrast to the Mbonga women. Bederman explains how Jane’s femininity contrast with the exaggerated masculinity of the Mbongan women: “Jane’s delicacy and need for protection are clearly racial characteristics. They contrast with the savagery and independence of the primitive Mbongan women, who raise their own food, attack their own enemies, and never receive protection from the Mbongan man” (227). She “teaches” Tarzan by presenting objects symbolic of European modernization –like record players, silk stockings, and bottled perfume-- that contrast sharply with the Pleitocene African surroundings. Constant contact with Jane, according to Henderson and Bederman, brings Tarzan into full awareness of his Anglo-Saxon masculinity. When an African male grabs Jane and swings through the trees with her, Tarzan, like his Ku Klux Klan counterparts in the United States, does not hesitate to kill the Black man in her honor.

Meanwhile, Mannoni compares European women in a colonial situation with men. Mannoni says of European women in colonized countries, “the European women are far more
racialist than the men. Sometimes their racialism attains preposterous proportions… Similar observations have been made in other countries where racialism exists” (115). Women keep the culture and standards of European civilization, according to Mannoni. For instance, in Shakespeare’s The Tempest, Miranda is without a mother to teach her the refinements of feminine virtues; yet, Prospero, her father, instills in her all of the virtues of life as an Italian royal lady. In Act I Scene II, Ferdinand declares to Miranda, “O, if a virgin and your affection not gone forth, I’ll make you the Queen of Naples” (I.II. 448-450). This assures Prospero that even on a remote island surrounded by slaves, European culture and its notion of superior “civilization” continues in the person of Miranda. Even the justification of Caliban’s enslavement comes through the body of Miranda. Lamming describes the importance of Miranda’s presence in The Pleasure of Exile, saying, “It is through Miranda, the product of Prospero’s teaching, that we may glimpse the origin and perpetuation of myth coming slowly but surely into its right as fact, history, and absolute truth” (110). Prospero accuses Caliban of attempting to rape Miranda: “thou didst seek to violate the honor of my child” (II.II. 350-351). Caliban does not deny seeking sexual favors from Miranda, but he simply wants to “people the island with Calibans” (I.II.353-354). In hoping to reproduce with the only woman on the island, Miranda, Caliban clearly desires to snatch some equality for himself from the hands of Prospero. Despite his political motivation for desiring sex with Miranda, Prospero declares that Caliban “proves” the savageness of his race, and is “deservedly confined into this rock, who hadst deserved more than a prison” (I.II. 365). Unlike his American counterparts, Prospero does not immediately declare death for Caliban; the creature is too valuable as a source of manual labor. Shakespeare’s treatment of Caliban concerning Miranda is not historically inaccurate; though Euro-American womanhood became emblematic of that culture in the Caribbean, the Caribbean
did not largely adopt its American counterpart’s policy of lynching and maiming Black male bodies. Yet, subtle economic tactics were used to impoverish Black males. For instance, in many Caribbean nations, the metropole countries encouraged emigration from Asian countries. These immigrants were given higher wage contract for their work than Black men and were granted higher social status. They were allowed to open businesses in Black communities, while Black men, in many island nations were denied these opportunities. In addition, colonialist educational systems, even when run by Black faces, often discriminated against Black pupils, making it impossible for Black people to achieve vertical social and economic advancement even through education. Those few Black people, especially Black males, who did achieve some sort of social and economic ascendance often served as colonial government middle management and became mired in class struggles with their fellow countrymen. They represent those people least likely to engage in any type of oppositional discourse with Euro-American males and are often portrayed as psychologically and emotionally impotent by Caribbean writers.

Black male Caribbean writers counter the Prospero-Caliban dynamic by embracing and exploring the character of Caliban from his perspective. His dispossessed mother, the erasure of his native tongue, as well as his condemnation to manual labor and toil makes him a very attractive metaphor for the plight of African Caribbean males. In her book *Making Men: Gender, Literacy Authority, and Women’s Writing in Caribbean Narrative* historian and critic Belinda Edmondson claims that “Caliban is a symbol of black Caribbean manhood in Francophone and Anglophone discourse” (111). George Lamming, however, argues that the metaphor of Caliban can be applied to all Black male who inhabit the island nations regardless of geographical or linguistic boundaries. Black people, like Caliban, in the Caribbean archipelago share a history of enslavement, colonialism, and either voicelessness or voice distortion in
dominant discourses. In *Continuities and Divergences*, Alabi argues “colonial discourses, like *The Tempest*, naturalize slavery, distorting the voice of the enslaved when they represent that voice” (53). Furthermore, Lamming says in *The Pleasure of Exile* “for Caliban himself like the island he inherited is at once a landscape and a human situation. We can switch from island to island without changing the meaning of language in *The Tempest*” (118). Black Caribbean appropriations serve to humanize Caliban, who is not a creature, but a man who Prospero “Others” through language. Shakespearean critic Judith Sarnecki notes “Aime Césaire takes Shakespeare at his word when he rewrites *The Tempest*, taking on the “master” in a political and artistic quest to free himself and his people from the oppression they have suffered at the hands of their colonizers” (276). The plot of the play is much the same; however, Césaire foregrounds the plight of Caliban, making him the dominant character rather than Prospero in his play *A Tempest*.

Many early Black, Pan-Africanist writers used their pens to counter these popular images of Black men as insatiable cravers of white, female bodies throughout the New World. For instance, Ida B. Wells-Barnett, in her groundbreaking academic study of lynching, *The Red Record*, thoroughly debunks and refutes the Black rapist beast myth. In fact, Wells called the whole rape mythology an “excuse,” and links the rash of lynching and castrations with the right to vote. Popular mythology, which conflated any kind of sexual act between white women and Black men with political participation, was also used to disenfranchise Black voters through Jim Crow legislation throughout the South. W.E.B. DuBois’s *Soul of Black Folk* follows Wells-Barnett, and continues to link economic competition and political equality, not rampant desire of white female flesh, for maiming and killing Black males.
In the twentieth century, specifically between World I and World War II, Black male writers began to counter the prevailing stereotypes about Black men directly in literary/social criticism. Writing from the Caribbean, scholar C.L.R. James published the landmark masterpiece, *Black Jacobins*, which connects the Haitian Revolution with ideals espoused during the French Revolution and highlights the brilliant tactical leadership of Toussaint L’Overture. He subverts the Prospero-Caliban relationship by telling the history of the Haitian revolution from a Haitian vantage point rather than a French one. James casts the revolution as a success due to the military genius of its Black male leadership and people who grasp the real meaning of the rhetoric of the French Revolution.

James’s fellow Caribbean scholar, Frantz Fanon, writes of colonization and the liberation struggle in Africa in his social commentary and literary criticism. In *Black Skin White Masks*, Fanon devotes an entire chapter to refuting M. Mannoni. He says that Mannoni tries “to make the inferiority complex something that antedates colonization” (85). Fanon explicitly rejects Mannoni’s psychologically based theory by stating:

> All forms of exploitation resemble one another. They all seek the source of their necessity in some edict of a Biblical nature. All forms of exploitation are identical because all of them are applied against the same “object”: man. When one tries to examine the structure of this or that form of exploitation from an abstract point of view, one simply turns one’s back on the major, basic problem, which is that of restoring man to his proper place. Colonial racism is no different from any other racism. [88]
Fanon declares that regardless of offered justification for colonization, it can only ever end in exploitation of the colonized and coming from the heels of racialized enslavement, colonization is but another manifestation of notions of European superiority and racism.

As the Harlem Renaissance and the Negritude Movement advanced, fiction writers presented humanized Black masculine characters. Using the ideals of unity espoused by the various political manifestations of Pan-Africanism, Black masculine writers began to acknowledge publicly the connections between oppression of Black masculinity in the New World and the exploitation of Black males in Africa. Yet, creative writers tended to ignore the Black rapist beast. As the twentieth century matured and more Black-authored scholarship concerning Black culture in America and throughout the Diaspora became available, the fiction writing changed as well; Black writers embraced the scholarship and created stories and characters that closely resemble personality types and situations as articulated by academics. Whereas the academic literature served to educate the public concerning Black life, creative literature served diegetic functions through both narration and characterization. For instance, Richard Wright’s *Native Son* is the first imaginative text that explores the Black rapist beast mythology. In his book *In the Shadow of the Black Beast: African American Masculinity in the Harlem and Southern Renaissances*, Andrew Leiter claims that “Wright’s novel offered a new approach by acknowledging the black beast and transferring the responsibility for his existence onto white American society” (203). Rather than substantiate white American stereotypes of the Black rapist beast, Wright demonstrates that he is a creation of white American racist discourse that constantly refers to people like Bigger with animal-like imagery.

In exploring the Black rapist beast mythology in *Native Son*, Wright places the story outside of the American South, and in Chicago, Illinois, a large industrial city of the American
North. The location of this text is significant because it removes the American South as a psychological soothing balm concerning American racism and indicts the entire American justice system for helping the media propagate the Black beast mythology. In the American South, Jim Crowism and de juris racism severely limited economic and political opportunities for all Black people, but the regime was particularly brutal toward African American males. Critic Marlon B. Ross in Manning the Race: Black Men in the Jim Crow Era explains that “The Jim Crow regime exploits the ideology of black male deficiency to justify and administer an entrenched color line through violence, intimidation, coercion, and the sadistic manipulation of the courts, schools, public transport, and other instruments of public interest” (2). Like hundreds of thousands of Black people, Wright tried to escape the racism, poverty, and indignity of the agriculturally-dominated American South by relocating to the urbanized, industrial American North. In books like Native Son “the material conditions from which his black male protagonists want to flee are those of racism and wage-labor in a capitalist society” (Dawahare 455). Yet, as Wright demonstrates in the text, conditions in the American North were often comparable to those in the American South for Black people. In the North, Wright, like millions of African Americans, faced de facto segregation. The racism of Euro-Americans in the city was ubiquitous and vicious, but unseen. Unlike in the South where there were “white only” and “colored only” signs; instead, Northern racist tactics included red-lining and gerrymandering, and were as pernicious and restrictive as poll taxes and Jim Crowism. Also, the threat of the unequal and color-cognizant American legal system in the North inspired just as much fear in African Americans as the extra-legal lynch mob violence of the South.

The first chapter is aptly titled, “Fear,” and it opens with another manifestation of the Northern racism: the rat-infested one-room apartment that Bigger must share with his brother,
mother, and sister that his mother calls a “garbage dump” (8). Bigger, a Black man in his early twenties, is aware of the powerlessness which constitutes life in Chicago’s Black Belt; unable to do anything about it, he creates a veritable psychological bubble around himself by engaging in a tough oppositional stance even with his family. Bigger “hated his family because he knew that they were suffering and that he was powerless to help them. He knew that the moment he allowed himself to feel to its fullness how they lived, the shame and misery of their lives, he would be swept out of himself with fear and despair. So he held toward them an attitude of iron reserve…” (10). The indignity of living in rat-infested, overly-crowded kitchenette buildings in the red-lined South side of Chicago is but one way Northern racism personally touches Bigger and the entire Thomas family. Bigger feels emasculated because as the oldest male child of the house he feels responsible for the welfare of the family and is unable to provide enough economically to move them to a better dwelling.

To escape the pathetic conditions of his home life, Bigger roams the streets with his friends, Gus, Jack, and G.H. However, once outside the home and in the streets of Chicago, Bigger and his friends face daily confrontations with an urban landscape that lead to further feelings of alienation. In Bigger’s world, there is no Black community. There are no men for Bigger and his friends to emulate—at least not in the Black Belt of Chicago. Bigger’s family, like many homes of the Black Belt, is headed by his mother. There is no father because “Bigger’s father has been dead for many years, having been killed in a riot in Mississippi. Bigger has had to take his father’s place in his family while still being considered a child by his mother” (Nejako 429). There is no viable church community where Black males exercise phallic authority. There are no uncles or other male family members to help the Thomas family, no Black male barbershop conversations where Black men gather to discuss the latest neighborhood
crimes or injustices, and no old Black men who act as neighborhood griots. There is not even a popular blues or jazz club where Bigger and his friends go to hear music and get release of their emotions through collective catharsis. The gang of petty thieves gathers at Doc’s pool hall, but he does not show any concern for the boys and offers them no guidance. When Bigger forces Gus to lick a knife, Doc laughs and asks, “Say, Bigger, ain’t you scared ‘im enough” (39). He neither asks Bigger to stop torturing his friend nor offers Bigger any corrective guidance. In fact, he only asks Bigger to leave at gunpoint once Bigger cuts the surface of a billiard table. The lack of Black male role models in Bigger’s world is a radical break from historical data concerning Black communities of the time (Depression Era Chicago). Literary critic Alexander Nejako claims that Bigger’s alienation is highly improbable during the novel’s setting stating that “The absence of models for African American masculinity in Native Son is surprising in light of historical and sociological evidence about African American communities” (431). The historical and sociological evidence, even during Wright’s time, shows that even in single, female-headed households, African American males retained some sort of community. Sociologist Robert Staples claims that Black males “learn the male role from a variety of sources. Even if there were not strong male role models available, women are able to transmit the male sex-role expectations symbolically, e.g., telling them how to walk, to carry their books, etc” (10). If there are men in Bigger’s world, they are as broken by the conditions of racism in Chicago as he is, and this makes young Black men like Bigger all the more susceptible to the destructive nature of Euro-American supremacist patriarchal thinking.

In the Caribbean, Caliban experiences social isolation in A Tempest. As in the Shakespearean play, A Tempest takes place on a remote island. Set at the historical cusp of colonialism, there are no villages, towns, or cities; there are only masters and slaves. In both
plays, a shipwreck brings more Europeans to the island, but only Caliban and Ariel are slaves with no communities of their own to which they can retreat. The two slaves both engage in an oppositional masculinity, but disagree about how to best gain their freedom from the tyranny of Prospero; thus, they do not communicate with one another regularly, and do not share a common bond in enslavement. Caribbean literature critic James Arnold in his article, “Césaire and Shakespeare: Two Tempests” reasons that “Ariel, although a slave, aspires to the bourgeois values of Prospero. His adoption of a purer form of speech represents an imaginary identification with the power that Prospero wields in fact” (244). In Act II Scene I, the reader learns that their differences are simply a matter of how to defeat Prospero. Ariel explains his policy of nonviolence to Caliban, “No violence, no submission either. Listen to me: Prospero is the one we’ve got to change. Destroy his serenity so that he’s finally forced to acknowledge his own injustice and put an end to it” (27). Caliban does not agree with Ariel’s policy of nonviolence, saying, “You don’t understand a thing about Prospero. He’s not the collaborating type. He’s a guy who only feels something when he’s wiped something out. A crusher, a pulverizer, that’s what he is! And you talk about brotherhood” (27). A number of critics write that Césaire uses Ariel to reference Martin Luther King and Caliban to signify Malcolm X. I believe that Césaire also alludes to some island nations’ policy of emancipating slaves, but only after several more years of indentured servitude on the Caribbean islands where they were enslaved. For many Black Caribbean scholars and writers, accepting colonialism and its restrictive policies, like chattel slavery, is also a form of emasculation due to a lack of self-governance. The nonviolent method, as espoused by Dr. King, was seen as accepting a form of colonialism or second-class citizenry; and thus, Black men accept emasculation. In this story,
Ariel’s complacency with Prospero’s rule cause a rift between them; they separate and never form the vital community that would serve to help both their causes.

Meanwhile, Tutuola uses another rhetorical strategy to reverse strangeness and alienation in Africa. He locates *The Palm-Wine Drinker* in Pleitoscene Africa, outside of modernity. Tutuola normalizes this world through the structure of his tale, which seems like a random collection of events and objects: “Such hodge-podge cultural shifts are common throughout *The Palm-Wine Drinker*. Frequently among ghosts, goblins, and enchanted villages, a seemingly out of place reference to a European object or concept such as a bomb, or a razor blade, or soccer will appear” (70). In the world of the drinkard, such objects appear strange. Rather than exoticize his Yoruba culture as “strange” or portray it is something “Other” than the Euro-American norm, Tutuola uses broken English to cathect objects of modernity with otherness. In *The Palm-Wine Drinker*, Tutuola presents a character who invokes a period predating colonialism. The protagonist states “In those days, there were many wild animals and every place was covered by thick bushes and forests; again, towns and villages were not near each other as nowadays” (193). Like Bigger and Caliban, the protagonist lives in a state of communal isolation; unlike Bigger and Caliban, however, there is no need to establish any sort of oppositional masculinity here. As a drinker of wine, he lives in opposition to his community. He tells the reader, “My father got eight children and I was the eldest among them, all of the rest were hard workers, but I myself was an expert palm-wine drinkard” (192). The protagonist, though the eldest male child in the family, is neither a productive member of his society, nor an economic contributor to his family. In his article on masculinity, “The Depiction of Masculinity in Classic Nigerian Literature,” Frank Salamone claims that by managing to drink more than any other human being in his world the protagonist “is certainly asserting his masculinity through his
drinking. He does so as one knowing that such behavior offends women and symbolizes his masculinity” (203). This behavior certainly defies Yoruba expectations of masculinity, which value a man’s hard work and productivity.

While embarking upon a journey to find his dead palm wine tapster, the protagonist, who refers to himself as “Father of the gods who could do everything in this world” (194), encounters many situations. It seems as if Tutuola strings together these unrelated events to tell a rambling story written in a form of English dialect. Read allegorically, each of these tales is a metaphorical representation of some facet of colonialism/imperialism or internalization of European values that the protagonist must reject. In this sense, the “Father of the gods who could do everything in this world” performs the same sort of oppositional masculinity as Caliban, though not as overt. For instance, the tale of how he acquires a wife warns against the attractiveness of colonialism and the devastation wrought by imperialistic policies. On the way to find his dead palm-wine tapster, “Father of the gods” meets a wealthy gentleman and wife who have a dilemma: their daughter defies Yoruba standards by refusing to marry a man picked out by her father. She defies her father’s patriarchal authority and almost meets her death. The girl becomes enchanted with a beautiful man, follows him, and finds that the man is only a skull: “Allegorically then, the woman has refused marriage and, implicitly children, and thus has (unwittingly) followed death” (Hogan 44). The man and his people enslave the woman by forcing her to sit upon a frog with a cowrie shell tied around her neck. The cowrie shell effectively silences the woman by making a very loud noise any time she attempts to move, making it impossible to eat as well. Even after “Father of the gods” rescues the woman, the cowrie shell continues to inhibit her and disrupts her father’s home and his patriarchal authority; the shell prevents the girl from eating the food he provides.
Once the “Father of the gods” sees this gentleman as well, he says, “I could not blame the lady for following the Skull as a complete gentleman to his house at all. Because if I were a lady, no doubt I would follow him to wherever he would go, and still as I was a man I would jealous him more than that” (207). In that sense, “Father of the gods” acknowledges the attractiveness of this creature. “Father of the gods” actually admits that he “jealouses” the man. Because the protagonist is no mere mortal, but a true “Father of the gods,” he has wisdom to see the perfect gentleman for what he is while normal humans may not be as fortunate: “I remembered that he was only a skull, then I thanked God that He had created me without beauty” (207). Perhaps this story warns against the material pleasures of Western materialism, as Tobias notes when he writes that “Tutuola suggests that although Western ideas and projects might at first seem tempting and attractive, these things ultimately prove little more than a deceptive façade. Once stripped away they reveal the true underlying structures of colonialism: death and enslavement” (72). The girl rejects the ways of her people to follow a stranger’s beauty and is led to her own enslavement and possible death. This brand of manhood, with its beautiful surface and its silencing of women through manipulation, is also undesirable.

This story, however, is more than a clever tale about relying on one’s own cultural teachings rather than shunning them for another; there is more. Though the girl is restrained at first with a chain to inhibit her physical movement, the Skull uses a cowrie shell to control her speech and silence her even in his absence. Hogan articulates the inability to speak with death of a culture: “Here, the connection between death and inarticulate artificial sound is becoming clearer. Death means being unable to speak” (12). The cowrie shell, also used as money by the Yoruba people and other nations living along the West Coast of Africa during this period, becomes a certifiable symbol of death through voicelessness in the hands of the Skull people.
Tobias also expounds upon this by writing that “through this tale Tutuola hints at the way in which colonial and, subsequently, postcolonial socioeconomic systems serve to chain their African victims to money and other seemingly positive trappings while simultaneously trying to remove their ability to voice resistance” (Tobias 72). Though “Father of the gods” is not obligated to remove the mark of colonialism and silence from the woman’s neck, he does. For his honesty, work, and dedication to completing the task, the girl is given to the palm-wine drinkard to wed. In this way, both the drinkard and the defiant girl fulfill their culture’s gendered expectations; one becomes a productive citizen through dedicated labor and the other becomes a wife. Balance, which is a common motif in Yoruba oral and written literature according to Patrick Hogan, is restored once the glittering trappings of colonialism are removed and the two become husband and wife. By acquiring a wife, the drinkard also becomes a man with a proper place in his Yoruba society. As a man with a wife to support, he must become a producer in order to properly economically support her and any children they may have together. Consequently, “Father of the gods” is no longer a simple consumer of goods and services in his society, but a producer as well. He becomes a masculine contributor to the well-being of his society.

In the United States, Bigger is also swayed by the powerful trappings of materialism. It is part of his condition as a marginalized minority in a country of extreme wealth. In American newspapers, movies, books, newsreels, and even upscale neighborhoods of Chicago, Bigger becomes aware of all of the things America could offer him but forbids because of his African ancestry. Going from de juris segregation to de facto discrimination, or from the South to the North, does not change this fact. As they walk along the Chicago streets, Bigger and Gus see a plane flying overhead. Bigger emphatically states to Gus that, “I could fly one of them things if I
had a chance” (16). After several gruff exchanges, Gus reminds Bigger of their limitations as Black people. He says, “If you wasn’t black and if you had some money and if they’d let you go to that aviation school, you could fly a plane” (17). In order to escape this destitution, Bigger and his friends often “play white” (17); the narrator explains that it is “a game of playacting in which he and his friends imitated the ways and manners of white folks” (17). Yet, “more often than not, however, these ‘games’ reflect for Bigger and Gus both a sense of futility and racial impotence” (Ellis 188). Ellis states that this game leaves Bigger and his friends even more frustrated than before, invoking a feeling of impotence or castration in them. Critical race theorists assert that “The economic, social, and political racism of 1930s Chicago has had such an insidious effect on Bigger that he has become a cauldron of feelings ready to boil over at the slightest provocation into violence” (Fernandez, Kelley, Sullivan, & Unsell 408). Bigger abruptly ends the game by yelling, “Goddamit, look! We live here and they live there. We black and they white. They got things and we ain’t. They do things and we can’t. It’s just like living in jail” (20). Being able to compete freely in the capitalist marketplace and acquire material goods is a critical component of masculinity in America. Yet, critics agree that “perhaps the most frustrating element of Bigger’s contact with the white world is that it will not allow him to obtain the kind of manhood that it offers to him” (Nejako 436). Attempts to escape the inner-turmoil only add to the young men’s frustration.

Movies and newsreels often serve to show men like Bigger how their potential to reach the ultimate masculinity is further constricted by racism.¹³ Jack and Bigger watch a newsreel:

Bigger sat looking at the first picture; it was a newsreel. As the scenes unfold his interest was caught and he leaned forward. He saw images of smiling, dark-haired white girls lolling on the
gleaming sands of a beach. The background was a stretch of sparkling water. Palm trees stood near and far. The voice of the commentator ran with the movement of the film: *Here are the daughters of the rich taking sunbaths in the sands of Florida! This little collection of debutantes represents over four billion dollars of America’s wealth and over fifty of America’s leading families…* [31, emphasis Wright’s].

It is at this moment, Wright emphasizes, that the creation of the Black rapist beast mythology becomes explicit in the text. As the two, young and impoverished Black men sit in the darkened theater the announcer purposely conflates American wealth with the young, attractive white American women on screen. The narrator, presumably a white American man, stresses that these young ladies are *symbols* of white American wealth, and as they frolic semi-nude on the screen, they represent everything that Bigger and his friends cannot have. Acquiring and maintaining material wealth and a rather attractive white woman to share those things with (as the newsreel presents) become associated with masculine agency and dominance in this text. In Depression-era Chicago this is presented in a way that invokes more feelings of impuissance in young, Black movie-goers like Bigger. Since racism and wage discrimination collude, Bigger and his friends turn to crime in order to amass some sort of material goods (robbery, specifically) and secure a tiny bit of masculine agency.

Immediately following this scene is the opening to *Trader Horn*, a cinematic precursor to *Tarzan*. The narrator proclaims that Bigger “looked at *Trader Horn* unfold, and saw pictures of naked black men and women whirling in wild dances and heard drums beating and then gradually the African scene changed and was replaced by images in his own mind of white
American men and women dressed in black and white clothes, laughing, talking, drinking and
dancing” (33). For people like Bigger Thomas, the portrayal of Africans as subhumanoid
creatures who never advanced past the Pleistocene era is the only knowledge of his African past
available in the United States. In the United States, “[a]s indicated by the emphasis that the
screenplay of Trader Horn places on the blackness of the main character’s servant, within the
African context “black” becomes one of the signifiers of the notion of “savage,” which is
equated with all things African” (Henderson 102). By assigning the negative or “savage”
attributes to the bodies of Africans, Euro-Americans could use this concept to reinforce their
belief that “savageness” or bestial behavior existed in every African male, regardless of
geographical location. White America, Wright emphatically claims with these two scenes, is
responsible for the creation of the Black male rapist beast that haunts its imagination.15 Scenes
like these in which Black males are shown as inept, inarticulate sub-humanoid creatures and
Africa as one large jungles are the types of portrayals that Pan-Africanist theorist and writers
strove to dispel with their creative and political writings initially.

The scene in the movie theatre is also Bigger’s first exposure to Mary Dalton, daughter of
the rich white American family for whom he eventually becomes chauffeur. One night while
Bigger was on duty, Mary becomes intoxicated and asks Bigger to carry her to bed because she
is too inebriated to climb the stairs. Mary’s blind mother calls out to her daughter, and Bigger
smothers the girl out of fear. Even though he is Chicago, he knows the consequences of being
Black, male, and alone in a bedroom with a young white woman. Though Bigger does think of
raping Mary while she is inebriated, Leiter claims that his motivation for murder is different.
Leiter writes, “It is not carnal lust nor a displaced desire for the opportunities of the white world
that lead to Bigger’s crime; rather, terror becomes the determining factor in Mary’s murder as
Bigger finds himself fully confronted with the fear that has lurked in the back of his mind” (193). In order to hide the evidence, he dismembers the body and stuffs it in a furnace.

As a symbol and living embodiment of American wealth, and a justification for the enforcement white supremacist ideology through the violent mutilation of Black male bodies, Mary becomes complicit in her own murder when she places Bigger in that terrible, uncompromising position of being alone with a helpless white American woman in a bedroom in 1930s Chicago. In justifying her murder, Bigger “felt that his murder of her was more than amply justified by the fear and shame she had made him feel” (114). In murdering Mary, he eases the feelings of powerlessness she invokes in him with her presence. He reclaims masculine agency by also killing the Mary who is a symbol of the American wealth that he cannot have. Having murdered Mary, Bigger finds value in his life. The narrator explains why murder gives Bigger a purpose, saying that “He had murdered and had created a new life for himself. It was something all his own, and it was the first time in his life he had anything that others could not take from him” (105). Once discovered and on the run, Bigger interprets his crime not as a reactionary one of fear, but one of individual opposition to the white world which suppresses and controls him: “This movement from an unpremeditated murder motivated by fear to an act of political rebellion involves a series of imaginative leaps on Bigger’s part that conflate murder with rape and rape with politics in a manner of mirroring the white cultural conflation of the same” (Leiter 205). Though Bigger thinks of raping Mary, he does not; however, he does deliberately rape and murder his Black girlfriend, Bessie. He no longer considers raping a crime. The narrator also explains why Bigger thinks raping a Black woman no longer constitutes a crime: “rape was not what one did to women. Rape was what one felt when one’s back was against a wall and one had to strike out, whether one wanted to or not, to keep the pack from
killing one” (227-228). Defined in this way, white America “raped” men of African descent by emasculating them; if not physically through brutal acts of castration, then socially and politically by Red lining, enforcing de facto segregation through state-sanctioned violence, and job and wage discrimination. Rape, as Bigger rationalizes it, is another form of his new-found, oppositional masculinity. White American discourse rapes him as a Black man; he physically rapes in order to reclaim some sort of masculinity.

Whereas Bigger resorts to robbery and murder for reclamation of masculine agency, Caliban uses language. Unlike Bigger, Caliban is acutely aware of the source of his oppression, has the ability to articulate his oppression, and is openly defiant toward that source, Prospero. In her article about Césaire’s creolization of Shakespeare, Judith Sarnecki addresses alienation experienced by Caliban when she writes that “The alienated, fragmented subject (Shakespeare’s Caliban) emerges in Césaire’s play as his own master because he claims the subject position in language in order to undo Prospero’s “magic” (431)” (279). Césaire’s protagonist uses an Africanized version of the European language that includes Swahili words. Caliban greets Prospero with a loud “Uhuru” (17) a word in Swahili that is more than likely and improvisation of the author: “That an African slave in the Caribbean is unlikely to have spoken Swahili is true enough. But the aim of this detail is, like the foregoing examples, not narrowly historical. The cry ‘Uhuru!’ has gained a universal currency since it first shook European colonialism in the 1950s” (Arnold 240). Caliban’s use of African words clearly upbraids Prospero, who protests “I’ve already told you, I don’t like it. You could be polite, at least; a simple ‘hello’ wouldn’t kill you” (17). Caliban also uses a form of Creole language, blending African, American, and European words to make them fit his purposes. In addition to having Caliban challenge Prospero’s linguistic superiority directly, Césaire also adds the African god, Eshu, to the original
play’s Greek and Roman gods and spirit. In fusing the language and adding an African God, Césaire endows Caliban with at least a culture of his own from which he draws strength and identity. Caliban refuses to “let the white world define [him],” to quote Baldwin from the epitaph. Like Bigger, Caliban attempts to banish impuissance. However, Caliban can expect a larger degree of success than Bigger; Prospero’s presence is real and not symbolic like Mary’s and he can directly confront his oppressor through the language and the worship of his own gods. Using nation-language rather than the Euro-American language of Prospero is Caliban’s way of engaging Prospero and opposing him simultaneously, and it is also a nonviolent reclamation of Caliban’s masculinity.

In *The Palm-Wine Drinkard*, the allegorical tale of how “Father of the gods” acquires and abandons a son is basically one of the colonizer, the native informant, imperialistic policies, and violent opposition to those policies. After acquiring a wife and establishing a farm, the community in which “Father of the Gods” and his wife reside experiences a brief period of normalcy until his wife’s thumb swells disproportionately and releases a fully-formed son. The child immediately talks as if “he was ten years of age” (214), grows to be more than three feet tall within an hour, and walks to the correct home without being told. Upon hearing his name, “’ZURRJIR’ which means a son who would change himself into another thing very soon” (214), “Father of the Gods” grows afraid and wants to abandon the child. This child, whose conception and birth are supernatural, closely resembles Skull in that he appears one way, but may soon change into something terrible. After hearing the name, “Father of the Gods” understands that the wife, through no fault of her own, has been the unwitting native informant to a terrible force that may soon upset the balance of their village. As the “mother” of this child, she nourished it (though not in the uterus, the biologically correct part of her body), and apparently taught the
child the language and customs of the village. Unlike Skull, who took victims to his place for enslavement, the child is a colonizer who comes to destroy the people of the village by eating all of their food and flogging them. “Father of the gods” reports that “this child was stronger than everybody in that town, he went around the town and he began to burn the houses of the heads of that town to ashes” (216). This half-baby essentially emasculates the leadership of each town by besting them physically and destroying any semblance of indigenous male authority. The child establishes his dominance by first physically declaring war upon all those who would stop his total eradication of their sustenance. He then symbolically declares his authority (patriarchal authority) by destroying the homesteads of community leaders. Read this way, this half-baby and the way he eradicated indigenous leadership through violent imposition of his own authority is allegorical of colonial rule in Africa. Like their Black male Caribbean counterparts, men in Africa believe that colonialism is as emasculating as slavery.

Yet, the people do not totally bow to the child’s tyranny. Like Caliban, “Father of the Gods” devises a plan to destroy the child. In a surprise attack, he burns the house down to the ground where the child is sleeping. The immolation of the child’s home is the village’s violent opposition to his rule. However, once again, the wife is attached to a material possession that leads them back to the sight of the child. She pokes through the ashes for a “gold trinket” (217), which is invaluable to her. In looking for the gold, they find the child, though missing half his body, still alive. Since the wife finds the baby, they must carry this burdensome child. The half-bodied baby is a rustic of colonization, and the results of his behavior are the same as colonialism. In this way, his presence is akin to economic/cultural imperialism—a form of domination that is not as destructive as colonialism, but equally destructive to those who come in contact with it according to postcolonial scholars. Tutuola demonstrates the destructive nature of
imperialism through the half-bodied child. Though only half-bodied, the child still takes away all of the sustenance from his parents. In addition, he makes it difficult for his parents to breathe without him, much like imperialistic policies that are driven by economic investments in undeveloped nations. Without those investments, formerly-colonized nations find it difficult to survive; thus, they remain economically dependent upon the metropole which initially took away the colonies’ wealth while suppressing industrial advancement. In the text, the couple must carry this baby as they travel. On this mystical journey, Drum, Song, and Dance –representative of culture - take the baby away; yet, the withdrawal of this horrible child leaves “Father of the Gods” and his wife penniless. After the baby leaves, “Father of the Gods” uses “juju” to turn himself into a canoe. His wife “used the canoe as ‘ferry’ to carry passengers across the river, the fare for adults was 3d (three pence) and half fare for children” (222). When capitalistic advancement is limited by race rather than based upon merit, those people who are not of the hegemonic race or class are usually relegated to such subservient jobs. Tutuola demonstrates “in this incident he is reduced by an externally imposed economic system to struggling subhumanly –yet in a way that appears vaguely, almost cryptically bourgeois –for a modest sum of British money” (Tobias 68). Only after they spend the day at this menial task are they able to purchase even basic needs for their journey. In colonial Caribbean and African countries as well as Black Code/Jim Crow America, capitalism was race-based rather than strictly meritocratic. Black males were often relegated to the most menial, subservient jobs regardless of their skill set or education. These jobs were also the lowest-paying jobs, making it impossible for men like “Father of the gods” to be the sole breadwinners of their homes and necessitating that their wives work outside the home as well. If Euro-Americans rationalized enslavement of African men due to an equally-divided workload based on gender, colonialism and Jim Crowism created the
conditions which would keep Black men at “faux man” status according to Euro-American discourse. Men like the palmwine drinkard, as long as he operates within a race-based capitalist system, may always need his wife’s supplemental income, creating a more equal power dynamic within the relationship instead of one based on domination and subordination as in traditional, Euro-American notions of heterosexual relationships.

Aside from being males of African descent, the protagonists in all three of these narratives have key similarities. First, they each reference an unadulterated, pristine Africa as an alternative identity to current, dehumanizing modernity. Though initially ashamed of the images of *Trader Horn*, Bigger believes the dark-skinned men and women who dance semi-nude on screen as more free than himself and envies those “men and women who were adjusted to their soil and at home in their world, secure from fear and hysteria” (34). Césaire uses African gods to reference Africa, and Tutuola normalizes Pleitoscene Africa by engrossing the audience in a world where bushes and ghost are normal, and football fields, razors, money, and telephones are not. Therefore, references to modernity are defamiliarized.

Second, the action of the texts takes place during colonialism in the Caribbean archipelago and on the African continent, and Jim Crow segregation in America, a form of internal colonialism. For instance, Bigger is part of a formerly-enslaved African American population, but Black Code and Jim Crow laws ensured that African Americans were not free. Because African Americans were relegated to the Black Belts in major Northern industrial cities, they became entrapped within a form of domestic colonization. Though Caribbean countries also released slaves, they remained colonized well into the twentieth century. After the end of the triangular slave trade, Africa was colonized by European powers for more than 100 years, which stripped the continent of many of its natural resources. New policies of imperialism also
left these countries dependent upon their former European colonizers for capital and investments like their Caribbean counterparts.

Third, though these societies, at the time of the production of these texts, were engaged in political, social, and economic upheaval and change, the discourse that negated Black males in Africa and the New World did not change. In fact, creation of the Black rapist beast in the New World, the Black Calibans of the Caribbean, and the Pleitoscenic, subhumanoid men of Africa only served to further inhibit and effeminize men of African descent. Savagery, juvenility, and sexual licentiousness became synonymous with Black males in Africa and across the Diaspora. Each protagonist engages in a form of oppositional masculinity that directly counters those stereotypes and myths. Bigger and Caliban engage in a more physical confrontation, whereas “Father of the gods” engages his opponents –slavery, colonialism, and imperialism –in battles of intelligence and strategy.

Regardless of strategy, oppositional masculinity has several shortcomings that manifest themselves in the texts. Wright, Césaire, and Tutuola write pieces that feature a lone male protagonist, each a hallmark of Western individualism. However, this format casts each Black masculine protagonist experience as the representative enslavement/colonized/imperial experience. Because the texts feature individuals, there is no in-depth portrayal of how racism and subsequent colonization affect communities. A community is implied in Tutuola, but the reader never sees it holistically as the book focuses solely on the drunkard and his adventures. This leads to alienation and an overall tone of hopeless and futility. Bigger never reaches any kind of full masculinity because he disintegrates into criminality. Prospero and Caliban are locked in perpetual struggle. Furthermore, these men possess and enact an individualistic masculinity which does not concern their larger communities. As for the palm wine drinkard,
Tutuola demonstrates that if he ceases to live in opposition to his own community, he can attain some sort of realized subjectivity through a communal notion of gender and gender performance.

Unfortunately, reclamation of Black male subjectivity depends upon the silencing of Black female voices in all of these texts. If white women play specific roles in white American discourse, Black women play little or no part in these tales of oppositional masculinity. For instance, the Black women in *Native Son* vacillate between weak and mindless to harsh and even complicit in emasculating young Black males. For instance, Vera, Bigger’s sister, is described as timed and afraid of life. She shrinks from life while Mrs. Thomas, Bigger’s mother, emasculates him with harsh words and name-calling. A single mother of three children in Depression-era Chicago, she also stirs feelings of confusion and impotence in the young man. She depends upon her eldest child, Bigger, for economic sustenance; yet, she treats him like a boy by constantly ordering him around and expecting prompt obedience. Completely opposite of Mrs. Thomas is Bigger’s girlfriend, Bessie, who he deliberately rapes and murders. Bessie demands nothing of Bigger aside from sex and alcohol, and Bigger seems to value her only for the easy sexual gratification she provides him. Bessie exists for Bigger in much the same way as Mary does, symbolically. She is a fantasy, and “Bigger can maintain this fantasy of Bessie only by depreciating and ultimately killing the Bessie that resists him and questions his confused thinking and harmful actions” (Dawahare 458). By insisting that Bessie only lives to gratify his most base sexual desire Bigger manifests marked immaturity, or boyishness, in his thinking. She destroys his fantasy of unlimited sexual gratification, so he lashes out like a child; only Bigger has a man’s body and his lashing out bashes in Bessie’s skull.

Bessie’s violent erasure is indicative of the silence imposed on most women in colonial texts. In most colonial texts, A.P. Busia correctly asserts that “the colonized male encounters not
himself but his antithesis; the colonized woman encounters only erasure” (95). Like in *Native Son*, the masculine voice is presented as the representation of Caribbean enslavement and colonialism. Both Ariel and Caliban are slaves, and both are males in Shakespeare’s play and in Césaire’s play. Also, both plays feature and invoke Caliban’s mother, Sycorax, but she remains voiceless: “She is invoked only to be spoken of as absent, recalled as a reminder of her dispossession, and not permitted her version of her story” (Busia 86). Though Sycorax is not physically present, the absence of her voice in both plays is deafening. With Prospero’s landing on the island, Sycorax’s linguistic teachings to her son are eradicated in both plays, and “having lost her language altogether, Caliban curses in the language of the master rather than in his ‘mother tongue.’” The black woman’s voice has been made to ‘disappear’ (Busia 94). The absence of Sycorax is indicative of the constructed silence of African women in colonialist literature, as well as in texts that claim to refute representations of African inhumanity. Absent in the original play, Cèsaire does not create a space for her to reclaim the island that Prospero and Caliban admit is rightfully hers. Rather than create a scenario in which Caliban and Sycorax reclaim the island and their indigenous identities together, Cèsaire’s Caliban marches toward oppositional combat alone. In this text, reclaiming identity is a lone, masculine undertaking.

Unlike Bessie, Mrs. Thomas, and Sycorax, the wife of “Father of the Gods” seems to be an equal partner in his quest. However, she still falls under patriarchal dominion. For instance, in rejecting her father’s arranged marriage, she foolishly brings about her own enslavement. If Skull and his use of the cowry shell are comparable to signs of enslavement and colonization, the young lady’s silence is indicative of the way enslavement and colonization silence *all* people, particularly women. According to Gayatri Spivak, the colonized woman is the ultimate subaltern, denied even a voice in opposition and characterized by her forced silence. Even
though “Father of the gods” removes the cowry shell from her neck, the lady does not attain any kind of agency, remaining a voiceless subaltern. Though she speaks several times, her husband “did not understand the meaning of her words, because she was talking with parables or as a foreteller” (257). He never understands her; thus, her words are lost. However, Tutuola portrays some sort of gender complementarity as the husband and wife travel together and work together to obtain finances for their journey, the act of speaking –reclamation of voice and identity for African, specifically Yoruba people –is performed solely by “Father of the gods.” In this text as in Césaire’s identity reclamation, even in opposition to Euro-American discourse, is a masculine enterprise.

Last, masculinity based upon oppositional defiance articulates the problems of Black masculine negation without necessarily offering a plausible political, social, or economic solution to it. Rather, it simply creates a complex symbiotic relationship based in ideological pugilism. In that sense, these characters are prodigious failures as plausible models of Black masculinity. For instance, Bigger kills and acts reactively to gain some visibility in the mind of white America. He wants to affect the psyche of white America, shocking them with his brutality and intelligence in criminality. He wants to reject the white American definition of himself, but “the irony, of course, is that Bigger already exists as an idea in white American minds. He does not exist there in the individual particularized details of his crime as he would like, but rather he exists as a fantastically dreadful formula” (Leiter 198). When he rapes and murders Bessie, he only “proves” the Black male rapist beast formulation, and therefore, fails as a model of Black plausible Black masculinity. In “How Bigger Was Born,” Wright claims Bigger a success because he does act for once in his life. However, Bigger’s individual acts of rape and murder do not challenge the structural racism experienced by inhabitants of America’s
Black Belt. In fact, based upon Bigger’s brutality, the reader has every reason to believe “there will be increased funding from the government to support police operations to prevent the kinds of acts Bigger was convicted of. And, of course, there will be no stop to the killing machine of the state that took Bigger’s life” (Fernandez et al 418). People like the Daltons will continue to charge Black Belt residents exorbitant rent, and the police brutality against Black boys like Bigger will more than likely escalate as a consequence of Bigger’s actions.

In *A Tempest*, Caliban also engages in a violent form of counternarration in which “Caliban’s counternarrative represents a more coherently symbolized articulation of bodily resentment into rational speech; in counternarrative the abrupt, pointed, explosive trajectory of the curse unfolds in the fuller form of story and history” (Lupton 11). Counternarrative as an oppositional strategy allows Caliban’s history and contemporary story to be heard, but it does not lead Caliban to a successful confrontation in which Prospero is driven from the island. His counternarrative, like Bigger’s oppositional murder, does not produce a feasible political program or philosophy. It simply expresses the desire for freedom from Prospero’s oppression. Also, Caliban’s actions depend upon Prospero’s actions as well. Instead of proactivity, both Caliban’s and Bigger’s actions are reactionary. Bigger reacts to the white-male-dominated newspaper stories about himself; Caliban reacts to Prospero’s “tricks” and violent resistance to his demand for freedom. In the end, Caliban does not launch an attack upon Prospero, but rather draws him into a fight, and awaits the elder’s actions. Though Prospero sends other Europeans away, he “leaves the island, as Caliban has come to understand, without admitting to himself that his work of colonization has been pointless and ineffectual; he has not won Caliban’s love; he has not converted Caliban to his values; and the isle itself could function perfectly without him
(3.5 passim)” (Porter 369). Apparently, Prospero is unwilling to admit his failure, and so the audience is left with an ideological stalemate between colonizer and colonized.

Though The Palm-Wine Drinkard is a powerful counternarrative in the Yoruba oral tradition, it does not offer many practical solutions to the problems that plague colonized African countries. While Césaire and Wright use language and stories which are directly confrontational with Euro-American hegemony, Tutuola takes a different approach in which his protagonist relies upon intellectual capabilities rather than direct confrontation with Euro-American men. Tobias claims that, “[t]hrough a sustained use of sublimation and metonymy, Tutuola creates an episodic allegory through which he can vent his personal frustrations with life under British domination” (67). He vents his frustrations while spinning cautionary tales against the materialistic trappings of colonialism and imperialism. He also implicitly suggests that reclamation of Black masculinity need not be directly oppositional, but can also be culturally-defined. In each allegorical episode, “Father of the gods” initially confronts Euro-American denigration of his masculinity, but he triumphs by relying not upon a European notion of masculinity, but upon the criteria set forth by griots of his own culture. This is his warning against internalizing the gendered ideas of another culture. Yet, advising caution and offering solutions are not one and the same; especially when that caution comes after colonialism has already gripped Africa. As aforementioned, there is not an urgent need to establish a masculine identity as in Native Son and A Tempest; yet, Tutuola does not articulate how one would reclaim a masculinity that has been nearly annulled by such colonial texts as Heart of Darkness and Tarzan. Also, throughout the narrative, he characterizes Africa as feminine via his nameless wife. Like in most colonialist literature, Africa stands helpless and voiceless, in need of a heroic, masculine savior.
In the penultimate chapter of *Black Skin White Masks*, “The Negro and Recognition,” Fanon divides the essay into two parts. The first part addresses psychologist and physician Alfred Adler and his inferiority complex as applied to Black people. The second part addresses Hegel’s master-slave dialectic in *Phenomenology of the Mind*. Though Hegel may have been writing from a strictly philosophical perspective, Fanon applies Hegel’s concept of visibility and recognition to slavery and subsequent colonization. Fanon interprets Hegel’s premises on self-consciousness as, “Man is human only to the extent to which he tries to impose his existence on another man in order to be recognized by him” (216). He extends that to include masters and slaves, saying, “One day the white Master, without conflict, recognized the Negro slave. But the former slave wants to make himself recognized” (217). At the basis of this relationship, Fanon claims, is reciprocity, but in a situation where the other is truly “Other” by the erasure of identity inherent in colonialism, there is no reciprocity, only reaction to one another’s scripted societal roles. Thus, confrontations (direct physical confrontations or more indirect battles of intellect) ensue, each side battling to the death for recognition by the other.

However, purely oppositional confrontations often result in a perpetual Hegelian master/slave circular motion. Opposition is often also reactional as Bigger’s and Caliban’s stories prove. Fanon issues a challenge: “Man’s behavior is not only reactional. And there is always resentment in a reaction…To educate man to be actional, preserving in all his relations his respect for the basic values that constitute a human world, is the prime task of him who, having taken thought, prepares to act” (222). Applied to Black male writers, Fanon declares that simply creating oppositional characters that demonstrate or articulate the splaying of Black masculine identity is not sufficient; neither is digging up and embracing a primordial African past and using it to claim cultural superiority over Euro-Americans. Though these early
narratives of Black masculine identity certainly foreground the plight of Black males, simple Hegelian opposition does not support a plausible Black masculine identity.

1 The British and French islands freed slaves and replaced slavery with indentured servitude by the late 1830s and 1840s. The Spanish and Dutch were the last to release their slaves, holding their slaves until the latter half of the 1800s, according to Klein and Vinson.

2 Haiti was the first Caribbean nation and only Black republic in the Western hemisphere to achieve independence in 1804. Cuba also received independence in the 1800s. Barbados, the Dominican Republic, Guyana, Jamaica, and Trinidad and Tobago all attained independence by the mid-1960s. The Bahamas, Dominica, Grenada, St. Lucia, and St. Vincent and the Grenadines received independence in the 1970s. Antigua and Barbuda and St. Kitt and Nevis received independence in the early 1980s. Aruba remains part of the Netherlands Kingdom, the Cayman Islands and Turks and Caicos remain a part of the United Kingdom, Guadeloupe and Martinique are overseas departments of France, and the Virgin Islands and Puerto Rico are territories of the United States.

3 In addition to being the “antithesis to Europe” (1785), as Chinua Achebe writes in his essay, “An Image of Africa: Racism in Conrad’s Heart of Darkness,” Africa becomes a backdrop for Euro-American masculine pursuits and a place of new markets for Euro-American businesses.

4 American films like D.W. Griffin’s Birth of a Nation used the body and “purity” of white American women to justify lynching African American males. It portrays a bestial Black man attempting to rape a white American woman (dressed in white to symbolize her virginity). Rather than let the Black man rape her, she jumps from a cliff. The Klan, like Tarzan, swoops in to avenge her death.

5 In her 1984 study, Exorcising Blackness: Historical and Literary Lynching and Burning Rituals, Trudier Harris concludes that motivations for mob violence, lynching, and castration of Black males were the same as the justification for slavery: to ensure that Black males remain cogs in a capitalist system designed to reward Euro-American men of their cultural/political/economic dominance in an uncertain, free-market economy by working to exclude other men, especially those of African descent. If the new symbol of the promise of American liberty was a demure lady in virginal robes, Euro-American discourse and the lynching and mutilation of Black male bodies served to remind African American males that they could take advantage of this freedom neither by consent nor by force.

6 This particular strategy is found in Chicago Defender articles written by Langston Hughes as well as those written by W.E.B. DuBois for The Crisis Magazine.

7 The Great Migration, or movement of African Americans from one part of the country to another, occurred in three phases. The Great Migration I occurred during World War I. The second, and largest phase, occurred during the World War II era, and for the first time in the nation’s history, the African Americans became an urban-based population. The movement is currently in its third phase, with many middle-aged African Americans moving away from the Rust and Steel Belts, and back to the South’s urban centers such as Houston, Texas, New Orleans, Louisiana, Memphis, Tennessee, Birmingham, Alabama, Atlanta, Georgia, Charlotte, North Carolina, Jackson, Mississippi, and other mid-sized/large cities. Please see The Warmth of Other Suns: The Epic Story of America’s Great Migration (2010) by Isabel Wilkerson for general information on the Great Migration, or Who Set You Flowin’?: the African American Migration Narrative (1995) by Farah Jasmine Griffin on how this movement affected African American literature.

8 Redlining involves real estate companies and banks which cooperatively target a certain area of a city, and refuse to offer houses to or lend to minorities outside of those areas. Companies would literally draw a red line around these areas on a city grid to delineate these areas from others in the cities; hence, the popular term “redlining.” Often, rent in these areas was exorbitant for the run-down kitchenette buildings, service-oriented businesses refused to open there, food was over-priced and of poor quality, and even medical care was overly-priced and of poor quality. Sadly, many cities would not allow permits for minorities to open better businesses in the neighborhoods where they lived, and even federally-subsidized loans were denied to minorities attempting to escape these conditions. Therefore, many urban, Northern cities created sprawling “ghettos,” and the unfair housing practices became a key issue during the early phases of the Civil Rights Movement. Gerrymandering is a process whereby one particular political party is given electoral advantage by manipulating geographical districts, or “redistricting.”
Though African Americans were allowed to vote without physical harassment, poll taxes, or Constitutional tests in most Northern cities, their votes essentially had no effect on the outcome of most elections due to gerrymandering for Euro-American political gain.

9 Though the heyday of the Chicago Blues scene would not reach its zenith until the 1950s, almost twenty years after the setting of *Native Son*, there was still a bustling music scene in Chicago where jazz and blues performers, like in New York, played smaller, more intimate clubs for Black audiences.

10 For instance, as mentioned in Chapter 2 of this project, France did not recognize Black males as adults until the age of 35. Therefore, rather than immediate emancipation, France recommended that slaves in its Caribbean nations remain slaves until the government deemed Black males capable of heading a household.

11 According to critics and historians, this text is based upon a Yoruba culture, but it does not explicitly state which country or city the story takes place in. The reader assumes that the action takes place on the West Coast of Africa where most Yoruba cultures are practiced.

12 *The Palm-Wine Drinkard* was the first African text to receive European acclaim, much to the chagrin of Tutuola’s contemporaries: “This antagonism is certainly felt in the writing of J.P. Clark, a fellow Nigerian writer who feels Tutuola has been raised on the shoulders of European critics solely because he does not write ‘correct’ English and is therefore a proper object for white paternalism” (Ferris 33-34). Academics shelved Tutuola’s seemingly “primitive” narrative for the more sophisticated ones written by college-educated Africans such as Achebe. Recently, however, scholars are rereading Tutuola within a postcolonial framework.

13 When *Native Son* was originally published, the movie scene was deleted due to graphic sexual content. However, it was later restored by the Library of Congress.

14 In fact, some of Tarzan’s footage is taken from *Trader Horn*, which actually contained shots from Africa. Clara Henderson says “…the drumming sequences are also most likely taken from the outtakes of the *Trader Horn* expedition. Despite the fact that the *Trader Horn* footage used in this film is authentic footage from Africa, the filmmakers thought it necessary to reshoot some of the *Trader Horn* scenes in America because the wild animal footage was not ‘wild enough’ (Hay 1991: 83)” (Henderson 113).

15 Once again, I am referencing Foucault here. He claims that discourse not only names, but defines an object as it names.

16 In Gayatri Spivak’s *Critique of Postcolonial Reasoning* she defines and follows the native informant through “Philosophy,” “Literature” “History,” and “Culture.” One way in which she defines the native informant is the educated elite of the indigenous population who acts as the voice of the “Othered” society or culture.
CHAPTER 4: BLACK MASCULINE IDENTITIES FROM THEIR OWN HISTORIES

Yet the adjustment must be made – rather, it must be attempted, the tension perpetually sustained – for without this he has surrendered his birthright as a man no less his birthright as a black man. The entire universe is then peopled only with his enemies, who are not only white men armed with rope and rifle, but his own far-flung contemptible kinsmen.

James Baldwin in “Many Thousands Gone”

In this chapter, I discuss *Things Fall Apart* by Chinua Achebe, *In the Castle of My Skin* by George Lamming, and *Invisible Man* by Ralph Ellison. Each text features a Black male protagonist who struggles to develop an individual masculine identity within his respective community by using cultural markers of what constitutes gender. While external factors such as Euro-American racism and colonialism loom largely in each text, the narratives show that masculinity must be internally defined. In addition, these texts act as demonstrative critiques of the earlier, oppositional Pan-Africanist literature produced by Black male writers that includes the Negritude literatures of Africa and the Black Caribbean and encompasses the protest literature produced by African Americans.
During the World War II era, literary manifestations of Pan-Africanism received intense scrutiny from both writers and cultural critics. In *The Wretched of the Earth*, Fanon offers broad criticism for writers of African descent in Africa as well as those in the New World for its monolithic portrayals of Africa and African people, and endorses literature written from the respective national cultures of Black populations. Though African people do share histories of enslavement and colonialism, there are real geographical and cultural differences that must be acknowledged. Because of these differences, Fanon explains, there can be no definitive or singular representation of Black peoples, or more specifically, Black male experience of oppression. At Pan-African Congresses or meetings of Black male writers such as the Conference of Negro Writers and Artists, disagreements frequently arose concerning how to correctly portray the Black experience, or the Black male experience with Euro-American oppression. Fanon demonstrates that even in a gendered experience there are differences which cannot be ignored, writing, “gradually the black Americans realized that their existential problems differed from those faced by Africans. The only common denominator between the blacks from Chicago and the Nigerians or Tanganyinkans was that they all defined themselves in relation to the whites” (*WOE* 153). Instead of singular, transnational portrayal which would border on essentialism, Fanon suggests that writers first look toward their own national cultures as a source of their literary inspiration. Fanon defines national culture as “first and foremost the expression of a nation, its preferences, its taboos and its model…National culture is the sum of all these considerations, the outcomes of tensions internal and external to society as a while and its multiple layers” (*WOE* 177). In addition to addressing the diminishing effects of Euro-American patriarchal supremacist discourse, viable Pan-Africanist literatures should contain elements of the local and national cultures that produce it. Since at this particular time, Black
identity was synonymous with Black masculine identity, according to Mary Berry in But Some of Us Are Brave: All the Women Are White, All the Blacks Are Men Black Women’s Studies, it is safe to assume that Fanon was also challenging Black male writers to leave behind their oppositional, monolithic configurations of Black masculine identity and embrace those identities which holistically accept their own national cultures.

Fanon’s advice was well-heeded by Black male writers who often found the various manifestations of the Pan-Africanist framework, such as the New Negro theory of the Harlem Renaissance literature or the emotional/spiritual emphasis of Negritude literature, very limiting. Wole Soyinka, a prolific writer and literary critic famously pronounced the limiting power of Negritude; he was often disappointed in its two-dimensional nature. At the Kampala African Writer’s Conference in 1962, Wole Soyinka voiced his “mot piquant before a wider audience: ‘I don’t think a tiger has to go around proclaiming his tigritude” (Soyinka in Feuser 557). While he acknowledges the good intentions of Negritude writers, his disdain stems from its dependence upon emotionalism as a marker of African character and the defensive tone that most Negritude literature often takes. Soyinka writes in Myth, Literature, and the African World that “Negritude adopted the Manichean tradition of European thought and inflicted it on a culture which is most radically anti-Manichean. It only accepted the dialectical structure of European ideological confrontations but borrowed from the very components of its racist syllogism” (127). In short, Negritude literature does not go beyond a Hegelian circle. In oppositional literature of Negritude, Black male writers engage Euro-American male writers in a form of pugilism concerning masculine identity. Wole Soyinka suggests, however, that Black people stop seeking white validation or acknowledgment from white males and simply write their respective Black cultures holistically –the good as well as the bad characteristics of each culture. Things Fall
Apart certainly fits both Fanon’s and Soyinka’s paradigm in that it shows a particular culture at a particular time holistically. There is no commentary upon the “backwardness” of the African nations or the inherent badness of encroaching colonialism; only a clear, anthropological picture of a people in a certain time period. Achebe uses two narrators to portray the nation and to provide the reader with the male protagonist’s psychological interior so that the reader understands the internal motivation for the external, sometimes destructive behavior this character displays.

Like Soyinka and his writings about Africa, Brathwaite offers similar solutions to the Manichean problem inherent in Pan-Africanist literature in the Caribbean. Instead of engaging in this two-sided struggle of discourse-antidiscourse, Brathwaite recommends that literature should reflect the history of Africans in the New World, shared and fragmented with the ability to transcend linguistic and cultural boundaries. In his famous essay, “Jazz and the West Indian Novel,” Brathwaite writes that the history of Africans in the New World is “a spiritual inheritance from slavery and the long story before that of the migrant African moving from the lower Nile across the desert to the Western ocean only to meet the Portuguese and a History that was to mean the middle passage, America, and a rootless sojourn to the New World” (29-30). Writing, like jazz, should also reflect the creolization of African cultures. Specifically, Brathwaite suggests “that West Indian culture must be defined in terms of the process of creolization, so too must this creolization be understood against its background of slavery” (116). Like a jazz song with its consistent rhythmic backbone and room for improvisation, West Indian literature must keep slavery as its commonality from island-to-island while leaving room for local cultural forms. Brathwaite claims that Black West Indian writers may be saddled with the paralysis of Manichean form because they “have not, on the whole, made any real concerted
attempt to explore or rehabilitate this tradition” (76). By looking seriously into local traditions, Black West Indian writers may break any malaise in their content as well as form. During the formative years of Black Caribbean literature, it was dominated by Black male voices. Brathwaite’s advice, therefore, naturally involved portrayals of Black male Caribbean islanders. After the initially oppositional portrayals, especially the appropriations of Caliban, Black Caribbean writers also began to produce more nuanced portrayals of Black male Caribbean islanders with geographical/cultural markers of the Caribbean archipelago. *In the Castle of My Skin* is a novel of psychological interiority, but it also incorporates the cultural markers of Lamming’s Barbados village and privies the reader to the quotidian events in the days of the lives of the Black male protagonist and his friends. It plunges the reader into the public/personal/local/national world of a nation in a liminal phase. It is nominally free of British rule, but still dependent upon the British for economic survival, and British culture is still the hegemonic culture as manifested through the school with its British textbooks and the system of governance, a relic of British rule with Black faces replacing the white ones. The Black male protagonist, though looking to leave the small village and enter the world, must use his own culture’s markings to define a personal masculine identity. His identity, he realizes, is shaped by his own community in its entirety and not an individual undertaking.

Just as Soyinka offers general criticism of Negritude literature, Baldwin offers a literary critique of the African American protest novel, specifically of *Native Son* and its portrayal of Black masculinity. Baldwin observes first that the protagonist is a lone character, inexplicably exiled from his community and himself. Second, Bigger succumbs to fear, self-hatred, and inferiority.² He writes in “Many Thousand Gone”: 

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His kinsmen are quite right to weep and be frightened, even to be appalled: for it is not his love for them or for himself which causes him to die, but his hatred and his self-hatred; he does not redeem the pains of a despised people, but reveals on the contrary, nothing more than his own fierce bitterness at having been born one of them. In this also he is the ‘native son,’ his progress determinable by the speed with which the distance increases between himself and the auction-block and all that the auction-block implies. \[30-31\]

Soyinka insists that Negritude literature of the Francophone African/African Diaspora writers is limiting, so does Baldwin conclude about the protest novel produced by African American males.\(^3\) Though produced at a later date than Negritude literature, the American-produced protest novel is also part of the Pan-Africanist literary manifestations. In fact, Baldwin insists that the protest novel’s character fails because he accepts the kind of inhumanity leveraged at him by white American discourse by becoming the rapist and murderer that he was always-already named. He does not reach any type of manhood as Wright implies, but accepts inhumanity and castration instead, according to Baldwin. Baldwin suggests that “adjustments must be made,” to Black males defining themselves based on their respective communities and not on the lone male protagonists produced in earlier literature. The danger in protest fiction as well as Negritude literature lies in the characters’ acceptance of their marginalized positions. It is partially in response to *Native Son* that *Invisible Man* is written. Like *Things Fall Apart* and *In the Castle of My Skin*, *Invisible Man* is a novel that features a Black male protagonist and his interior. *Invisible Man* is a classic migration narrative in that the protagonist travels from the
rural American South to the industrial American North in search of greater social and economic opportunities. Yet, the protagonist embarks upon a mental journey in addition to his physical one. He must discover his Black masculine identity using specifically African American cultural markers. Internalization of Euro-American patriarchal values only hinders his ability to formulate a concrete image of his own identity; hence, the “invisible” portion of his identity. He is invisible to white Americans, and as long as he uses white American standards to formulate an individualistic brand of masculinity, he remains invisible from himself as well. Both the invisible man and Okonkwo reach an epiphany concerning what kinds of masculinity they have each formulated in their minds versus the pragmatism of daily life.

Set at the dawn of European colonialism in Africa, *Things Fall Apart* acts as an anthropological study of an African culture in reverse; the knowledge of the culture comes from internal sources with thorough knowledge of this particular nation rather than an external agent who visits and observes as a stranger. Unlike Tutuola’s *The Palm-Wine Drinkard*, this novel portrays a living indigenous African society holistically without the magical realism of Tutuola or the embellished extravagance of travel tales. Wafting between an engaged narrator who lives among the people and one who gazes from afar, the novel focuses on the people and events in the village of Umuofia. The engaged narrator tells of each village event; the one who gazes from afar temporarily leaves the action to explain particular symbols and ceremonial activities to the prying eyes of the reader. The result is “the Igbo tribal world emerges here in all of its specificity, its daily routines and seasonal rituals attuned to the natural rhythms of its living environment” (Irele 120). The two narrators cover the internal tensions and contradictions within the culture without the disparaging tone found in many European anthropological and other writings concerning various African cultures. The book focuses specifically on the parts of
the culture which define gender in the village and how its own gender division can easily be
distorted by an individual who desires an individualized type of masculinity.

Semantically, the contradictions represented by Umuofia’s gendered existence and
embodied by Okonkwo, the book’s central character, lend themselves quite easily to distortion.
Okonkwo’s misgivings are certainly understandable to the person viewing the society only on its
surface or through its mythology. Everything in Umuofia has a gender designation, even the
crops. Women’s crops were “coco-yams, beans, and cassava. Yam, the king of crops, was a
man’s crops” (23). Indeed, “the crime was of two kinds, male and female” (124). Male crime is
premeditated, and female crime is inadvertent. Seemingly, all things masculine are valued at a
higher premium than feminine virtues. Irele reasons in the African Imagination that manhood
was seemingly valued higher in this society “because it is confronted with what is nothing less
than a precarious material situation, it has perforce to accord primacy to manliness as a
manifestation of being at its most physical, elevated into a norm of personal worth and social
value” (126). Umuofia is a society that scratches a living from the soil and is dependent upon
physical labor for food and physical force for tactical military victories: “The valuation of
physical prowess, in play as in war, the emphasis on individual achievement, considered as
instrumental to social solidarity, appear then as strategies intended to ensure the security and
permanence of the group” (Irele 126). The elevation of masculine attributes makes it appear that
women are not integral to the society. First, holding positions in governing and decision-
making, bravery during wartime, and wealth are considered characteristics of masculinity. The
successful man has plenty of yams in his barns, has taken enough titles to be a clan elder, has
several wives, and is a fierce warrior. Second, Umuofian society is also a meritocratic one for
men; women are excluded from the competitive process of receiving higher status through the
capture of titles for physical feats of bravery. Claiming titles, as the text implies, is an activity that defines Umuofian masculinity and represents a demarcation between male and female. Thus, a man who takes no titles in this culture is equivalent to a woman, also known as “agbala” as Okonkwo learns cruelly from a teasing peer. Last, women cannot participate in the egwugwu, “the most powerful and the most secret cult in the clan” (88). This cult serves as the judiciary body, making decisions on various disputes within the clan. Though women may have had their own titles and secret rites, the narrators do not elaborate on to those activities.

According to the aforementioned criteria, though manhood comes at a steep price it is meritocratic with hard work being rewarded with a higher status and more socio-political power. In this particular text, “Okonkwo is a ‘Big Man,’ one who is wealthy in people, yams and power” (Etter-Lewis 161). Okonkwo is a unique character within the novel because he seems totally devout to the version of masculinity which is embodied in his clan’s own mythology about itself, and his devotion is based upon his individual needs rather than the harmony of the clan. He believes that masculinity is the ultimate form of subjectivity and it can only be achieved through the total exclusion of women. His notion of cultural definition is not strange: “A subject is defined by his or her culture, but this definition is not mediated by the real conditions of existence, but the ideal images which the culture promotes to define itself. Okonkwo’s mistake, it appears, is his commitment to those ideal images (‘imaginary relationships’) which his culture promotes but also blocks” (Gikandi 41). This seems contradictory until the reader understands that Umuofia’s pragmatic life is actually governed by a firm balance of male and female attributes: a relationship of interdependence and reciprocity. For instance, Umuofia was known and feared by all of its neighbors for being fierce warriors with powerful magic. However, the narrator declares, “the active principle in that medicine had been an old woman with one leg. In
fact, the medicine itself was called agadi-nwayi, or old woman” (11-12). The medicine men and priests may be knowledgeable, but the potency of their medicine depends upon a woman. Even the belief system, with its deities and messengers, manifests this careful balance of male and female. The aforementioned word, “agbala,” is also synonymous for the Oracle of the Hills and the Caves, and this oracle is one of the most powerful deities in Umuofia. The gazing narrator details the power of this entity, explaining, “People came from far and near to consult. They came when misfortune dogged their steps or when they had a dispute with their neighbors” (17). Though the text refers to the spirit as a masculine entity, the messenger is a woman, Chielo.

Even with a strict pragmatic/spiritual balance in place, one can safely conclude that Okonkwo’s psychological distortion is not borne solely of his society’s gender divisions. In fact, “there is evidence elsewhere in the text that Okonkwo’s psychological indoctrination into manhood developed partly with his awareness of how men are not to be” (Etter-Lewis 162). Okonkwo is first acquainted with a deviant form of Umuofian masculinity as a child. Unoka, his father, was a living antithesis to every measure the village of Umuofia uses to define masculinity. Much like the palm-wine drinkard of Tutuola’s tale, Unoka knows who he is, and had little regard for his clan’s standards. For instance, whereas most men of the village reveled in the prospect of war, “Unoka was never happy when it came to wars. He was “in fact a coward who could not bear the sight of blood” (6). Whereas most men of Umuofia thoroughly enjoyed the fruits of large gardens, Unoka “was poor and his wife and children had barely enough to eat” (5). Whereas most men enjoyed working with the machete to clear those gardens, Unoka was lazy and preferred to work the same distressed soil with each planting season rather than clearing a new farm. Whereas many men Unoka’s age had taken titles in the clan, Unoka remained a “man who had no titles” (13). Whereas most men married several wives, Unoka was husband to
only one. Even in death, Unoka remained flippant to his society’s standards. Unoka “died and 
rotted away above the earth, and was not given the first or the second burial” (18). Defiant to the 
end, Unoka carried his flute with him as he walked to die alone in the forest. A lazy, titleless 
man, Unoka became a constant source of embarrassment for his son, Okonkwo.

Thus, Okonkwo’s rigid inflexibility concerning his nation’s standards of masculinity 
develops from embarrassment of his father, his inability to accept his father as a viable member 
of the clan, and fear of being seen as similar to his father: “Okonkwo, consequently, wants to be 
a warrior, a strong man in the traditional Igbo value system” (Salamone 204). Okonkwo 
embarks upon a palimpsestic struggle to become the ideal “Big Man” of Umuofia and 
simultaneously erase memory of his pitiful father. On the one hand, Okonkwo’s masculinity is 
in fact hypermasculinity, which is a grossly exaggerated performance of masculinity, and a strict 
denial of what the performer comprehends as feminist or unmasculine traits. On the other hand, 
“Okonkwo’s compensatory hypermasculinity contravenes the Igbo ideal, which, the novel makes 
clear, holds in equilibrium the qualities characterized as masculine and feminine” (Kortenaar 
774). In denying his father, Okonkwo denies the feminine side of the clan, also a vital 
component to its existence. With his flute and his propensity for story-telling, Unoka is 
representative of the feminine element that the clan needs for harmony, balance, and survival.

Denial of Unoka and his feminine traits drives the narrative on several levels. His 
character endows Okonkwo with an intransigent psychology concerning women, and ultimately 
affects Okonkwo’s behavior toward his children; Okonkwo constantly reprimands his eldest son, 
Nwoye, for seemingly feminine behavior or for traits that resemble Unoka’s while nursing 
constant disappointment that one of his daughters, Ezinma, is not a boy. Both children can only 
ever disappoint Okonkwo: Nwoye for not being a masculine replica of his father and Ezinma for
simply being born the wrong sex. Nwoye’s propensity for deep thought and challenge of his culture’s customs often causes tension between himself and Okonkwo. The engage narrator explains how Okonkwo misreads Nwoye’s pensive nature: “Nwoye resembled his grandfather, Unoka, who was Okonkwo’s father” (155). Thus, as he does with all things and people who resemble Unoka, Okonkwo deals harshly with the child. He wants to instill a disdain for “womanly” things into Nwoye, and according to Okonkwo, this would properly suit Nwoye for manhood. In order to satisfy his father, Nwoye, only pretends to have a disdain “about women and their children” (52). However, after Okonkwo kills his friend, Ikemefuna, Nwoye no longer tries to please his father. The killing of Ikemefuna “marks the beginning of the boy’s disaffection toward his father and ultimately his alienation from the community that Okonkwo has come to represent for him” (Irele 133). Just as Okonkwo comes to disdain all things concerning Unoka, Nwoye comes to fear and despise the things that resemble his father, which includes the highly-valued masculine characteristics of his culture.

Within the narrative there is a comparison between Nwoye and his father’s favorite daughter, Ezinma. Okonkwo tells Obierka, “If Ezinma had been a boy I would have been happier. She has the right spirit” (66). The real sorrow lies in Okonkwo’s inability to see past the child’s biological sex. He projects feminine “weakness” onto Nwoye, and has inappropriately masculinizes Ezinma, a daughter who cannot be his heir. Therefore, “the least likely and least appropriate substitute, Ezinma can only disappoint Okonkwo; she can only ever fail to be the son she should be” (Counihan 174). His masculinization of Ezinma breaks clan laws, and the child must be called back to her role by the clan’s deities. The priestess, Chielo, has a fondness for Ezinma and in the possession of her god, she takes the child away from her father’s obi and into the cave where she has a conversation with the girl.
In addition, Okonkwo’s willed deafness toward anything pertaining to Unoka prescripts any deeper understanding of his society’s culture other than the simplest surface differences between male and female. Several incidents show that he simply cannot conceive of life outside of his own hypermasculine interpretation of the clan’s identity. In the beginning of the story, the narrator explains Okonkwo’s struggle to become a “Big Man,” but what of his mother and sister, the other laborers within his family? What becomes of them? The reader never learns of them because “within the total narrative space of *Things Fall Apart* there is only one direct, substantive mention of our hero’s mother” (Jeyifo 847). After killing Ikemefuna, Okonkwo cannot sleep for days, and when he finally does sleep, a mosquito buzzes in his ear. He then remembers a story his mother told him. In an instant, he dismisses his mother’s stories to him as “silly women’s stories,” slaps the mosquito, and turns to his side to sleep more comfortably: “the single, brief mention of Okonkwo’s mother is extraordinarily suggestive both for reading Okonkwo’s particular brand of misogyny and neurotic masculinist personality” (Jeyifo 848).

Women often make many contributions to West African societies, including the one in which Okonkwo inhabits; “besides bearing children, women in polygynous societies are often expected to do most of the planting and harvesting and to cook and clean for their husbands and children” (Powell 173). Okonkwo dismisses the product of their labor as “female” crops, and behaves as if his labor alone pulled his family from the edge of starvation. This is a manifestation of his determination to inhabit an individualist gendered existence rather than one based upon the harmony of the clan.

Okonkwo’s propensity toward individualized masculinity with complete disdain toward femininity often complicates his relationship with his fellow villagers. Gikandi demonstrates how when he writes, “If we keep in mind that Unoka, in spite of his failure to live up to the
ideology of wealth which the culture promotes, represents and indispensable side of Igbo life (the artistic and humanistic, if you want), then Okonkwo’s absolute negation of the father complicates his relationship with his community” (41). While Okonkwo may not value feminine contributions to his society, others of his village do and are not as rigid with their criteria for what constitutes a man. For instance, a man named Osugo contradicts Okonkwo at a kindred meeting, and “without looking at the man, Okonkwo had said, ‘This meeting is for men.’ The man who had contradicted him had no titles” (26). This draws the ire of clan elders, which Okonkwo is obliged to heed. The non-participatory narrator reports, “The eldest man present said sternly that those whose palm-kernels were cracked for them by a benevolent spirit should not forget to be humble” (26). Okonkwo also beats one of his wives during the sacred Week of Peace and is punished by the Earth Goddess, Ani. Some of his neighbors declare that his punishment was too light and the sentence should have been death. Okonkwo resents the laws of his clan that interfere with his overly-masculinized idea of who he and his people are, and though he claims to keep a strict adherence to the customs, is also a habitual breaker of those laws when they do not benefit his personal ambitions and definitions of masculinity.

Eventually, the clan exiles Okonkwo because of his hypermasculinity. While celebrating the death of a warrior, he discharges his gun and accidentally kills a young boy. Because the crime is a female one, or an accident, Okonkwo’s punishment is exile rather than death. He retreats to his mother’s home, Mbanta, where he labels the clan as “womanly,” and is scornful of them, even though they treat him generously. His uncle Uchendu, the clan elder, publicly chastises Okonkwo for his intransigence:

A man belongs to his fatherland when things are good and life is sweet. But when there is sorrow and bitterness he finds refuge in
his motherland. Your mother is there to protect you. She is buried there. And that is why we say that mother is supreme. Is it right that you, Okonkwo, should bring to your mother a heavy face and refuse to be comforted…Have you not heard the song they sing when a woman dies? ‘For whom is it well, for whom is it well? There is no one for whom it is well.” [135].

Though many feminist critics attack *Things Fall Apart* for its emphasis on masculinity, they seem to totally ignore Uchendu’s speech. Pivotal to the novel’s trope of balance, Uchendu clearly admonishes Okonkwo: “Uchendu’s response constitutes the novel’s deliberation on the question of motherhood and femininity and nurturing as opposed to fatherhood, masculinity and aggression” (Davies 245). According to Uchendu, women are invaluable to any culture. After all, they give birth to men such as Okonkwo and deserve not only acknowledgment for their contributions, but respect and equality.

As an alternative Okonkwo’s antithetically-based masculinity, Achebe presents Okonkwo’s best friend, Obierika. In his writings on the novel, Irele suggests that “Obierika seems to have been conceived as a foil to Okonkwo, serving as a kind of Menenius Agrippa to Okonkwo’s Coriolanus, so that his attitude indicates the possibility of an alternative stance” (130). Unfortunately, Achebe does not reveal much about Obierika’s past – only that he is as respected, fearless, and powerful as Okonkwo. Obierika’s life is not driven by fear of feminine weakness, and he can think rationally about the ideals and traditions of his clan. Through conversations that are filled with proverbs and lengthy debates with his friends, Obierika challenges and questions the customs of his clan. For instance, after Okonkwo kills Ikemefuna, Obierika admonishes him saying to Okonkwo, “If I were you I would have stayed at home.
What you have done will not please the Earth” (67). Okonkwo claims he had no choice but yield to the god, but Obierika reminds Okonkwo that even their gods leave him some agency saying, “If the Oracle said that my son should be killed I would neither dispute it nor be the one to do it” (67). Because of his pensive nature and his acceptance of the female principle, Obierika finds an alternative whereas Okonkwo does not. Ironically, Nwoye resembles his father’s friend more than either his father or Unoka in that they both think of things deeply and question the validity/goodness of their nation’s customs. For instance, Obierika “remembered his wife’s twin children, whom he had thrown away. What crimes had they committed” (125)? Likewise, Nwoye was chilled by the cry of the abandoned babies, and privately questioned this practice. Perhaps with more nurturing and understanding, Nwoye, who also thinks of things as deeply as Obierika, would have come to represent an alternative version of Umuofian masculinity.

Ultimately, Okonkwo fails, as did Unoka, for several reasons. He fails in his method of death. After killing a white man in anger and seeing that his clan would not follow him in war, Okonkwo takes his own life. The clan’s reluctance to follow him to war is its manifestation of its own restrictions and contradictions; Okonkwo’s unrealistic version of his culture’s hypermasculinity exists only in his mind. Like Ezinma, the clan can only ever disappoint him, and he commits suicide following his epiphany. Committing suicide is an abomination, according to his clan’s customs. Like Unoka, Okonkwo will not receive a warrior’s burial, but “he will be buried like a dog” (208). Also “Okonkwo fails, additionally, because he ignores or cannot accept the wisdom of traditional respect for ‘Mother’” (Davies 246). He does not heed Uchendu’s warning. Denying the very real contributions of the feminine to his society only leads to death for Okonkwo individually. The clan’s imminent break-up is represented culturally.
by the Christian church’s success at winning converts such as Nwoye and other outcasts in the village.

Like *Things Fall Apart*, Lamming’s *In the Castle of My Skin* is a historical study written in reverse. The text, an autoethnobiography, attempts to tell the story of a people in a Caribbean nation who otherwise may not have a voice in History. It articulates an identity for those Caribbean islanders who may not have one in History. Like Achebe’s text, this text is split between narrators: an omniscient, third-person narrator and G, the book’s main character; the book is also split between a more formal English and nation language. Like the two narrators of Umuofia, the two narrators here provide a very clear view of life in Creighton Village for its Black residents and the interior of G’s motivations as well. The narrators waft between individual episodes that occur as the boys participate in one troubling episode after another, and events that encompass the entire population of the village. The boys’ development from boyhood to adult manhood is juxtaposed to Barbados’ status as a British colony to a nominally free nation. As the boys grow, they begin to differentiate between desirable and undesirable forms of manhood. Those men who operate within the British colonial system—the schoolteacher and bathhouse keeper—represent undesirable forms masculinity. The leftover colonial school and religious system promote indecisiveness or impotency in Black men. The second class of men are unfortunate victims of the colonial system. Shoemaker and Pa at least grasp toward some sort of self-definition and awareness, but the colonial educational and economic system collude to keep them both impoverished and undereducated. Therefore, they never reach the type of validation that they crave. Still, a third class of men like Mr. Slime, represent a newly-emerging, Euro-American educated bourgeoisie who possess Black faces, but exploit and continue to auto-castrate their people the same as the former colonizer. G, the protagonist, must
forge a new masculine identity in spite of the various restraints placed upon him by the relics of colonialism.

Traditionally, Black Caribbean writers have had two options in identity exploration: the notion of recovery of a lost African ancestry or Cesaire’s notion of verrition. According to J. Michael Dash, Caribbean scholar, Cesaire’s notion of verrition as used in Notebook means to sweep clean. Indeed, the text begins with a catastrophic flood on G’s, the protagonist, ninth birthday, which sweeps the entire village clean. The flood could signify several things, including erasure of the history of the island’s peasantry, the African-descended population that remained after emancipation. Aside from post-emancipation verrition, perhaps the flood also signifies the notable absence of fathers in the text. There are men, but few fathers. The absence of fathers easily facilitates a gendered language introduced very early in the text when G declares, “And what did I remember? My father who had only fathered the idea of me had left me the sole liability of my mother who really fathered me” (11). Recent readings of the text suggests that “the absent father stands for the lack of a strong identification with a homeland, for in the US South and Barbados, white culture, which defines all standards and, importantly, publically shared history, denies people of color a place in either the past or the present apart from servitude and submission” (Lowe 560). This same reading has been applied to Native Son as well. In this project, the absence of fathers clears the way for G and his friends to craft new definitions of masculinity in the text. This sweeping clean motion also allows Lamming to coalesce nationhood and masculinity; as G and his gaggle of friends grow from boys to men, Barbados transitions from a British colony to a sovereign nation.

Since G lives in a community of men and women who form a very small village rather than a city, alienation and exile are very difficult to rationalize. Unlike Native Son in which
Wright offers no plausible explanation for Bigger’s phallic no man’s land, Lamming provides the reader with two very creditable reasons for G’s loneliness and its effect upon the development of his male subjectivity. First, according to E. K. Brathwaite, feelings of alienation among the descendants of slaves in the Caribbean are quite historically valid. While the Black Caribbean population was allowed to maintain some of its African elements during slavery, colonial schools and church missions worked very diligently to eradicate these customs and practices after Emancipation. The colonial schools impose European History upon the children while the churches work diligently to completely erase African religious practices and to force European/Euro-American mores upon the islanders and this affects the boys’ masculine identities. For example, when the boys learn about valiant men in their history classes at the colonial school, all of those men are British. One boy says, “I read ‘bout all those who been making hist’ry, William the Conqueror an Richard an’ all these. I read how they make hist’ry, an’ I say to myself ‘tis time I make some, too” (48). Since the boys apparently do not learn about any Black men of historical importance, the only men worth imitating are white and outside of the history of their island. As the boys travel through the village and learn of enslavement, it only invokes feelings of confusion within them.

Second, Lamming provides the reader with a clear differentiation between a penis and phallus. A penis is a male body organ, a part of genitalia and sexual reproduction organs. On the other hand, a phallus is a “cultural construct that, in a variety of complex representations as a symbolic double for the penis…It represents a distinctly masculine superiority that extends beyond the body into the realms of intellectual authority, political power, and cultural preeminence” (MacMullan 7). In plantation societies, Black males most definitely possessed penises, but could not legally possess any phallic authority or participate in any facets of the
phallic economy. The three facets of G’s society that constitute the phallic economy: public and social domination to the exclusion of women, economic success, and political authority. It may appear to be common knowledge that “Within the phallic economy, men achieve dominance because of their possession of a penis, which marks them as legitimate bearers of phallic power” (MacMullan 7), but in a colonial or segregated society Black men achieve only limited, hard-won participation in the phallic economy and many times through the various colonial systems such as their schools, churches, or by serving as mid-level officials whose activities more than likely benefit the hegemonic culture. As a formerly colonized society, G’s island culture most certainly denies Black men full participation in the phallic economy, and they must overcome certain barriers and work very hard to achieve an education tailored from the colonizer’s standards. They must also master the language of the hegemonic culture in order to obtain the limited participation granted to them.

In “Discourse on Language,” Foucault explains that education, language, and discourse are inseparably linked:

Education may well be, as of right, the instrument whereby every individual, in a society like our own, can gain access to any kind of discourses. But we all know its distribution, in what it permits and what it prevents, it follows well-trodden battle-lines of social conflict. Every educational system is a political means of maintaining or modifying the appropriations of discourse, with the knowledge and the powers it carries with it. [227]

The colonial school and especially its imposition of the English language and British history alienate G from his surroundings. Though G is unable to adequately articulate the rigid
political/cultural agenda behind the failure to mention slavery in the school’s history books or the severe restriction on the use of Bajan nation language in school or official business, he does feel exile and alienation from the village at large and the men he loves like Shoemaker or Pa. In *The Pleasure of Exile*, Lamming writes that Pa’s character is based upon PaPa Grandison, a village father figure for the boys. Lamming writes that his colonial “school had one intention: that it was training me to forget and be separate from the things that PaPa already was: peasant and alive” (228). G’s formal education may grant him limited participation in the island’s British-defined phallic economy, but it separates him from his own culturally-defined masculinity. This is a constant source of G’s internal alienation throughout the text.

Furthermore, the educational system prepares the Black males of Barbados to take specific roles within the phallic economy, further limiting their participation. It not only perpetuates a system marked by cyclical poverty and political apathy, but also helps to define gender roles on the island. According to educational experts, one “major function of education is the transmission of society’s norms and values. Education therefore has a significant role in shaping how a society understands, interprets, and treats issues of gender” (Grace and Predergast 14). G explains that the boys “left at fourteen and spent a year at the bench [learning a trade]. Within two years they had become men with weekly wages and women of their own” (219). To possess a job with wages and a woman to support financially are markers of adult manhood for the village’s Black male residents. The school does not prepare the boys to gain cultural/economic pre-eminence, intellectual authority, or political power. Instead, G insists that the school serves another purpose: “The village school served the needs of the villagers, who were poor, simple and without a very marked sense of social prestige” (218). In a phallic sense, the colonial educational system promotes impotency among the island’s Black men.
In this text, Lamming demonstrates that phallic impotency is linked to masculinity rather than physical sexual inability. In fact, the Oxford Dictionary of English first defines “impotent” as being unable to take effective action; helpless or powerless. According to Angus McLaren in Impotence: a Cultural History (2007), impotency has been historically linked to men’s social status. The potent man is socially dominant with submissive, chaste wife who quietly supports his socio-cultural/political career and accepts his sexual indiscretions with other women. Their relationship is an uneven power dynamic: the man is dominant while the wife is subordinate.

Part of his phallic authority is the ability to make decisions apart from his wife and to control her actions as well. The headmaster of G’s school, also representative of the colonial system, is neither dominant in his home with his wife, nor is he able to take definitive action concerning her sexual indiscretions. The narrator allows the reader to eavesdrop on a conversation between young boys as they help clean a peer who the head teacher beat until defecation. The young boy explains the head teacher’s animus towards him: his mother works for the head teacher, and she knows that the head teacher’s wife is “hot stuff” (50), or sexually promiscuous. The gender roles are further reversed because the head teacher is a drunkard, and his wife physically dominates him by beating him with a belt when he is inebriated. The wife further subordinates the head teacher by discussing his shortcomings with the domestics. The boy relays to others, “His wife don’t hide anything. She don’t keep anything in, an’ tis not once or twice, but time an’ again that she say to my mother what his shortcoming is” (47). The head teacher’s wife is not the quiet subordinate woman that Euro-American missionary workers claim women ought to be; instead, she is the more dominant partner in their relationship and a source of private shame for the head teacher.
In the phallic economy, possession of a penis grants the possessor a certain amount of power to make decisions and to control the actions of others who may not be their wives. In a racialized colonial situation this power is limited by the very institutions that help constitute the phallic economy. School teacher is granted a reprieve from his drunkenness by the village people because of his position as an educator. However, his public persona renders him helpless to control his wife’s promiscuity, especially when it occurs with one of his subordinate employees. He discovers the affair by accident one day and experiences psychological impotency. The narrator informs the audience about head teacher’s internal dilemma: “He tried to think of what he might do. It wasn’t always like that. Formerly, he had the ready response, the manufactured word or phrase, and the cultivated face...Now these had retreated. They ad all become inoperative. It was almost like being a boy again” (66). Because the head teacher does not want to discuss publicly his wife’s promiscuity and lack of control over her actions, he does not confront his subordinate and loses phallic potency through his inability to act. Here as in ancient days, “loss of potency meant loss of manhood and defeat” (McLaren 5). Defeated by his wife and the subordinate teacher, the headmaster finds that he can only control, punish, and dominate the male pupils at his school. As the group of boys cleans his victim, they become disgusted by the head teacher and reach an important conclusion concerning masculinity: “A man who beat a boy like that is an advantage-taker” (47). Though Black and in possession of some degree of power, the head teacher represents an undesirable model of masculinity for the boys.

Though much space has been devoted to the colonial educational system, it is not the only system that induces a sense of phallic impotency or castration in Black Caribbean men in Castle. In other episodes, the church and its authorities, both Catholic and Protestant, cause
phallic impotence through indecision. For example, G and his friends discuss Jon, Jen, and Susie, a curious case of indecision. Jon lived with Susie, but impregnated Jen, a preacher’s daughter. Under the threat of death from the preacher and poisoning from Susie, Jon promises both women to marry them and sent them to two separate churches: Susie to the Catholic church and Jen to the Protestant one. Unable to make a decision, Jon hides in a mahogany tree above a graveyard. Trumper, one of G’s friends, tells the story to the boys, “The graveyard wus quiet an silent like nothin’ he ever know before, an’ he sit down betwixt two graves with a teeny-weeny bit of light on his shirt sleeve, an’ wait” (125). Trumper never finishes the story; neither the boys nor the reader ever learns what becomes of Jon. We know that someone finds Jon simply sitting, waiting, and being as indecisive as the head teacher. Jon, who succumbs to the religious morality imposed upon him by the church, represents an undesirable form of masculinity due to his inability to act one way or the other - impotency. For the boys, to become a Christian man, whether Protestant or Catholic means to take away the ability to make a decision independently and thus strip away masculine agency. They all vow to retain their masculine agency by repeatedly rejecting entreaties from people to join any church, Protestant or Catholic.

In one instance, Lamming demonstrates that the colonial system may psychologically castrate the Black males of Barbados before they reach full potency. The bathhouse keeper, a very low-level colonial agent, symbolically castrates G and the boys. While at the bathhouse, the boys discover that they can achieve erection at will, and participate in group masturbation in order to achieve ejaculation, a veritable symbol of masculinity, according to the boys. The narrator observes, “Simultaneously they performed the feat, and the supervisor unbidden saw” (30). Before the boys achieve ejaculation, the spying bathhouse keeper stops them. Read allegorically, this episode is Lamming’s comment upon colonialism in the Caribbean; the system
of colonialism, enacted shortly after emancipation in many Caribbean nations, effectively precluded any sense of self-determination, or manhood, for those islands whose population was majority Black.

The absence of immediate fathers in Castle does not mean that there is a void of all father figures as in Native Son. There is a community of men there. Some men, like Shoemaker and Pa, represent models of masculinity for the boys who are more suitable than the teacher, bathhouse keeper, overseer, or Mr. Slime, the politician. For instance, Shoemaker possesses some sort of economic solvency outside the colonial structure. While the rest of the men depend upon the white landholders for employment as well as shelter, Shoemaker is the proprietor of his own business and owns his own shop (though he rents the spot of land from the colonial landholders). His economic independences gives him social standing amongst the Black village men who gather around his shop to discuss politics and current events. Shoemaker also often delivers unsolicited advice and corrective criticism to his peers. For example, he contends that men like head teacher mercilessly beats the village boys because there are simply not enough concerned fathers in the home to check on the boys’ progress in school or to police the authority and behavior of a man like head teacher. He seeks to correct this behavior by advising the men, “Don’t let [the boys] run around like stray dogs as if they ain’t got no owners” (102). Though Shoemaker has this social standing among peers, he cannot parlay it into any serious political power due to his limited education and restricted access to political knowledge. Shoemaker is certainly aware of the new political awakenings that sweep the Caribbean by reading newspapers, the reading of J.B. Priestly’s political writings, and hearing a speech delivered by Marcus Garvey. He says of the school system, “But if you look good, if you remember good, you’ll never remember that they ever tell us ‘bout Marcus Garvey. They never even tell us that
they wus a place where he live call Africa” (104). And because he lives in Little England where access to current political knowledge is severely restricted, Shoemaker must acquire more knowledge of current events by inviting high school boys to his shop, engaging them in conversation and debate, and taking notes. This leads to a fragmented understanding or Pan-Africanism, colonialism, and Black self-sufficiency as espoused by Marcus Garvey. In this way, Shoemaker is also castrated metaphorically by the colonial educational system and its limited media. Though he does thirst for political and historical knowledge of Black people in the Caribbean archipelago, historical and political ignorance concerning Black people in the world is integral to his colonial education and stifles his potency as a lecturer or even a leader among the people before it is ever achieved. In this sense, the school system is as effective as the bathhouse keeper. Furthermore, Shoemaker does not own the lot of land on which his shop is located. When a new faction purchases the land, Shoemaker’s social standing and political fervor culminate in no action; he must defer to the new owners, Mr. Slime and his associates, and move his shop. Thus, Shoemaker may be a more suitable form of masculinity for the boys than those who participate in the colonialist system, but he never achieves full potency or participation in Barbados’s phallic economy.

Age and poverty induce Pa, another village father figure, into a state of impotency. In *The Pleasure of Exile*, Lamming writes that he bases Pa’s character on a man from his childhood, PaPa Grandison. Lamming recounts that “There was no one in my village within word reach of that corner whom Papa had not earned the right to rebuke. His age was not just years, but a whole way of being together with generations of children whom he had seen mature into fathers, or stumble, one way and another, into disgrace” (POE 227). Like Obierka, Pa is a man who deeply contemplates his own life and the life of Crieghton Village. His religious wife, Ma,
would like him to stop questioning and simply accept his lot with prayer. However, Pa simply cannot accept Ma’s invitation to Puritanical acceptance and passivity. On the night of Ma’s death, Pa has a disturbing dream about Black people and how they came to the New World. His dream is threefold: “Pa’s dream vision establishes a history of displacement, slavery, and colonization as the context in which the present and the future must be viewed” (Paquet 25).

Advanced in age, Pa courageously asks about Mr. Slime’s nefarious activities, but his advanced age and poverty prevent him from taking any decisive action. At most, Pa can only perpetually reminisce about the large sum of money he made as a young man while working on the Panama Canal. He feels that the young men of his village need a huge work similar to the Panama Canal so they can experience being true economic breadwinners and partakes in at least the economic portion of the phallic economy, but the current economic system, another relic of colonialism, is built upon exploitation and domination of others. Pa, in his old age, has a desire for phallic potency –masculine agency –for the young men. The abject poverty in which the young men are kept, lack of any memory or knowledge of the great economic boom fostered by the Panama Canal, and racialized economic practices on the island render the young men impotent, constantly economically dependent upon those who once oppressed them, and unable to achieve full masculine agency. In addition, having once been a breadwinner does not help Pa when the new syndicate takes over. He does not have enough money to buy them out and is left as impotent and castrated as Shoemaker. As Lamming explains, “The land had been sold to a new syndicate who were black men; but Papa had to leave because he couldn’t afford to pay cash for his tenancy, or risk installments on behalf of a future which could not be very long. He was already over seventy” (POE 227). Having once achieved economic potency with his work on the
Panama Canal, Pa is thoroughly defeated or symbolically castrated by the new syndicate who sees him as nothing more than a poor, old Black man standing in the way of progress.

Because G witnesses the utter helplessness of Shoemaker and Pa in the face of Mr. Slime and his new syndicate, he continues to seek other forms of masculinity. He certainly rejects the example of Mr. Slime, who participates fully in the phallic economy. As part of the aspiring Black bourgeoisie, Mr. Slime finds a place in the current system and successfully exploits the peasantry to his advantage. First, he enjoys social standing among the village people because he was a teacher at the all-boys school before he resigned. Next, Mr. Slime enjoys some sort of political power because he did win a seat in the assembly. Last, he founded the People’s Penny Bank and Friendly Society, a foundation that collected the pennies of the peasants. The charismatic politician promised the Black peasants that one day Black people would buy the land from its current wealthy white owners. He then purchases the land of Creighton Village from the landlord, The Great, and offers the greatest contributors to his bank the best land plots, forcing most of the long-term tenants off the land. In *Wretched of the Earth*, Fanon discusses at length the intermediary role of the new national bourgeoisie as characterized by Mr. Slime: “For the bourgeoisie, nationalization signifies very precisely the transfer into indigenous hands of privileges inherited from the colonial period” (100). This is precisely what Mr. Slime does. Whereas most of the prime land belonged to white men, he negotiated with The Great to transfer the land into the hands of Black men. Fanon explains the motivation of men like Mr. Slime in great detail: “Since the bourgeoisie has neither the material means nor adequate intellectual resources such as engineers and technicians, it limits its claims to the takeover business and firms previously held by the colonists” (100). Mr. Slime, upon acquiring the land for himself and others of his class, further exploits the villagers in much the same way as The Great. Mr.
Slime’s exploitation of the people seems inevitable because the colonial educational system does not prepare students in any other occupations that would lead to self-sufficiency or manhood for the villagers. The school certainly does not produce any engineers or even large-scale farmers to feed the people. In short, the system of exploitation does not change in the Caribbean, only the color of the faces who benefit from it. As long as the colonial system continues to operate in the Caribbean, Black Caribbean men will endure a pernicious cycle of impotence, castration, and lack of phallic authority. Though educated inside this system, G must continue to search for alternative ways to reach phallic authority without exploiting others.

For this reason, the return of Trumper occurs at a pivotal time in the text: “We are told that after going to the United States, in the midst of the civil rights movement, he returned with an outlook that confused the others while also fascinating them” (Thiong’o *FTI* 165). Having travelled beyond the island and into America, Trumper’s vocabulary is infused with the passion of Shoemaker, but is more knowledgeable: “The shoemaker owes his insights to a chance reading of Priestley and to Marcus Garvey, while Trumper discovers the meaning of race and the importance of Black unity in the U.S.A.” (Paquet 20). G does not understand his friend because Black people on the island are not a minority, but constitute a majority of the population. Trumper understands that this is the pernicious, though subtle, cruelty of colonialism. Having visited America with its Jim Crowism and redlining, Trumper states to G that “In America they don’t worry with that kind o’ beatin’ ‘bout the bush” (296). Last, Trumper tells G that Black men are not considered men at all, but something else. The cruelty in the Caribbean colonial system lies in its civility and invisibility. Often, the source of phallic castration and impotence is invisible in the Caribbean where many islands contain a majority-Black population and colonial domination is achieved through subterfuge such as the educational system and economic
discrimination. Trumper learns of a different, overt system in the United States, saying, “If the rights o’ Man an’ the rights o’ the Negro wus the same thing, ‘twould be different, but there ain’t ‘cause we’re a different kind o’ creature. That’s what a simple little word can do, an’ ‘tis what you goin’ to learn sooner or later” (297). Yet, it is not enough to be aware of the castrating effects of colonialism, “for even as Trumper enthuses over his newly-found sense of racial identity, black bourgeois politics is moving in to disposess Foster and send Pa to the Alms House” (Jonas 352). As Trumper and G discuss the newfound concept of Race, Black men dismantle and remove the Shoemaker’s shack. The narrator announces that “the shoemaker’s shop became a bundle of wood heaped on stones. The men ran out from all directions, and we stood opposite, silent, almost humiliated. There was nothing we could do” (300). Once again, a colonialist enterprise is marked by impotency, or the inability to act. The scene here serves a diagnostic function to effectively demonstrate Trumper’s revelation to G, who remains confused about how discrimination against African Americans in the United States relates to the Black inhabitants of Barbados. Just as the word “man” is not used to describe African American men, colonialism takes away the ability of Black men in the Caribbean to reach full manhood by action.

As G looks forward to embarking on a new trip that will take him outside the comforts of his own village and even his own island, he realizes that his education in destructive individualized manhood is simply not enough to fully give him a sense of phallic authority or masculine agency. In one last act of defiance toward other definitions of manhood, he refuses to sleep with an aggressive prostitute, telling her a story instead. She laughs at his anecdote, which is ultimately an allegory about the type of man who defines himself simply based upon sexual virility. Though G does not have any credible examples of manhood before him, he looks
forward to gaining the same type of confidence that Trumper now possesses though he does not fully understand it. He understands that knowing what not to do is only the beginning of a very simplistic understanding of his own life. Unlike Okonkwo, he looks to the women of his village as well as the men like PaPa to give him a foundation as he formulates his own definition of positive masculinity.

Whereas *In the Castle of My Skin* ends with a journey, *Invisible Man* begins with one. Ellison’s unnamed, first-person narrator sets out to irrupt into History. Like G, the unnamed protagonist comes to understand that he must define his Black maleness from inside the culture and not from external sources. A direct signification of Wright’s *Native Son, Invisible Man*, like *In the Castle of My Skin*, is a collection of episodes which seem to randomly happen to the protagonist. For each model of masculinity that Ellison’s protagonist aspires to imitate there is a form of deviant Black masculinity that lurks in the shadows of historical illumination. Last, in his quest for historical visibility the protagonist is blind to the struggles of others, and like his African counterpart, Okonkwo, understands his complicity in casting shadows much too late in the text. Since the story is written in hindsight, the protagonist presents the reader with warnings; in addition to the verbal warnings of his grandfather, the text is saddled with demonstrative warnings.

Like *Things Fall Apart*, a haunting father figure hovers in the life of the protagonist. The protagonist’s dying grandfather, like Unoka, appears and reappears throughout the text and appears to drive the narrative at certain points. The grandson’s family, like G’s mother, has bourgeoisie aspiration for the boy, who graduates as the class valedictorian at his local, segregated high school. The town’s white mayor invites him to give a speech to all of the
important white men in his town. Before delivering this speech, the boy’s dying grandfather has a piece of advice for him:

Son after I’m gone I want you to keep up the good fight. I never told you but our life is a war and I have been a traitor all my born days, a spy in the enemy’s country ever since I give my gun back in the Reconstruction. Live with your head in the lion’s mouth.

[16]

The grandfather references the Civil War, which was followed by Reconstruction. It was during this time that Booker T. Washington, with his message of industrialism and self-sufficiency, gained prominence. Washington preached his gospel of economic prosperity at the expense of Black political freedom and participation. This often caused bitter backlashes from other African American leaders, most notably Pan-Africanist W.E.B. DuBois, who connected civic participation and political/economic equality with masculinity (In fact, DuBois frequently refers to enfranchisement as “manhood rights” in his essay, “Of Mr. Booker T. Washington and Others.”). In Washington’s famous speech at the Atlanta Exposition, he articulates what is now referred to as the Atlanta Compromise. He challenges white employers to hire Black people who have been trained in respective trades and who speak English rather than Eastern European immigrants who could not speak English: “It is important and right that all privileges of the law be ours, but is vastly more important that we be prepared for the exercises of these privileges” (101). According to the Washingtonian doctrine, Black people should take pride in learning trades, work earnestly for even white customers and employers, gain economic independence by offering indispensable services to others, and favor gradual political equality.11
By ascribing to this doctrine, the dying grandfather feels he made a mistake. As a gun is an obvious phallic symbol, the grandfather implies that he traded in manhood for prosperity. The protagonist does not understand the grandfather’s cryptic message and upon learning of his status as valedictorian, delivers a class speech that is almost verbatim with Washington’s Atlanta Exposition Address in both tone and content, even taking some parts verbatim. For instance, he says, “Cast down your bucket where you are” (29), the famous refrain from Washington’s “Atlanta Compromise.” Upon deliverance of his speech, the white populace of his Southern town shows its approval by inviting him to deliver it to an audience of the town’s leading white male citizens. Before the protagonist delivers his address, he must take part in a battle royal with nine other boys from his school. The boys are blindfolded and pushed into each other’s swinging fists. IM says, “Everybody fought hysterically. It was complete anarchy. Everybody fought everybody else. No group fought together for long” (25). Meanwhile, the inebriated white men shout racial epithets at the boys. To further the “entertainment,” the men force the last two boys standing to fight each other. At this point, the narrator’s blindfold is removed. For the second round, the boys are placed on an electrified floor to fight over gilded gold coins as the white men yell at them. The golden coins are useless, in fact, they are advertisements for a car dealership; they are only cathected with meaning when the wealthy white men challenge poor, young Black men to fight for them. The very system within which they fight is designed not to reward them with anything, but to punish them, hence the electrically-charged floor. Finally, after all of this humiliation, the narrator gives his speech. The narrator lives in an American South where white masculinity is precluded upon denying any man of color equal opportunity to participate in the phallic economy politically, socially, or economically no matter how intelligent, physically dominant, or conciliatory a man of color may be. The white men disregard
his intellectual capability by completely ignoring both his academic accomplishments and his speech. Yet, he looks to these people, the white American men who totally humiliate and castigate him, for validation of his personhood and masculinity. His fatigued deliverance of the speech to a crowd who ignores him and his very grateful acceptance of the briefcase assure the reading audience that the grandfather’s warning, as well as the physical ordeal, are ignored.

Perhaps the humiliation that the protagonist endures during the Battle Royal scene should have been the first warning: for it demonstrates several inequalities within America’s economic system. In a capitalist system, individuals may use capital via money, natural resources, and/or human labor in order to create a product that serves the population. Individuals, including workers, are rewarded with vertical economic advancement based upon their own, personal sacrifice of time and labor to this system. On the surface, the system is meritocratic; however, in a race-based capitalist society, which may also practice gender discrimination, a relatively small number of privileged capitalists benefit from exploiting the capital of the Other(s).

While attending college, he meets the physical embodiment of his model, Booker T. Washington, Dr. Bledsoe, the college president. Dr. Bledsoe is “influential with wealthy men all over the country; consulted in matters concerning the race; a leader of his people; the possessor of not one but two Cadillacs; a good salary and a soft, good-looking and creamy complexioned wife” (99). Furthermore, he achieves these things while being ugly, fat, dark-skinned, and bald—all undesirable phenotypical traits at the time of this story’s setting. Bledsoe’s material success and his high social standing validate the protagonist’s choice of model. The local men, on the other hand, represent truly deviant models of masculinity to the Washingtonian one, which Ellison effectively demonstrates with Jim Trueblood, a local resident accused of impregnating his wife and daughter simultaneously, though no one at the college can verify his claim. The
protagonist explains that all of the college men are ashamed of men like Trueblood, saying, “How all of us at the college hated the blackbelt people, the ‘peasants,’ during those days! We were trying to lift them up and they, like Trueblood, did everything it seemed to pull us down” (47). In the narrative, “Trueblood exemplifies a deviant model of black masculinity primarily because of the perversion of incest” (131). However, not only does the African American man represent a deviant model of masculinity, but Ellison also introduces a more explicit deviant Euro-American masculine model than the previous white men in the smoky room in the person of Mr. Norton, one of the college’s white board members.

According to Verner Mitchell, Ellison links Norton and Trueblood together as models of deviant masculinity. Norton carries around with him a picture of his deceased daughter, and the story he tells about his daughter’s mysterious death implies an incestuous relationship between the two. On Founder’s Day, Dr. Bledsoe chooses the narrator to drive Mr. Norton around the town so that he may see the “progress” that his charitable contributions to the college makes possible. He asks the narrator to take him to the “Negro Quarters,” and the young man unwittingly obeys this paternalistic request and they stop at the house of the deviant Trueblood. Of course Trueblood relates his story of incest to Mr. Norton and while it is simply embarrassing to IM, it physically dishevels Norton to the point of fainting and he calls for whiskey. Norton’s feeble cry for whiskey prompts the second verbal warning of the text. The protagonist takes Norton to the Golden Day, a bar frequented by mentally ill Black veterans and avoided by the students: “Many of them had been doctors, lawyers, teachers, Civil Service workers; there were several cooks, a preacher, a politician and an artist. One very nutty one had been a psychiatrist” (73). Though the students label these veterans as “nutty” and dismiss them, the “nutty” veteran not only sees but clearly explains the current, uneven power dynamic taking place between the
very wealthy and powerful Mr. Norton and the young protagonist. The veteran states that to Norton, IM is nothing more than “a black amorphous thing. And you, for all your power, are not a man to him, but a God, a force…He believes in you as he believes in the beat of his heart. He believes in that great false wisdom taught slaves and pragmatists alike, that white folk is right” (93-94). Of course, Mr. Norton is not pleased to hear his paternalism boldly explained to him by any Black man and reports it directly to Dr. Bledsoe.

During his meeting with the college president, Dr. Bledsoe delivers a revelatory speech akin to the philosophical writings of Foucault in its meaning; those who shape and control discourse also use it to define what the truth may be at any particular historical epoch: “These white folk have newspapers, magazines, radio, spokesmen, to get their ideas across. If they want to tell the world a lie, they can tell it so well that it becomes the truth” (140). In the “Discourse on Language,” Foucault reminds the reader that, “…only one truth appears before our eyes: wealth, fertility and sweet strength in all its insidious universality” (220). In short, the hegemony controls History and who it allows to enter that History. Yet, Dr. Bledsoe, like his Caribbean counterparts, Mr. Slime and others, has a place in the order of things and is comfortable exploiting other African Americans in order to maintain that place; the myth of the Washingtonian model is shattered and the protagonist is literally lost and blinded. After his expulsion and on the way to New York, the same veteran whose clarity of vision advises the young man once more, admonishing, “…remember, the world is possibility if only you’ll discover it. Last of all, leave the Mr. Nortons alone, and if you don’t know what I mean, think about it” (154). As Mitchell states, the veteran’s words seem frivolous on the surface, but closer attention reveals him to be just as knowledgeable of discourse as Bledsoe. Any type of identity must come from an internal source, or at least from one’s own culture. The veteran warns the IM
not to attempt entry into Mr. Norton’s phallic economy, but to spend time discovering and
celebrating his own.

Ellison provides the narrator and reader with a clean slate, or a moment of verrition akin
to Lamming’s flood. While working at a paint factory, the narrator sustains heavy head injuries
during an explosion and undergoes a procedure that causes temporary memory loss. After being
released from the hospital, the narrator leaves his men’s home where he had lived prior to the
accident, removing himself from the college crowd that resided there. He finds safety and sanity
at a boarding house run by a woman named Mary. Though he clearly disregards Dr. Bledsoe and
Mr. Norton, the narrator still itches to inject himself into History. This time, his motivation is
different, which leaves room for a different sort of masculine model: he does not want to simply
attain riches and wealth, as was the case with his Washington model, but wants to speak out
against injustice on behalf of others. Here, the novel alludes to the Communist Party’s wave of
popularity within the U.S. The “People’s Front” took place in the mid-1930s and “was a time of
mass reform work, alliances with liberal forces, and aggressive recruitment of African
Americans into the party” (Hobson 357). Many Black, male intellectuals joined or sympathized
with the Communist Party during the Cold War. According to historians like Nell Irving Painter,
the Communist Party’s Black members once included Langston Hughes, Richard Wright, E.
Franklin Frazier, Angelo Herndon, and party sympathizer, Paul Robeson. The CP offered
African American men the opportunity to become politically active on a national level. The
Invisible Man and several African American men in the text seize upon this opportunity and the
effect of this on his manly and human status is in line with Fanon’s argument in Wretched of the
Earth. Fanon writes that becoming active in a national political part is a way of casting of the
dehumanizing status assigned to them by the dominant discourse (77).
At this point, critics suggest that Ellison then turns to Angelo Herndon for an African American model of masculinity. Herndon became famous as a CP member in the early 1930s. At one point, he was also editor of *Negro Quarterly*, a widely-read Black publication. Herndon, arrested in 1930 on a charge of vagrancy, was ordered to get a job or go to jail by the judge. During the trial, Herndon declares that there are no jobs, and upon hearing this, the judge writes notes for Herndon to other white men, telling them that Herndon is searching for a job. In 1937, according to Griffiths and Herndon, Herndon adds to the note that he was set up to be lynched. Herndon declares that the incident was “interesting because its twin shows up in Ralph Ellison’s *Invisible Man* (1952) when the protagonist/narrator receives seven sealed and betraying job recommendations” (Griffiths and Herndon 617). Also, the Invisible Man, like Herndon and the CP, increasingly asserts his own authority and distances himself from the Brotherhood. Just as the IM falls into a hole after the failure of Brotherhood ideology “after the failure of the *Negro Quarterly* in 1943, Herndon dropped out of public life” (Griffiths and Herndon 625). According to Ellison, Herndon never stopped searching for his identity after his disillusionment with the Communist Party.

On the one hand, the Brotherhood offers IM a place in History –into the phallogocentric realm of it at least. The leader of the party explains to the IM that “right now in this country, with its many national groups, all the old heroes are being called back to life –Jefferson, Jackson, Pulaski, Garibaldi, Booker T. Washington, Sun Yat-sen, Danny O’Connell, Abraham Lincoln and countless others are being asked to step once again upon the stage of history” (299). Upon delivery of his first riveting speech, he is included in the Brotherhood. Shortly after delivering the speech, the protagonist meets Ras the Exhorter, a Black masculine figure who The Brotherhood deems as a deviant man. With his love of pomp and pageantry, West Indian accent,
and separatist notions, Ras is reminiscent of Marcus Garvey. Like *In the Castle of My Skin*, Marcus Garvey would have most certainly influenced this novel; Garveyism in the United States reached its height between world wars, a pivotal moment in African American history. During the Great Depression, Euro-American males often harassed and sometimes murdered African American males as the economic conditions worsened. The 1930s saw a rise in racialized violence and a resurgence in those extralegal organizations that perpetrated those acts across the nation. These same tense conditions also contributed to a rise in Communist and pseudo-Communist organizations such as The Brotherhood. Garvey, a Pan-Africanist separatist, remained a thorn in the side for many African American leaders and other organizations. First, those members of organizations like The Brotherhood did not approve of his economic separatism, and other Black intelligeia often wrote of Garvey as an uneducated lover of pomp who failed to adequately address all of the racial and social concerns of African Americans. The Brotherhood as a pseudo-Communist organization would have seen Ras as deviant Black masculinity. Note that Brother Jack, the de facto leader of the Brotherhood, mentioned Booker T. Washington without mentioning other, more militant Black men. Nonetheless, Ras offers the third verbal warning to the protagonist saying, “Don’t be stupid, mahm. They white, they don’t have to be allies with no black people. They get what they want, they turn against you. Where’s your black intelligence” (366)? For a third time in the narrative, the IM ignores sound advice from a Black man who is outside of History trying to warn him about Historical inclusion and its costs.

Ellison also uses the character of Ras in *Invisible Man* to make a very subtle, sophisticated critique of the American Communist Party. Throughout this portion the narrative, it seems that when Invisible Man asserts himself inside CP, the white male leadership accuses
him of racializing pure class issues, and they punish him because addressing race matters is not part of the CP program. However, the IM reasons that it is highly unlikely that a party, with its polysyllabic terminology, rigid methodology, and hazy economic programs imported from Europe could work for racially-divided America. Upon returning from assignment in Manhattan, IM finds that people no longer respect the Brotherhood and work in Harlem has ceased. He sees his colleague, Brother Clifton selling Sambo dolls in the street, and is later shot by a policeman. Once again, the IM asserts himself in the agency. He addresses the racialized elements of American society, against the wishes of the Brotherhood. He preaches to the crowd, “I was saying that up here we know that the policemen didn’t care about Clifton’s ideas. He was shot because he was black and because he resisted. Mainly because he was black” (458). The Brotherhood calls his statement, “racist nonsense” (458). Perhaps, the “most important thing” is what the narrator does not understand: the Brotherhood only wants him to play a role in their grand ideological scheme. Once again, as in a repeat scene with Bledsoe, the protagonist sits outside an office while waiting on punishment like an impotent schoolboy.

In addition to the dismissal of the importance of race in this society, the narrator reveals paternalism. Finally, Brother Jack reveals to him, “You were not hired to think…We furnish all ideas. We have some acute ones. Ideas are part of our apparatus” (458-459). The organization is also plagued by the same maniacal grasp of power and paternalism that characterize Bledsoe and Mr. Norton. Brother Jack exclaims, “We do not shape our policies to the mistaken man in the street. Our job is not to ask them what they think but to tell them” (462)! IM thus “learned” that beneath their veneer of egalitarianism, “Communists were no different than Jim Crow racists” (Foley 537). The protagonist finds himself in a liminal space: “Outside the Brotherhood we were outside history; but inside they didn’t see us. It was a hell of a state of
affairs. We were nowhere” (488). Even more devastating is IM’s epiphany that he is simply a “particular kind of second-rank Communist –both honest and self-deluded, his decent impulses compromised by an abstract ideology, deference to authority, and personal ambition, as when he is criticized and reassigned to lecture downtown” (Hobson 358). Like many African Americans of the time, the protagonist quickly becomes disillusioned with the promise of inclusion in the Brotherhood as well. IM no longer views the pseudo-Communist organization as a plausible avenue toward realizing some sort of masculine agency.

As he walks away from The Brotherhood and the violent chaos of the Harlem riot, the protagonist puts on a pair of dark sunglasses and a hat. The people of Harlem instantly mistake him for a man named Rhinehart. Rhinehart is simultaneously a pimp, preacher, boyfriend, and gambler, and loved by his community. The narrator realizes that men like Rhinehart have acclimated themselves to life outside of history and are therefore free to determine and define themselves. They are neither interested in the center nor do they push themselves toward it. Still, these men possess some freedom within the comfort of their communities, their peers reward their upward social and economic mobility, and they have accumulated some material wealth. The IM realizes the power of Rhinehart, saying, “He was years ahead of me, and I was a fool. I must have been crazy and blind” (487). Worst of all, in his attempt to inject himself into History, he realizes that he has not even seen Rhinehart or Trueblood or the veteran or Ras. In attempting to irrupt into History, the IM makes other men invisible. How, in that respect, is he any different from Mr. Slime who had exploited men like Pa or even Dr. Bledsoe? In his quest for white male validation –or visibility – he invalidates other Black men just like those who exploited him. In attempting to irrupt into History, he perpetuates a vicious cycle of invisibility and castration.
Maybe his greatest social crime in his quest for visibility is the rendering of women invisible just as Euro-American men often do. Before the Battle Royal, a naked white woman with an American flag painted on her belly, dances to entertain the crowd. Of course, the black boys are not allowed to look at her; as aforementioned, Southern white masculinity was predicated upon exclusivity. Socially, this meant white men often freely and openly sought sexual liaisons with Black women while simultaneously deifying the white woman’s body and forbidding Black men access to them. The white men use the nakedness and whiteness of the woman’s skin to torment the boys, and concomitantly demonstrate the falsity of the image of the Southern genteel, protective white gentleman. It is the white men who act as ravenous beasts; they chase the woman, grab at her flesh, pass her naked body around, and finally let her escape with a sober member of the crowd: “Clearly, the scene is unnerving for both the reader and IM. Its inhumanity inevitably indicts the white male spectators as perverse and far removed from the cherished ideal of gentility” (130). Once inducted into the Brotherhood, Ellison continues to introduce white women as objects. While at his first party as a member of the Brotherhood, the protagonist dances with Emma, a white woman sympathetic to their cause. Their conversation is light and fluffy and devoid of substance. After the dance, another less attractive woman asks him seriously about women’s rights, “But before [he] could open [his] mouth, Brother Jack had pushed [him] along to a group of men” (303). Women’s issues are only addressed as “punishment” and are not seen as pivotal to the Brotherhood’s overall political philosophy. Also, there are no female members of the Brotherhood’s ruling body. Even in the CP and pseudo-Communist organizations, women hover at the periphery.

A veritable critique of American Communism, Invisible Man is also a gynocritical rewrite of Richard Wright’s Native Son. In Wright’s narrative, the protagonist, Bigger Thomas,
is driven to the streets by his harsh, insidious mother, who often chides him to take subservient jobs in order to support the fatherless family. Many critics, especially feminists, agree that, “With this narrative serving as a prototype for Black protest fiction, Wright left a far more insidious legacy of misogyny, which the radical black left embraced during the 1960s” (Judson and Shin 250). Ellison rewrites the mother figure in the person of Mary, a woman who takes in boarders to subsidize her income in Harlem. Rather than drive Black men toward the streets in search of money, Mary welcomes them to her home. Many of the boarders cannot immediately afford to pay rent, and she stretches her budget by cooking cabbage, a cheap meal. After dropping into his hole, the protagonist realizes that he had never really “seen” Mary. He never thought the Mother figure had any real personal problems. Suddenly, he wants to “see” her, saying, “Suddenly, I felt an urge to go look at her, perhaps I had really never seen her. I had been acting like a child, not a man” (290). In his boyishness, he criticizes people like Mary for their communal thinking saying, “There are many things about people like Mary I dislike. For one thing, they seldom know where their personalities end and yours begins; they usually think in terms of “we” while I have always tended to think in terms of ‘me’” (290). He chooses an individualized, masculine version of History over pragmatism and community when he states, “Brother Jack and the others talked in terms of ‘we,’ but it was a different, bigger ‘we’” (290). As the protagonist descends into a manhole, he understands that much of his disillusionment could have been avoided had he taken the time to “see” women like Mary who must live pragmatically while men fight endless bouts for control of History. Unlike G, who is alienated due to schooling and palpable linguistic difference, much of IM’s alienation is self-inflicted. Once surrounded by the darkness of the manhole, he understands that masculine identity must come from within with the acknowledgment of both masculine and feminine contributions.
While G embarks on a physical journey, the protagonist of *Invisible Man* commits social suicide by burning physical identification for himself, and embarking on a psychological journey. The manhole becomes his metaphorical womb.

In haste to characterize these texts as misogynist or anti-woman, many critics have misread the signs just like the protagonists Okonkwo and the Invisible Man. Unlike their first-wave counterparts who declared their masculinity with their works, Ellison, Lamming, and Achebe show concern of a different nature. Not only are they concerned with Black masculinity, but they focus on the types of masculinity that Black men should avoid, namely those based on individualized and/or Euro-American definitions of masculinity. They also challenge Black men to question the unequal natures of the systems within which they struggle to gain phallic authority. Those men who do not acknowledge the feminine half of themselves fail as masculine model; hence, the failures of Okonkwo and the IM. The men who do not challenge the system within which they live easily exploit others who look like themselves. Internalized institutionalized castration and impotence allow these men to exploit and castrate others who look like themselves. This explains the ease with which the schoolmaster mercilessly beats a young boy, Mr. Slime evicts the rural people of Creighton Village, the devious nature of Dr. Bledsoe, and the unwitting invisibilizing action performed by IM. Okonkwo’s individualism in the midst of a culture which practices group harmony blinds him to the harm that he does to his entire clan.

Both *Invisible Man* and *In the Castle of My Skin* contain similar scenes that challenge the myth of meritocracy and reward in a capitalist system. In the Battle Royal scene, Lamming features Black boys who fight for monetary gain. In Lamming’s tale, the boys fight at sea for coins tossed into the water by wealthy, Euro-American tourists. For entertainment purposes, the
tourists threw out pennies to the boys, forcing them to fight for more. G and his friends choose not to participate in this humiliating game, but make up games of their own instead where they throw pins at the sea floor and dive for them. They invest their own objects with the same value as the coins, but do not fight one another for them. Here, Lamming suggests that Black males find an alternative equal system for the Black Caribbean population. Masculinity must be based upon a system of equal participation in the social, political, and economic life of Barbados and not one based upon exploitation and domination.

While *Invisible Man* and *In the Castle of My Skin* are rather implicit in this next point, Okonkwo’s failure in *Things Fall Apart* explicitly demonstrates the importance of feminine contributions, particularly those of the mother, to a successful model of masculinity. Carol Boyce Davies explains Okonkwo’s, writing, “One must understand that Okonkwo had attained a position of leadership in the clan, but still failed to grasp the significance of uniting the male and female qualities. Achebe, Lamming, and Ellison, with their warning signs, demonstrate how not to become Black men: by denying, blaming, and even hating the feminine aspects of a culture. Unfortunately, only G successfully recognizes and acknowledges the contributions of the community of women who surround him. Though G’s mother’s middle class aspirations for her son do occasionally cause tension that explodes into anger and subsequent fits of laughter, G ultimately acknowledges that the entire village, not just its men, contribute to his well-being. Unlike Okonkwo and IM, G is willing and unafraid to challenge his culture’s configuration of masculinity. The changing times dictate that he must, and he sets out on his journey unafraid and armed with the knowledge that his masculine identity comes from culturally internal sources with feminine aspects. G’s narrative ends on a positive note with room to develop a new type of masculinity.
After the landmark success of *Native Son*, many critics placed Wright’s literature in the tradition of American protest literature, literature meant to spur the population to action, convey shock and anger, prompt empathy, or simply to express dissatisfaction with the status quo.

According to Simon Gikandi, Soyinka concedes that the Francophone African Diaspora needed something like Negritude to advance its thinking about Africa and those of African descent. When he originally dismissed Negritude as a nonviable literary expression of Pan-Africanism, he was unaware of the cruel psychological damage of French assimilationist colonial policies. He does assert that he was only speaking from an Anglophone perspective, where British policies of discrimination were more explicit toward Africans than their French neighbors.

I use the term “auto-ethnography” based on the assessment of Lammings’s novel by Wheat who writes, “In as much as Lammings’s novel may be considered a coming of age novel portraying a child’s progression into adulthood, it is also a chronicle of the coming of age of a society within an important cultural moment in Caribbean history” (2). It tells the history of an entire people, and therefore, stands outside of the tradition of Western autobiography, which tends to focus on the individual author.

I use the term “nation language” as opposed to “patois,” “pidgin,” or “dialect.” Brathwaite defines nation language as the syncretic speech of the African Caribbean population that blends European and African languages alongside some Native American terms. According to Adetayo Alabi, in his essay, “Recover, Not Discover,” African Caribbean authors also use nation language as a unifying act of resistance to enslavement by the British and subsequent colonization.


Wright certainly influenced an entire generation of Black Caribbean writers, especially Laming. Wright wrote the introduction to the edition aimed at African American audiences.

J.B. Priestly was an English author as well as social/political critic. Of course, Marcus Garvey was founder and leader of the very populist United Negro Improvement Association, a Pan-Africanist political organization located in the United States. He was deported to Jamaica in the 1920s, where he remained committed to his political ideals and to his philosophy of Black self-determination. He carried his philosophy throughout the Caribbean as well, and published a newspaper there. Historians agree that, “migrant labour and Marcus Garvey’s politics of race added new dimensions to the political awareness of the 1930s and 1940s, and fed directly into the independence movements of the 1950s” (Paquet 9). Once settled comfortably in the Caribbean, Garvey addressed the political conditions of Black people there. Once deported from the United States, “Nowhere was [Garvey’s] personal vision more visible than during his political and cultural activity in Jamaica between December 1928 and March 1935” (Patside 38).

In *The Signifying Monkey*, Henry Louis Gates, Jr. defines the process of signification as the African American practice of speaking with innuendo and hidden meaning. Speech is an act of communication and performance. According to Gates, African American writers also use this form to rewrite their texts (identities) with a difference. In other words, it is a purposeful editing of identity through literature. For instance, Gates writes, “Ellison in his fictions Signifies upon Wright by parodying Wright’s structures through repetition and difference. One can readily suggest the complexities of the parodying. The play of language, the Signifyin (g), starts with the titles. Wright’s *Native Son* and *Black Boy*, titles connoting race, self, and presence, Ellison tropes with *Invisible Man*, with invisibility as an ironic response of absence to the would-be presence of blacks and natives, while man suggest a more mature and stronger status than either son or boy” (106).

Booker T. Washington also founded the Tuskegee Institute and became the only African American to found and head a university. Currently, it still stands and is fully-operational in Alabama.

This doctrine, at its inception, was seen as a willingness on the part of Black males to part with manhood. Ironically, because of its emphasis on industrial education for Black people, dignity in labor, and self-sufficiency, it greatly inspired Marcus Garvey.

On August 1, 1943, there was a riot in Harlem. After police assaulted a Black woman for allegedly disturbing the peace, the neighborhood irrupted into violence. Many businesses were destroyed, hundreds of Black people were injured or beaten, six people were killed, and over 500 Black men and women were arrested in connection with the violence. Peace was finally restored on August 3.
CHAPTER 5: CONCERNS OF THE HEART(H): BLACK MALE CHARACTERS IN BLACK WOMEN’S WRITINGS

We need men who can let their interest and gallantry extend outside the circle of their aesthetic appreciation; men who can be a father, a brother, a friend to every weak, struggling, unshielded girl. We need women who are so secure of their own social footing that they need not fear leaning to lend a hand to a fallen or falling sister. We need men and women who do not exhaust their genius splitting hairs on aristocratic distinctions and thanking God they are not as others… Anna Julia Cooper in “Womanhood a Vital Element”

While Achebe, Lamming, and Ellison are master-craftsmen who created haunting warnings about and against Black male misogyny and internalization of Euro-American definitions of masculinity, it is important to study the works of their Black female cohorts. After all, women have their own experiences as gendered beings in systems of enslavement and colonialism, and they, too, used their art to make political statements concerning their plights as women in sexist societies and as people of African descent in racist ones.
This chapter will explore how Black female writers use their fiction and drama to critique their exploitation, patriarchal superiority inherent in Euro-American race-based capitalism and governing system, and personal encounters with Black male misogyny and abuse. The books *So Long a Letter* by Miriama Ba, *The Chosen Place the Timeless People* by Paule Marshall, and *A Raisin in the Sun* by Lorraine Hansberry are written by Black women who are not only from very different regions linguistically and geographically, but are also living in different epochs of history with respect to their cultures. Ba’s text is set during the postcolonial era after Senegal has gained and retained freedom from France; in Marshall’s Caribbean-based text the island is nominally free from England, but still dependent upon the mother country for economic survival and is also facing a newer, American-style imperialism; and in Hansberry’s text, the Younger family has migrated from the rural South to the urban North of Chicago looking for freedom only to find the same brand of racism, discrimination, and poverty they left behind. In spite of these major differences, these texts each implicitly demand that Black men in their respective cultures evaluate and construct definitions of masculinity which do not involve Black female subordination. Excluded from most conversations concerning identity by Black men, Black female writers like Ba, Marshall, and Hansberry create their own transnational conversations on racial and gender oppression through their literature.

Furthermore, all three writers critique male chauvinism and sexism as manifested in the behaviors of Black men in their lives with sophisticated empathy. They avoid accusatory language or the suggestion that a defunct patriarchal system should be replaced by a matriarchal one. Rather, Ba, Marshall, and Hansberry, like the Black male writers discussed in the previous chapter, use their Black male characters and plot development to demonstrate the personally destructive and communally damaging ramifications of internalization of Euro-American
patriarchal discourse. They extend the argument about the effectiveness of patriarchal discourse even further by incorporating and introducing patriarchal women –characters which are absent from all of the texts written by Black males discussed in this project thus far. Patriarchal women are those women who have benefitted from patriarchy and therefore uphold and maintain it by oppressing other women. By introducing patriarchal women to the transnational conversation, Ba makes a commentary on Black African women who uphold oppressive traditions and impede the progress of other women while Marshall and Hansberry allude to the historical cleavage between European and white America feminists and Black women in the New World. These texts demonstrate that a person does not have to possess a penis in order to wield phallic authority. Phallic authority is more than biology; it involves wealth, race, and history. In that sense, phallic authority may be divorced from biology in some cases, and even women can use it to oppress others. When read together, these texts also speak to the voicelessness Black women experience in Black male dominated political organizations which proclaim equality for all Black people and the loud voicelessness they endure in Black male literature.

As stated earlier, at the height of its popularity in the middle of the twentieth century much of literature produced by Black males was heavily influenced by the political tenets of Pan-Africanism, which may be one explanation for the subordination or complete silencing of women in these texts. One of the major weaknesses of Pan-Africanism is its inattentiveness to the plight of Black women in Africa and throughout the African Diaspora. In both the active protests of organizations like the more populist version of Pan-Africanism like the Harlem-based United Negro Improvement Association run by Marcus Garvey and the more academically elite version fostered by W.E.B. DuBois, the Black woman ambiguously appears and then vanishes in the margins. For instance, known for its massive parades, the UNIA often paraded men, dressed
in full military regalia, up front while women walked behind the motorcade. Even Garvey’s wife, Amy Garvey, seems to garner little scholarly attention. As historian and critic Karen Adler states in her article on the UNIA and women, “Very little has been written, however, about the most important woman in Garveyism – Marcus’s second wife, Amy Jacques Garvey” (346).

While Mrs. Garvey did much of the organizing within the structure, much of the attention went to her husband and to his legacy. Other women were important for the day-to-day operations of the UNIA, which helped to make it one of the most successful Pan-Africanist organizations in history. In the Caribbean, the female participation was not as visible as in the United States. Maryse Conde, in her essay, “Pan-Africanism, Feminism and Culture,” claims that many women were simply too preoccupied with the tasks of daily living – finding or raising and cooking food for their families, attending to their smaller children, and sending their school-age children to descent schools – to participate in active Pan-Africanist liberation struggles. Nevertheless, some women were active in the Caribbean, but their works remain largely ignored by scholars.¹

The seminal work of Fanon, *Black Skins White Masks*, largely focuses upon reclaiming identity for oppressed people of African descent in the face of massive colonialist/apartheid/segregationist repression and resistance.² Though a beautiful and passionate cry for the rights of oppressed Black men the position of Black women remains ambivalent at most: “There is very little question that women play an important role in *Black Skin, White Masks*. Women – women of color and white women – (ostensibly) comprise two separate chapters of the book’s diagnosis of and prognosis for the condition of the black man and his potential liberation” (Counihan 163). I agree with Counihan’s assessment on the absence of women and gender issues in most Black male-produced anticolonial literature when she writes that “What is not as clear is how and why exactly women figure into this construction of colonial
subjectivity based in racial difference” (163). Women appear only tangential to the work and to the colonial experience at large. Even in reassessing the importance of this work, Homi K. Bhabha remains relatively silent about the absence of women.

Artistic works produced by men of African descent share the same preoccupation with an identity for oppressed people as their more critical philosophical works. This adds a distinctly racial element to Eve Sedwick’s claim in *Between Men* (1985) that often ideals and struggles over masculinity are affairs conducted by men and between men, because African and African Diasporic men proclaim their humanity to Euro-American men who perpetually ignore or deny it. Within a Pan-Africanist/postcolonialist theoretical framework, “the constitution of black male subjectivity within white supremacist, patriarchal culture is an affair between men” (Saint-Aubin 1067). Indeed, the colonialist structure was not designed with input from any women – regardless of class or color. In turn, the writings of Black males on the Continent and throughout the Black Diaspora in which they speak directly to colonizing and other repressive forces also do not create a space for plausible Black female voices.

In some cases, such as Ba’s *So Long a Letter*, African or Black faces simply replaced the white colonialist ones who controlled government. There was little change in gender relations and the exploitation of women continued in many postcolonial countries. Since the “structures of colonialism were geared to proceed to apace without significant input from black women” (Francis 117), those who continued to operate within those structures continued to muffle the voices of women. As Carole Boyce Davies claims, “In their writing, the image of women was in some ways and to an extent rehabilitated, but in many cases, new sexist stereotypes were created and older African ones went unchallenged” (242). For instance, women are invoked in both African and African Caribbean texts produced by men only symbolically as mothers or the
fecundity of a pristine, precolonial African/Caribbean region. Like those texts produced by their Euro-American male counterparts, these texts link Black women to a soil upon which real men trod; but, in a brief survey of Black male literature, they at least revere the soil they trod upon. In some literature, Black males elevate and revere the status of mother. Yet, “preliminary surveys of African literature reveal that the novels of men, like the Negritude poetry, treat mothers more as symbols than as living, suffering individuals” (Davies 244). Mother is not a real person with a real voice. In Walcott’s Dream on Monkey Mountain, Black women serve as a nameless, voiceless body that constitutes Makak’s wives. Sycorax in Shakespeare’s The Tempest and Cesaire’s A Tempest, remains silent. Even as Achebe, Lamming, and Ellison warn Black men about their chauvinism, they also do not create a space for Black female voices. For instance, as mentioned in the previous chapter, we never learn what becomes of Okonkwo’s mother and sister. In the texts I study in this chapter, Ba, Marshall, and Hansberry feature female protagonists who are more than metaphors. The authors allude to the historical socio-economic/political events of the tales’ settings which constitute the exterior lives of these women, but they also provide windows to the female protagonists’ psychological, emotional interiors. They are not symbols or foils to male characters, but real human beings living gendered existences in racially oppressive, patriarchal societies. These characters demonstrate, rather than proclaim, their humanities by thinking critically about the world around them while loving their families.

Part of the underlying cultural tension which informs So Long a Letter is the long history of racialized degendering and imposition of Euro-American gender standards upon the cultures of West Africa by European writers and philosophers, and later, colonialist governments. One “abnormality” of African society, according to European writers, is their matrifocality. Critics
and historians agree that “the European writers did not seem to have had a parallel historical experience of mother-focused systems to draw from. Their patriarchal paradigm was taken from the fixed point of the father” (Amadueme 91). In colonial European culture, patriarchal existence is the ultimate ontological form of humanity. Sociologists, feminists, historians, and literary critics also agree that “through patriarchy, men exclude women from access to the essential productive resources in society and channel their sexuality in the direction of producing and rearing children. When a theory that apprehends reality with only two categories —“men” and “women” —confronts Africa, the result is a litany of confusion and nonexplanations” (Taiwo 48).

These “nonexplanations” (48), as Taiwo suggests, could have very well led to an otherwise credible philosopher, Hegel, to make the racially-biased claim in his writing that sub-Saharan Africa simply has no history. Though this statement is absurd, it is a logical conclusion that stems from the inability of European philosophers to understand gender outside of binary oppositions.

Imposition of European gender standards on African cultures poses several problems. Oyeronke Oyewumi, African historian and literary critic, outlines them:

The concept presupposes that households are normally organized around one male authority figure directing all other members of the household. In many societies in Africa, this is not the case; authority is more dispersed in consanguinally-based, multi-generationally based households in which the spheres of control for a variety of individuals, fathers and mothers, siblings and wives are delineated. In addition, the fact that women hold positions of authority within the household does not necessarily suggest male
absence or the pathologies associated with female-headed households in the West. [38]

Though a symptom of psychosocial pathology or social deviance in Europe, female authority figures within an extended family base—not the nuclear family—were considered the standard norm in some parts of West Africa.

Throughout the colonialist era, the African woman continued to appear in literature as both foil and object. In such texts as Joseph Conrad’s *Heart of Darkness* and the *Tarzan* books and movies mentioned in Chapter 3 of this project, the African woman, in her superb savagery, serves as foil to the European woman in her controlled refinery. According to Oyewumi, “the labeling of African women as primitive, and therefore more sexually intensive, was antithetical to the portrayal of the European woman as sexually passive” (37). Certain specific stereotypes of African women dominate colonialist literature. Oyewumi declares that “in the literature, the impression created is that African women, apart from being peasants, traders, wives, clerks, child-care workers, or whatever, are also always prostitutes” (37). The African prostitute and the polygamous male are related to European notions of uncontrollable African sexuality and promiscuity. Also antithetical to European ideals of femininity were the manual labor and economic independence accorded African women in many sub-Saharan societies. Many African women found no conflict with balancing motherhood alongside work outside the home so that they may contribute to the economic well-being of their families. In some societies, very successful African women achieved titles and could acquire wives.3

The imposition of colonialism and modernity upon African societies severely affected gender practices within those societies. As aforementioned, some African cultures practiced very complicated and flexible notions of gender that allowed for female authority and autonomy.
However, “the new Western concepts introduced through colonial conquest carried strong sex and class inequalities supported by rigid gender ideology and constructions; a woman was always female regardless of her social achievements of status” (Amadiume 119). In some cases, colonial regimes declared women’s authority and autonomy illegal in order to achieve European gender standards in Africa. For instance, in Igbo culture, “The Ekwe title, which was both a social and a political acknowledgment of female economic success, and therefore a reward for female industriousness, was banned” (Amadiume 123). In those cultures where male domination was evident, it “became more pronounced during the phases of Islamic expansion and European conquest, as well as afterward” (Mikell 3). The contributions of African males were elevated in colonial governments, and women’s voices, even after independence, were severely restricted. In *So Long a Letter*, Ramatoulaye, the author of the letter, and Aissatou, the letter’s intended recipient, falsely believed as girls that freedom from French rule would somehow also mean equality for both men and women of Senegal. Part of the disillusionment of independence, as expressed by Ramatoulaye, was realizing that freedom from racial oppression did not necessarily mean liberation from patriarchy, as both she and Aissatou learn through bitter experiences.

Whereas the African females were derided for their manual labor in Africa by colonialist writers, the same labor in the New World was exploited for profit by mercantile capitalists, and this is the underlying, bitter portion of Caribbean history that Marshall repeatedly references in *The Chosen Place the Timeless People*. Most plantation historians agree that “[g]ender was not a consideration in the allocation of most tasks requiring hard labour, as women were required to do the same work as men” (Moitt 156-157). This is true throughout the Caribbean, regardless of which European metropole colonized specific islands. For instance, “in the French Antilles, there were two or three field gangs on sugar plantations, depending on need. The first gang, the
great gang consisted of the strongest male and female slaves who performed the most arduous tasks such as preparing the soil for planting, weeding, cutting canes, and manufacturing sugar” (Moitt 158-159). In the Anglophone islands, Black women also worked alongside men, even during pregnancy. They also received the same severe as punishment as Black men for minor infractions of plantation rule regardless of pregnancy status.

In addition to the exploitation of her labor, the African woman’s fertility became directly linked with the profitability of capitalist pursuits in the Caribbean. As a piece of property, her worth was calculated by the amount of material she could produce versus the amount of money a plantation master spent on her upkeep. If she became a mother, “a child [was] accounted for at birth in the plantation inventories as an additional capital unit. Black womanhood and motherhood, then, existed at the same nexus of the market economy as factors in the production and reproductions process” (Beckles 135). A Black woman in the Caribbean became more profitable if she produced more labor for the plantation, conjoining the products of her womb to the productivity of her manual labor, in other words. In much proslavery literature produced about the Caribbean, Euro-American writers stereotyped the Black Caribbean women in much the same way as her African counterpart: “as superordinate amazons who could be called upon to labour all day, perform sex all night, and be quite satisfied morally and culturally to exist outside the formal structures of marriage and family” (Beckles 135). Euro-American literature written in support of and against Caribbean enslavement, the Black woman is the ultimate seductress; many antislavery Caribbean writers used the Black seductress to demonstrate the evils of the Caribbean Plantation on white male moral character. In some abolitionist literature, “white men simply could not resist them, but desired them, bought and brought them into their beds, and produced children with them” (Beckles 135). In addition, because Black women
performed difficult manual labor on the sugar cane plantations alongside men, a new stereotype arose in the Caribbean concerning African women: they did not feel emotional attachments to their lovers or their children as European women did. In proslavery literature, “she was now projected by the white proslavery literary imagination as lacking developed sense of emotional attachment to progeny and spouse, and indifferent to the values of virtue and high moral sensitivity” (Beckles 135-136). The proof was the large second-generation of mulatto children being born on Caribbean plantation. Enslavement in the Caribbean produced an inextricable link between labor, domesticity, gender, and race. After emancipation, missionaries descended upon the Caribbean to help ex-slaves acclimate to freedom. Many simply wanted to correct the “backwardness” embodied in the plantation system. Slavery, with its manual labor requirements for Black women, produced an aberrant gender system that all but extinguished any sort of Black masculinity. Put another way, “slavery, in their view, had produced an unnatural phenomenon, male slaves who were entirely dependent on their masters, who could not truly be men since the essence of manhood was independence” (Hall 53). One of the tasks of missionaries, as well as the schools founded by them, was to teach “proper” gender roles. Black men were expected to perform tasks for wages while their women were to be housekeepers and sexually and economically dependent upon their husbands. In their zeal for “proper” places according to European gendered definitions, these missionaries and schools “side-stepped the extensive evidence of the failure of marriage to become popular, the high levels of illegitimacy, the incidence of women’s labour and of women’s importance to patterns of landholding” (Hall 56). Like their African counterparts, the independence of African Caribbean women was derided and maligned by European writers who were overwhelmingly influenced by Victorian social codes for gender behavior. In much colonialist literature that features Black Caribbean women, she is
shown as loud, aggressive, and overly-masculine alongside the Black Caribbean man who is lazy, indolent, passive, and effeminate.

In *Chosen Place*, Merle, the Black female protagonist, is the product of a sexual liaison between a young, poor Black teenage servant and a much older, wealthy Euro-American landowner. Such “relationships,” in which wealthy Euro-American men carried on romantic, extra-legal love affairs with or sexually exploited Black Caribbean women with no fear of legal recourse, occurred long after Emancipation, complicating not only racial relations in the Caribbean, but also the relations between Black and Euro-American women of the Caribbean. For instance, though Marshall never reveals whether or not Merle’s birth is the result of a romantic relationship or rape, she does portray the strained relations between women. Merle’s mother was murdered in front of her when she was only two years old by her father’s wife. Though the whole island knew of the murderess, no one ever served jail time for the homicide of the teenager, and Merle’s father certainly did not express any paternal affection toward his illegitimate child.

In North America, many of the same stereotypes of African Caribbean women that developed during slavery also followed African American women in addition to newer ones. Though Lorrain Hansberry alludes to them in *A Raisin in the Sun*, the newer stereotypes most certainly influenced the pungent criticism her play received from Black male critics. The Victorian-era Cult of True Womanhood influenced much of North American gender ideology. However, as Nell Irving Painter claims in her book, *Southern History across the Color Line*, as constricting as this movement was for white women, it guaranteed exclusion from womanhood for Black women. Melissa Harris-Perry expounds upon this concept in her book, *Sister Citizen:*
Shame, Stereotypes, and Black Women in America. She gives explicit details as to why Black female slaves in America, like their Caribbean counterparts, could never be true women:

Victorian social codes clearly divided public and private realms, made white men the sole authorities in their homes, and stripped married white women of their property and legal personhood. It also advanced beliefs in the essential chastity, innocence, and weakness of women…Black women were subjected to forced nudity during slave auctions. They often labored in fields with skirts hiked up. They were punished on plantations by being whipped in partial or total nudity. They were banned from legal marriage. The myth of black women as lascivious, seductive, and insatiable was a way of reconciling the forced public exposure and commoditization of black women’s bodies with the Victorian ideals of women’s modesty and fragility. [55]°

Unlike their Caribbean counterparts, however, white plantation owners in America concocted a docile, sexless creature who could bear children for the master, serve as a slave, and remain outside the realm of womanhood: mammy. Black feminist Patricial Hill Collins explains that “the mammy represents the clearest example of the split between sexuality and motherhood present in Eurocentric masculinist thought” (Collins 92). Though possibly a mother of many children (some of them were more than likely the master’s), mammy’s image was always asexual. Antithetical to mammy was the more familiar Black “hot momma”; like her Caribbean counterpart, this image of the Black female slave was sexually lascivious, a threat to white male morality, and solely responsible for the mulatto class of slaves in the United States.
After slavery and into the twentieth century, the image of the hypersexual African American lingered woman and a new stereotype replaced Mammy: the overpowering, castrating Black matriarch. Ironically, it is from the research of African American male scholars, E. Franklin Frazier and W.E.B. DuBois that white Americans culled and shaped this stereotype. In Frazier’s *The Negro Family in the United States* (1939), Frazier devotes two chapters, “The Matriarchate” and “Granny: the Guardian of Generations,” to female-headed households within various African American communities. I agree with Collins’s assumption when she concludes that Black male sociologists have been quoted out of term by Euro-Americans: “Both saw so-called matriarch as an outcome of racial oppression and poverty” (Collins 82). One report even uses a quote from Black female Civil Rights Movement leader, Dorothy Height, as evidence that Black families, with a mother who works outside the home, is socially deviant and must be corrected.⁶ There is no mention in these reports of the discriminatory hiring practices that rendered Black males unemployed for months at a time, unfair housing practices, and the relegation of Black males to lower-paying, subservient jobs that forced Black women out of the home and into the working public. It is also almost never mentioned by Euro-American feminists that Black women were often employed and underpaid by Euro-American women in Africa and throughout the Diaspora.⁷ This history of slavery, poverty, and Black female demonization inform the gender relations of *Raisin*. For example, the adult female members of the Younger household work outside the home in order to supplement the male protagonist’s income that he earns from a subservient job. Though Walter, the male protagonist, does speak harshly to the women of his household when he feels most economically impotent, he does understand that they are not to blame for the job discrimination which relegates him to subservient positions only, the wage discrimination which prevent him from becoming the fiscal
head of his household, and the racism which keeps his family living in a shabby apartment in an impoverished neighborhood.

In some way, all three of these texts refer to the historical rejection of Euro-American feminism by women in African and throughout the African Diaspora. In *A Critique of Postcolonial Reason* (1999), Gayatri Spivak follows the ultimate subaltern, the uneducated woman, through the archives of colonial history. Using the Indian practice of sati, or self-immolation of widows, Spivak determines that subaltern women cannot speak. She writes, “Between patriarchy and imperialism, subject-constitution and object-formation, the figure of woman disappears, not into a pristine nothingness, but into a violent shuttling that is the displaced figuration of the “third-world woman” caught between tradition and modernity, culturalism and development” (304). This is certainly true of African women, who, in feminists’ haste to make a case for universal female suffering at the hands of a patriarchal structure, have no voice even in the feminist discourse that claims to liberate them. The African woman, a perpetual victim of her culture and her man, never speaks. In most feminist literature produced on African women, “the agency was always male; the woman was always the victim. The dubious place of the free will of the constituted sexed subject as female was successfully effaced” (Spivak 208). In Western-produced feminist scholarship on African women “one wonders whether African women ever aged or had any relationship with the spouses and families of their children” (Oyewumi 34). Even in feminist discourse “the subaltern cannot speak” (Spivak 308) when that subaltern is an African woman.

African women and those throughout the African Diaspora have developed their own brand of feminism that springs for a different source than Euro-American feminisim. African feminist historian Mikell declares “the African variant of feminism grows out of a history of a
female integration within largely corporate and agrarian based societies with strong cultural heritages that have experienced traumatic colonization by the West” (4). African American women created their own brand of feminism called, “womanism,” a term coined by author and activist Alice Walker. African women on the Continent as well as throughout the Diaspora use their literature to tell their story, but to critique the intersecting systems of oppression which restrict and exploit women: religion, tradition, colonialism, imperialism, patriarchy, and Black male chauvinism. This is particularly true of the novels produced by African women. In many novels, “the economic exploitation of African women and their deft survival strategies have been documented but the new novel directs our attention to a special group of women who have demonstrated that they have both the means and common sense to take charge of their own lives” (Ohale 132). Rather than focus on the oppressive natures of individual men, Ba, Marshall, and Hansberry use their Black male characters to assess the harmful nature of the colluding systems of oppression that continue to restrict Black women’s freedom even in what are considered postcolonial states.

Miriama Ba’s So Long a Letter is an epistolary novel set in post-independence Senegal. Ramatoulaye, a teacher and widow, writes a letter to her friend, Aissatou, after her husband abandons her for a younger woman and dies shortly after the marriage. She writes to her friend because they both experience the demise of their marriages. The long letter is essentially divided into three parts. The first part details how both women’s marriages were destroyed in part by patriarchal systems and the women who perpetuate them; the second part details Ramatoulaye’s resolve to reclaim her identity as an individual with agency; the third portion of the book ends with a measure of hope for improved gender relations in Senegal. Ultimately, Ramatoulaye grasps toward a system of gender relations that guarantees equanimity for all people of Senegal.
Thus, Ramatoulaye’s letter becomes a long commentary on the things that weaken Senegalese society by impeding the progress of women—individuals who constitute half the population and half the working force. In her letter, she reveals that individual decisions are often manifestations of a confluence of oppressive discourses that are both external and internal to Senegalese society. The things that destroy individual marriages also weaken Senegal. However, for every problem Ramatoulaye details she discusses a solution made possible by modernity.

The French colonization of Senegal brought with it a rigid European gender system, and winning independence from these powers did not eradicate this system of inequality that overwhelmingly favored men. In fact “during economic restructuring and democratization, male politicians have sought to convince women that their interests were served by the current politicians, while at the same time they deny women additional benefits” (Mikell 5). Ramatoulaye and Aissatou were once pioneering activists for the causes of African women, even in the face of mass opposition from African men. Ramatoulaye relates the opposition she and her friend experienced from African men, saying, “Because being the first pioneers of the promotion of African women, they were very few of us. Men would call us scatter-brained. Others labeled us devils” (14-15). She describes the excitement experienced during her generation: “It was the privilege of our generation to be the link between two periods in our history, one of domination, the other of independence. We remained young and efficient, for we were the messengers of a new design. With independence achieved, we witnessed the birth of a republic, the birth of an anthem and the implantation of a flag” (25). In her description of the end of colonialism and the beginning of independence, she uses inclusive, egalitarian pronouns like “our” and “we”; implying that women as well as men were equal colleagues in the struggle.
Women’s rights were linked to Senegalese independence, according to Ramatoulaye. However, the dream she shared with her female freedom fighters never quite materialized because both African patriarchs and cultural traditions continue to oppress African women at the time of her husband’s death. Namely, she discusses patriarchal women, materialism, abuse of Islam, and men of the national assembly who deny women’s ability to lead.

In the first part of the letter, Ramatoulaye details how patriarchal women, those thoroughly devoted to old traditions as well as those enchanted by material gain, helped destroy both she and Aissatou’s marriage. Men are not the only possessors of a phallus; women use their power and authority to oppress other women, too; Ramatoulaye demonstrates this principle by describing the end of Aissatou’s marriage. Traditionally, certain classes of African women suppress other African women who they deem are of a “lower rank” than themselves. For instance, Aunty Nabou is from an African noble class, whereas Aissatou’s father is a goldsmith (working class). The man’s mother did not approve of her “only man” who is a doctor marrying beneath his class to Aissatou. According to Aunty Nabou, Aissatou is “a goldsmith’s daughter!...she burns everything in her path, like fire in a forge” (26). Aunty Nabou “lived in the past, unaware of the changing world. She clung to old beliefs. Being strongly attached to her privileged origins, she believed firmly that blood carried with it virtues, and, nodding her head, she would repeat that humble birth would always show in a person’s bearing” (26). Aunty Nabou believes women’s ignorance and docility are virtues and secure good marriages to prosperous men. She asks a brother for one of his younger daughters, raises her, and then offers her in marriage to Mawdo, Aissatou’s husband. Once he accepts, Aissatou leaves the marriage. Not only does Mawdo’s mother destroy an otherwise happy marriage, she also ignores four grandsons produced by that marriage in a place where sons are cherished. After the mother-in-
law’s triumph, Aissatou uses education to not only gain the respectability for herself that Mawdo’s mother and all of his family refused her, but to earn a very good living for herself and the boys. Ramatoulaye lauds the liberatory function of education in her society, saying, “What society refused you, [books] granted: examinations sat and passed took you also to France. The School of Interpreters, from which you graduated, led to your appointment into the Senegalese Embassy in the United States. You make a very good living” (32). Seen as a hindrance to those like Aunty Nabou, Aissatou’s success proves that obtaining an education is freedom from the tyranny of tradition for African women; marriage is no longer the only avenue available to African women who wish to make vertical economic movement.

On the other hand, a woman thoroughly desirous of the material comforts of modernity destroyed Ramatoulaye’s marriage (It is ironic that one of the episodes in Tutuola’s *The Palm Wine Drinkard* warns against the materialism of modernity. Like Tutuola, Ba makes a commentary here about how rampant materialism ruins marriages and Senegalese society.). Modou was a technical adviser in the Ministry of Public Works. His position (not necessarily his finances, as Ramatoulaye reveals) allowed him essentially to purchase his daughter’s friend, Binetou, from her greedy mother. Ramatoulaye reveals how Modou purchased his bride: “Four million francs borrowed with ease because of his privileged position, which had enabled him to pay for Lady Mother-in-Law and her husband to visit Mecca to acquire the tiles of Alhaja and Alhaji; which equally enabled Binetou to exchange her Alfa Romeos at the slightest dent” (10). However, the Mother-in-Law’s aspirations are detrimental to the daughter’s. Ramatoulaye says, “The young girl, who was very gifted, wanted to continue her studies, to sit for her baccalaureate” (10). In order to secure Binetou, Modou removed her from school and her peers, placed her in a villa, and bought her many fine things. While Ramatoulaye holds Modou
responsible for his personal decision to break the happiness of their marriage by marrying one of his daughter’s friends, she does not show anger toward Binetou, her co-wife; instead, “Binetou, like many others was a lamb slaughtered on the altar of affluence” (39). Because Binetou’s family is poor, and her marriage to a good man would automatically mean upward socio-economic movement for her entire family, the child gave in to her mother’s will, and allowed herself to be sold to Modou Fall like any other object he desired. As for the child, her life became tragic as Ramatoulaye tells us: “Worn out, Binetou would watch with a disillusioned eye the progress of her friends. The image of her life, which she had murdered, broke her heart” (50). Her mother, on the other hand, thoroughly enjoyed the new luxuries she gained by selling her daughter, including a trip to Mecca for she and her husband, a new home with running water, easier access to a motorized car through Modou, and clothes. If read as an allegory, Binetou’s fate is symbolic of materialism’s destructive nature in Senegal. Materialism and the women of Ramatoulaye’s age who are caught in its web, slow the progress of the entire country by impeding the dreams of young ladies like Binetou for material comfort.

If Modou’s ego and selfishness prompted his desire for a younger wife, abuse of the tenets of Islam allowed the farce of a marriage to proceed. In Islamic societies, specifically those of West Africa, men are allowed more than one wife if he can provide for them financially, emotionally, and sexually equally. Often, men abuse the system of polygamy for selfish gain, as manifested by Modou and Mawdo, and Ba uses the examples of these men to criticize the abuse of Islam while never directly attacking Islam. This is a very fine line to tread and one critic declares, “Miriama Ba’s discourse, however, while never questioning the fundamental precepts of Islam, stemmed deliberately and convincingly from a dynamic conception of society, a strong belief in social and political change and progress” (Makward 272). Rather than attack Islam
directly, Ramatoulaye reveals that “Modou ignores traditional decorum and religious tenets that require the husband to secure the approval and the participation, in some measure, of the first wife in the process of taking a second wife” (Kamara 218). The Imam brings Ramatoulaye the news of Modou’s treachery and tries to allay the severity of Modou’s disrespect for Islamic protocol with religious rhetoric, “There is nothing one can do when Allah the almighty puts two people side by side” (36). Only after the Imam and Tamsir speak can Ramatoulaye adequately deduce that the person of which they speak is her husband. The Imam, or Islamic religious official, has the authority and knowledge to advise Islamic people on the proper conduct according to the Islamic holy books, the Koran and Hadith. Undoubtedly, this Imam did not advise Modou against disrespecting his wife by taking on another wife without her consent or approval, but performed the ceremony instead. His actions affirm Modou’s selfishness instead of properly condemning him; therefore, religious officials who do not counsel men against or strongly discourage men from abusing Islamic tenets for their personal, individual tastes are complicit with other systems that exploit women and support an African patriarchy through improper polygamous relationships. In the hands of abusive people, Islam becomes another tool of patriarchy that impedes the progress of women; thus, it impedes the progress of Senegal, according to Ramatoulaye.

After Modou’s marriage, Ramatoulaye, like her friend, Aissatou, must decide whether to stay in the marriage or leave. Being forced to decide, or take agency for her own life, creates an aperture for Ramatoulaye; whereas Aissatou uses education as a liberating factor and a way to leave Senegal for the United States, Ramatoulaye, a teacher, uses her loneliness to rekindle the revolutionary spirit she left behind once she became Modou’s wife. She decides to stay, “but even though Ramatoulaye does not physically leave the house, she does psychologically leave
the marriage. She opts to stay in the house – her house – after her husband abandons her” (Kamara 219). Instead of asking Modou Fall to come home so that he can perform the duties normally reserved for men in her society, Ramatoulaye performs them. For instance, she purchases the food and pays bills. She writes to Aissatou, “I was often the only woman in the queue” (51). But, she says repeatedly, “I survived” (52). These small, personal rebellions against patriarchal traditions of her society give her courage. She learns to overcome her shyness of going out alone, and takes trips to the cinema without a partner; she learns to appreciate the difficult lives of her children when she tries to take public transit; and lastly, she learns to drive after Aissatou gives her a car free of charge. The attainment of her driver’s license is a symbol of her triumph over Modou Fall’s abandonment. The license symbolizes reclamation of the lost agency Ramatoulaye willingly gave to her husband and family, and empowers her to wage psychological warfare on relatives and friends who oppress women daily.

During the second part of this letter, Ramatoulaye implicitly confirms her humanity in word and deed. Ba achieves this degree of subtlety by juxtaposing Ramatoulaye’s personal crises with the failings of post-independent Senegal concerning oppression of women. Ramatoulaye launches her “attack” by first opposing marriage proposals from her brother-in-law and a former suitor. The brother-in-law asks for her hand in marriage during the ceremony marking 40 days since the passing of Modou. Ramatoulaye promptly denies him saying:

Your strategy is to get in before any other suitor, to get in before Mawdo, the faithful friend, who has more qualities than you and who also, according to custom, can inherit the wife. You forget that I have a heart, a mind, that I am not an object to be passed from hand to hand. You don’t know what marriage means to me:
it is an act of faith and of love, the total surrender of oneself to the
person one has chosen and who has chosen you. [58]

With this public diatribe, Ramatoulaye accomplishes several things at once. First, she states that she is an individual who is capable of making adult decisions about her life and not a pawn in a game of conquest. Women, not religious principles or traditional practices, should be the ultimate judges of when and who they should marry—if they choose to do so at all. Marriage is a product of love, a commitment to fidelity, and choice to be entered into freely and willingly. After all, “one of the key concepts to emerge from Mariama Ba’s novels is that of choice” (d’Almeida 161). Next, she jabs a finger in the eye of the duplicitous religious leader by scolding Tamsir in the presence of the Imam at a sanctimonious event in the temple. Finally, upon the end of her public vent, she declares triumph saying, “Thus I took my revenge for that other day when all three of them airily informed me of the marriage of Modou Fall and Binetou” (58). Tamsir, Mawdo, and the Imam are thoroughly shocked, awed, and defeated by her angry outburst. It is against religious tradition for a woman to voice her frustrations loudly and publicly; yet, men routinely ignore those principles when breaking them serves their personal agendas. In turn, chastising them publicly in a holy place during a religious ritual serves Ramatoulaye’s mission of confessing to the world that she is a human being and not an object to be passed mindlessly from one masculine hand to the next. Full of triumph, Ramatoulaye prepares to take on and defeat larger, national adversaries to women’s progress.

Ba presents Ramatoulaye with a national adversary in the person of Daouda Dieng, a former suitor, lifelong friend, and member of the ruling body of Senegal. Ramatoulaye conflates him with “the male-dominated National Assembly he belongs to that denies representation to women, and the one-party political system that denies services to the citizenry” (Azodo 80).
Though women such as Aissatou and Ramatoulaye fought alongside men during the revolution for Senegalese independence, they are excluded from positions of power and do not share adequate representation in the country’s governing body. After independence, the voices of African women are effectively silenced by the patriarchal, sexist African males that replaced the white ones. Ramatoulaye reminds Daouda that in the National Assembly, there are “four women…four out of a hundred deputies. What a ridiculous ratio! Not even one for each province” (60). However, Daouda has a very male-chauvinist counter-offensive declaring, “[Y]ou women, you are like mortar shells. You demolish. You destroy. Imagine a large number of women in the Assembly. Why, everything would explode, go up in flames” (60). He implies that women are not as capable in positions of leadership as men, and that the country would be lost in chaos if more women were elected. Ramatoulaye gives Daouda a nice speech on the rights of women; it is not as vitriolic as with Tamsir, Mawdo, and the Imam; rather, it is symbolic of a balancing act African women must always use when challenging African governments. In the burgeoning independent countries, African males successfully silenced African women by claiming that African women’s complaints were not original to them, but were the results of European feminism; thus, feminism becomes another tool of colonialism designed to castrate African men, according to African men. Critic Mikell declares that “African women find themselves carefully balancing these conflicting forces, trying to achieve greater public involvement for themselves while supporting the rights of African states to be autonomous decision makers” (2). Daouda’s comments, though they may be reflective of the general attitude of African men toward feminism, are deeply offensive to Ramtoulaye. They disregard the intelligent assessment of educated, African women like Ramatoulaye by claiming that only European women could instill such unrest in Africa and that African women really do
not desire equality and recognition of their contributions to their respective societies. In that sense, Daouda and all African males who think as he does, participates in taking away the voices of African women and making them subaltern bodies in Senegal. Furthermore, his remarks confirm Ramatoulaye’s assessment that African males had no intention of bringing about equanimity for all citizens of Senegal; they only wanted to replace the European ruling body with an African one. Senegalese men in positions of power like Daouda inhibit the socio-economic growth of Senegal by failing to address the deep-seated, structural gender inequalities. Ramatoulaye tells him, “But Daouda, the constraints remain; but Daouda, old beliefs are revived; but Daouda, egoism emerges, skepticism rears its head in the political field” (61). She rejects his hand in marriage; in spite of the financial benefits and social mobility that a marriage to him would mean, Ramatoulaye, as an individual, decides not to participate in the ideology that she believes is hurting her country.

In the last third of the book, Ramatoulaye looks to her children in order to make an assessment of the modernity that she and Aissatou helped bring about. The children, representative of the next generation, do pose problems for their mother. The girls make bold fashion choices that are more revealing than traditional Islamic dress allows, one is having illicit sex and becomes pregnant out of wedlock, and several are smoking tobacco. Though these new developments scare Ramatoulaye initially, she sees a vision of gender egalitarianism in her children. Ramatoulaye looks to Daba, her eldest daughter, and Daba’s nontraditional husband and the way they treat one another with mutual respect and understanding. They often blend gendered tasks such as household chores in a way that Ramatoulaye’s generation does not: “Daba does not find household work a burden. Her husband cooks rice as well as she does; her husband who claims, when I tell him he spoils his wife: ‘Daba is my wife. She is not my slave,
nor my servant’” (73). In many school disputes involving younger siblings, it is Daba, not her husband, who accompanies the children and confronts the teachers. According to Ramatoulaye, Daba and her husband and their effort to compromise as equals in marriage, constitute “an ideal couple, just as [she] has always imagined” (73). She hopes that Daba’s marriage is another, positive allegory for other couples throughout Senegal. Gender complementarity is the ultimate freedom and her daughter’s marriage is proof that one day it can be achieved, but it must start with individual choices and symphonic harmony in heterosexual couples, Ramatoulaye believes. Only with gender complementarity, a system of equanimity in which men and women share private family chores and public local/national leadership, will the liberatory process she and her generation started, be complete.

An old warrior for justice by the time of this letter, Ramatoulaye still believes firmly in progress for the nation through care of individuals within the family structure, and the family begins with the mutual respect of couples. According to Ramatoulaye, families, major components of the private domain, are small microcosms of the public domain, and “The success of the family is born of a couple’s harmony, as the harmony of multiple instruments creates a pleasant symphony” (89). Like the basso continuo of a baroque symphony, couples provide the structure or backbone which often ties the various, notes, chords, and movements together to make the larger symphony sound like a unified piece rather than a cacophonous collection of notes played on various instruments. Of course, Ramatoulaye stresses the freedom in individual decision-making as well; becoming a heterosexual couple does not mean that the individuals which constitute the relationship/marriage must relinquish autonomy, but retain agency. While the choices individuals make are the result of the confluence of many discourses, individual choices tend to perpetuate the ubiquity and inequality found in ideology. Though Foucault looks
at discourse from a linguistic lens applied to larger society, Ba presents a narrative in which the
effectiveness of ideology and discourse are based upon words, actions, and the pregnant pauses
in between.\textsuperscript{10}

In \textit{The Chosen Place the Timeless People}, Marshall’s fictional Caribbean nation, Bourne
Island is remarkably similar to Ba’s Senegal and Lamming’s Barbados; though nominally free of
the colonialist rule of the metropole, it is still dependent upon it. Bourne Island is a former
British colony that is still dependent upon the British economically and dominated by England
culturally. For instance, the island’s school system still uses British textbooks that teach British
history and cater to British curriculum while refusing to allow anyone to teach the island’s own
local history and geography. Politically, like Ba’s Senegal, Black male faces simply replaced the
white, British ones that used to govern the country without much actual structural changes to
address the racial and gender inequalities which cripple the island’s socio-economic progress.
But, Marshall does make a departure from Ba, who uses her long letter to reflect Senegalese
society at large; Marshall’s novel is a reflection of the Diasporic experience in the New World.
She uses references to slavery to condemn the plantation system in the Western hemisphere; she
also uses uneven gender binaries to comment upon the power of patriarchy to subordinate others.
Through her allusion to slavery and her explicit use of gender, Marshall, like Ba, demonstrates
that women can be patriarchal and oppress other women using the same power dynamics.
Furthermore, Marshall uses a masculine character, Vere to implicate the pernicious effect of
American cultural encroachment and imperialism in the Caribbean. Vere rejects his own island’s
definition of masculinity in favor of the Euro-American one he learned on a work pass in the
United States; instead of purchasing a home, Vere buys a car, a symbol of North American
masculinity, and suffered devastating consequences. The car which causes Vere’s death, an
Opel, is a German-American hybrid which symbolizes Euro-American masculinity, and not simply white American masculinity.

First, Marshall uses *Chosen Place* to demonstrate that *all* systems of Euro-American patriarchal supremacy are equally destructive to people of African descent through setting and dialogue. Marshall explicitly states this in an interview, “I hoped that the novel would not be seen as a novel about the West Indies, even though it’s set there, but a novel that reflects what is happening to all of us in the Diaspora in our encounter with these metropolitan powers, the power of Europe and the power of America” (Marshall and Pettis 124). Perhaps this explains her choice to use the fictional nation, Bourne Island, rather than Lamming’s Barbados or Roumain’s Haiti. Though these islands differ geographically and linguistically, they share the same history of European enslavement, subsequent colonialism, and present American cultural influence.

Throughout the text, Marshall uses the Atlantic Sea to reference the horrors of the Middle Passage and enslavement in the New World. The omnipotent narrator describes the Atlantic as:

…a wild-eyed, maurying sea, the color of slate, deep, full of dangerous currents, lined with row upon row of barrier reefs, and with a sound like that of the combined voices of the drowned raised in a loud unceasing lament –all those, the nine million and more it is said, who in their forced exile, their Diaspora, had gone down between this point and the homeland lying out of sight to the east. [106]

The “nine million” refers, of course, to the conservative historians’ estimate of the number of Africans who either committed suicide by jumping overboard before the ships docked in the
Caribbean or simply died and were tossed overboard along the way during the Triangular Slave Trade.

There are other points in the narrative where Marshall simply uses dialogue between characters to achieve her African Diasporic vision for the novel and to critique Euro-American supremacist ideology. In a casual conversation with a white American woman, Lyle, one of the book’s masculine characters, says, “It’s a marvelous sight, and a much needed one, goodness knows, in a world where all of us manage to be so ugly to each other, especially over this whole stupid question of race and color…All one can hope is that things don’t get as bad as in [America] or that dreadful South Africa” (200). According to Lyle, the two countries coexist in that they both use specific discourses to maintain Euro-American supremacist ideology: the former uses de facto and de juris segregation while the latter uses Apartheid. Both these things maintain the social, cultural, and economic supremacy of the Euro-Americans who reside in these countries.

In fact, Harriet, the woman with whom Lyle is talking, a powerful Euro-American woman born in the U.S. North, has benefitted from America’s unequal system of justice and capitalism and has ties to the Caribbean slave trade as well. She gains power and wealth through a female predecessor who also owned stock in Triangular Slave trading companies and those white American owned companies which processed and sold poor quality, salted cod to the island’s Black population during colonialism. The narrator informs the reader about Harriet’s background: “An early forebear of Harriet Shippens, for example, the widow Susan Harbin, had launched the family’s modest wealth by her small-scale speculation in the West Indies trade, which…consisted of taking a few shares in a number of sloops making twice-yearly run between Philadelphia, the west coast of Africa, and then back across the Atlantic islands” (37). Marshall
purposefully chooses a Northern-born family in order to condemn the entire American society. Harriet’s character, according to Marshall, is meant to be “an in-depth study of just how the women from respectable families of the North, not only the mistresses of the plantations who hated the black women that the practice used and abused. These women in the North had their side trade in slaves” (Marshall and Pettis 125). Ironically, Harriet’s think tank financially sponsors her husband, Saul’s, anthropological work in the very islands where her predecessors once exploited and suppressed other women. As the financier of her husband’s trip, it is Harriet who wields the phallic authority in the relationship, and not Saul, the sole possessor of a biological penis in the marriage. Saul, the anthropologist, has not internalized Euro-American patriarchal thought, perhaps because he is a Jew and Jews were also excluded from configurations of masculinity in the United States. Harriet, as a white American woman with powerful connections and a sizeable fortune, is the patriarch of this relationship, though she is biologically a woman.

Harriet accompanies her husband, Saul, to the island where the notion of her own cultural superiority is severely challenged by the island’s working class Black population and the atmosphere of carnival, which Lyle previously describes. The atmosphere of carnival is a pivotal part of the book’s setting throughout. Carnival in the Caribbean, Canada, the lower United States, and the South American mainland is “a time for putting on masks individually and in groups. Masking oneself and disguising oneself allows an identity change, freeing one temporarily from everyday roles” (Lozica 72). On carnival day, the roles are often inverted; those people who are often on the bottom of the economic spectrum are allowed to dress and make a mockery of upper-class customs and mores; those left outside of History perform their own personal histories before the spectacle of the crowd. Costumes, mask, and the general
theme of carnival allows these grotesque performances without fear of repercussion; the crowd streets and costumes provide safety in anonymity. Though this particular carnival parade does not employ masks, the narrator describes the faces of the participants as if they are masks. The crowd was “staring with a strange fixity straight ahead, utterly absorbed in what seemed some goal or objective visible only to them” (295). In the eyes of the revelers, Harriet sees “the goal they had set for themselves” (297) as they ignore her. This streak of steely self-determination and the crowd’s rejection of her orders angers Harriet and she wants to strike out at the crowd. The inversion of roles, in which working class people take the phallic authority and Harriet is made to obey the will of the proletariat severely affects Harriet, and her psychological breakdown begins on the last day of carnival.

Last, Harriet’s false notion of her racial superiority comes tumbling down after she learns of Saul’s affair with Merle, the book’s Black female protagonist. Harriet wants to brush the affair aside as “nothing more than carnival” (426). Though she is angry at Saul, she is more intrigued at the skin color difference between he and Merle. Saul answers, “Merle’s color presented no problem. She was the one. She couldn’t bear the thought of my being white and insisted on pretending that I was really one of the red people from up Canterbury” (430). After Harriet manifests her racism and condescension, Saul, a Jew, becomes indignant, saying, “And just think, someone could ask you the same question. They could ask how is it that you, a Philadelphia blue-blood, could bear to have me, a long-nosed Jew, touch you. They might not be able to understand that, either” (430). In order to save her marriage, she tries to pay Merle to leave and arranges to have Saul removed as head of project. Merle rejects her payment, and Saul is angry enough for divorce after he learns of his replacement. Unable to live in a world where
she cannot have order or control, Harriet drowns herself in the sea where her aunt, so long ago, imported human cargo.

Harriet is not the only Euro-American woman who possesses and wields phallic authority. While in Britain, Merle has a lesbian affair with an unnamed wealthy British benefactress, and it ultimately ruins Merle’s relationship with her African husband, Ketu. Of course, Merle’s affair and her subsequent breakup is allegorical to Britain’s relationship to the Caribbean and the Caribbean’s fragmented relationship to Africa. The older lady always kept international people, including Indians, Asians, Canadians, Australians, Gibraltans, and even a man from Tonga in her home: “The sun, you might say, never set on the little empire she had going in her drawing room” (328). All of these people were once (or continues to be) colonized by the British Empire. After three years of this lifestyle, Merle understands that the woman’s supposed generosity had a sinister consequence for those who accept it. Merle declares that the woman looked like a “queen bee” (329) while all of the colonials entertained her. In fact, Marshall compares the relationship that the woman has with the students to, “the relationship of the English when they were the nation on which the sun never set, the British Empire” (Marshall and Pettis 125). After Merle finally recognizes the colonial simulation in which she was unwittingly taking part, she breaks free from the British woman, but chooses to remain in England where she “has the opportunity to interact with someone from Africa who stands in sharp contrast to the Bournehills bourgeoisie, Lyle Hutton and others, who believe that their homeland is beyond help, or who are in essence neocolonials taking advantage of a new government” (Gnage 101). Ketu, a student from East Africa was committed to not only independence, but the work required to maintain the economic independence of his home nation. Ketu had come to England to learn and apply his education to his own country, not to wrap
himself in Western culture. After Merle marries him, she rebukes the English woman. However, like Harriet, the British woman does not like having her power and authority challenged. She “could never permit it, not someone like her who had to feel they had the power of life and death over other people. She couldn’t take someone she considered her inferior standing up to her” (332). In other words, the British woman relished in her position of power as much as any Euro-American man. She is a patriarchal woman and would not accept rejection from someone who she deemed as her subordinate, Merle. Consequently, the wealthy woman works through subterfuge to destroy Mere’s marriage and is successful. Merle’s marriage to Ketu ends after he learns of the lesbian affair, but rather than return to the British woman, Merle returns home to Bournehill.

Far removed from the British woman, the pain that she caused lingers with Merle, and “the intensity of that pain culminates in her memory of her husband and reveals the hidden claims of colonialism that control interiority as well as external life” (Lynch 186). Merle hoped the reverse migration to her home, where she teaches the island’s Black slave history, would bring some sort of healing for her. But, the island’s educational board—a relic of British colonialism—fires her for teaching about the island’s Black slave warrior hero, Cuffee Ned, and refuses to hire her to teach at other schools. Though Marshall takes the reader toward Merle’s personal psychological torments and the cause of her mental breakdown, Marshall uses the cleavage of Merle’s marriage in the same that Ba uses Ramatoulaye’s personal experiences. She juxtaposes Merle’s personal life to the colonial situation. The woman replicates the height of Anglophone colonialism. Though this may be an abstract concept, it touches Merle on an intimate level and ultimately affects her career. Because of her commitment to teaching Black Caribbean history, she cannot find gainful employment on the island nor can she savage her
marriage or be a mother to the daughter she had with Ketu. These external historical influences, the discourse of colonialism, racism, and sexism collude to force a psychotic break in Merle. Merle, in a sense, represents the entire population of the Anglophone Black Caribbean.

Whereas Merle returns home for some kind of psychological and emotional healing, Vereson, leaves Bournehills – the place of his psychological castration. Vere represents a younger generation of African Caribbeans who no longer consider travel to the metropole necessary for cultural or economic advancement. Black Caribbean author and literary critic Maryse Conde states, “They do not even think about Africa. Instead, they look to the United States, to Black America, for their inspiration…They see the United States as a place where a Black man or a Black woman can reach the top” (59). As a young man, Vereson impregnates a very light-skinned young lady (who also remains unnamed), but she continually rejects Vere’s hand in marriage, even after he promises to travel to America to make more money to support her and his child. The girl deliberately kills Vere’s son because “she didn’t want it, said it was too black…Every morning she had it in a hot bath, like she was stewing it, and she would leave it alone in the house all day without little tea” (32). Leesy, Vere’s island guardian, even begged the girl to let her raise her great-grandson, but the girl refused, continuing to “stew” and starve the child to death. Her cruel rejection of Vere and their child because of their dark skin, a classic case of chromatism, is a sort of castration. In addition to killing his child, the girl spent the money Vere sent from his immigration scheme on clothing for herself. In Vere’s world, as in the world of the young men of In the Castle of My Skin, providing for a woman and child is a mark of manhood. Her refusal of Vere’s providence, the rejection of their child together, and the acceptance of his economic contributions for her individual financial gain deny Vere any sense of masculinity as defined in particular Caribbean nations. Vere seeks vengeance on the girl by
beating her, but accepts “the realization that no matter how long he flailed away at her he would never be able to convey to her what it was he had been seeking in having her as his woman and giving her the child, and how deeply she had wronged him by denying him both” (275). The girl is profoundly ignorant of what she did to Vere and his masculine identity. Instead of striking her again, he looks for a comparable object to destroy, something that would signify the identity she would have liked to embody. He finds a suitable instrument in “the doll amid the toilet articles on the vanity” (275). Vere simply wanted to hit the girl with the doll, but the girl tears the doll in half when she tries to wrest it from Vere’s hand. The girl lets out a loud shriek that “continued to rise and fall long after he had gotten into the Opel and driven away” (276). Satisfied that he had at last conveyed to her what her cruelty and chromatism had done to him, he forgets her and looks forward to beginning his life anew with another symbol of masculinity.

Upon returning home, Vere uses the remainder of his money to purchase a car. His dreams of a car “had come to serve as the antidote for everything that troubled him” (15). Cars do several things: announce material success and carry identity values in that “they act as markers of social and cultural differences and they communicate ideas about who [they] are in relation to who others are. Through this system of signs cars also serve as symbols of masculinity” (Best 4). Vere, in owning a car, would set himself apart from the rest of the men in Bourne Hill, because most Black men, even those older than himself, do not own a car. In many ways, “the car has long been a way for young working-class men to claim respect and dignity as men, to deflect the repeated assaults on their manhood staked elsewhere” (Best 4). In building the car according to the instructions, the car would be a way to reconnect with other men: the ones he left behind three years earlier for a job in the United States. Besides, he always dreamed of building his own car and racing in a local race on the island –winning the prize for all of the
downtrodden men of the Bourne Hills community. Not only is the car a symbol of Vere’s masculinity, Marshall uses the car as a symbol of Euro-American patriarchal supremacy. In desiring a car as a symbol of his masculinity, Vere has internalized Euro-American ideals of masculinity. First, “car culture is forever bound to the historical relations of modern capitalist production and consumption. Quite simply cars, unlike other material artifacts, have never existed apart from the economic logic of modern life; cars are first and foremost commodities” (Best 14). Second, Marshall’s choice of car, a German-American hybrid, rather than an iconic American or European car, assures that the entire system of Euro-American patriarchal supremacy – and not one specific country – is indicted. Marshall states in an interview why she chose this model of car: “That’s one of the reasons, for example, just a small note, that the car in Chosen Place that kills is made by General Motors in Germany. This brings together what I saw as two major powers that reap such havoc on the world” (Marshall and Pettis 124). The car, an Opel, gives Vere a sense of power, “…he felt the combined power of that supercharged German motor and long, low-slung American body which, in motion, looked like an animal lunging forward to strike, flow up through the floor and through the shaft of the steering wheel and enter him, becoming his power” (365-366). Vere’s new-found sense of self, of course, upsets Harriet, who prefers the docile and broken Vere who yearns after the girl.

Of course, Vere’s version of manhood is not in accordance with Leesy’s, either. According to Leesy, “the first thing a man needs to do is make provision to feed himself so he don’t have to look to nobody and to put a roof over his head. His own roof. Then he’s his own man, what you’d call an independent person” (186). In Leesy’s definition, true manhood is only achieved when a man is truly economically independent. A man’s economic independence is symbolized by home and land ownership. She also believes that no good can come of the car.
Indeed, when Vere takes part in the Whitmondy Race, the car falls apart around him: “Vere, in foolishly allowing himself to be taken in by what he had believed was its promise of power, was simply a hapless victim” (367). The Euro-American patriarchal notion of manhood, when internalized by Black males, is a false promise. Racism and classism often prevent Black men from achieving this ideal masculinity. Many, like Vere, are often unaware of the detrimental consequences that Black male chauvinism and sexism has for themselves as individuals, their families, and their respective communities. In Vere’s case, it is fatal. He dies during the car crash, leaving behind his pregnant girlfriend.

After the crash and the closing of the sugar cane processing factory, Merle finally articulates the systemic, often unseen, oppression all of the islanders, regardless of class, experience. Merle, as a character, is representative of all the people of Bourne Hill and talks endlessly. Of Merle’s loquaciousness, Marshall says “I could use the talk as a means of saying what is not to be said, so that she says things that one is not supposed to say. She says things about the political situation; she says things about the relationships of people of the island, those with power, those without” (Marshall and Pettis 124). Her peculiar brand of insanity gives Merle the phallic power to speak to authority without the consequences. To the British owner of the closed factory, she declares, “[Vere] is not around anymore, is he? He went to America and you people turned his head with a lot of nonsense about cars and he’s dead. Just so. Cut down just when he was coming into his own” (390). Of course, Merle understands that British people are not Americans, but she is speaking to a system of Euro-American patriarchal supremacist thought, not a particular instance. She believes that these two different systems collude to maintain Euro-American supremacy.
Like Ba and Marshall, Hansberry uses her art to criticize both Euro-American patriarchal supremacist ideology and Black male chauvinism. The 1959 play, *A Raisin in the Sun*, like Ba’s epistolary novel, foregrounds the effectiveness of discourse through the conversations and interactions between a Black married, heterosexual couple. Unlike Ba’s narrative, there is no abandonment here; there is some underlying tension between Ruth and Walter Lee Younger. As the play progresses, it becomes evident that Walter, who works a menial job as a chauffeur for a wealthy white man, has internalized the Euro-American patriarchal supremacist definition of masculinity, and desires to fulfill those beliefs, even though he is fully aware that racism prevents him from doing so. Like many Black males of his era, Walter blames his wife for his feelings of insecurity, and replicates the same lurid atmosphere of oppression inside the home that he experiences outside of it. She also uses two other Black male characters, George Murchison, a middle class Black man who dates Walter’s sister, and Asagai, one of Beneatha’s suitors, to demonstrate Black male chauvinism and to link her critique of Chicago’s racialized politics to other struggles throughout the Diaspora.

Like Richard Wright, a one-time resident of Chicago, Hansberry uses her home city to indict American racism as a whole. The opening stage directions read, “Time: sometime between World War II and the present. Place: Chicago’s Southside” (24). According to critics, *A Raisin in the Sun* “directly engages segregation struggles in Chicago as a symbol of black oppression and resistance. In doing so, she brought local, individual struggles of African Americans –against segregation, ghettoization, and capitalist exploitation –to the national stage” (Gordon 121-122). As a global city, Chicago was “the most violently and residually segregated metropolis in the nation, post-World War II Chicago rocked with more bombs in and around black homes and businesses than even Birmingham, Alabama” (Gordon 123). Many
families, “like Mama Younger, some 80% of Bronzeville’s interwar residents had migrated to Chicago from the South, seeking employment, education, the vote, and freedom from anti-black violence” (Drake and Cayton 99, 227 in Gordon 123). Many found racism in Chicago, but in a slightly different format than its Southern counterpart. Rather than “white’s only” signs and poll taxes, African Americans in Chicago faced residential redlining and jerry-mandering.

They also found the same violence and the same limiting, subservient positions in the North that they once held in the South. Many families “like the Youngers, 64% of black women and 34% of black men in the city worked as domestic servants” (Gordon 123). Only in the industrial North, women served as day-workers instead of live-in maids, and after a long day of scrubbing floors caring for another’s family, they went home to care for their own families. Walter Lee serves as a chauffeur for a wealthy Euro-American man while his wife, Ruth, works as a domestic as well. His mother, Lena Younger, also works as a domestic. After the death of her husband, Lena becomes the economic head of her household as the beneficiary her husband’s insurance check. Only his sister, Beneatha, escapes the drudgery of domestic work by deciding to attend college with the hopes of becoming a doctor. On the surface, the family does resemble the deviant Black matriarchate described in the Moynihan Report. From the onset of the play, Walter Lee Younger, Jr., as a man who cannot adequately support his entire family with his meager income, is economically castrated.

Like families in So Long a Letter, external tensions often irrupt and manifest themselves domestically in the marital tension between Ruth and Walter Lee, Jr. Though the entire family endures external racist conditions, internal tension arises between Walter Lee, Jr. and the women of the play. On stage, “audiences had not seen the restlessness and frustration of a black male such as Walter. Usually, such characters crossed the line into criminal behavior and could be
dismissed as victims of their own or society’s problems” (Wilkerson 144). While such a dismissal would easily apply to Wright’s Bigger Thomas, Walter does not disintegrate from responsible father to criminal. Rather, the chiding of his wife, Ruth, is symbolic of larger gender tensions in Black male-Black female love relationships: “The antagonism that many African-American women and men feel and express toward one another reflects the contradictions characterizing Black masculinity and Black femininity within prevailing U.S. sexual politics” (Collins 168). Walter Lee, or Brother, is a man who knows and certainly feels the weight of his circumstances. Both he and Ruth work outside the home in demeaning jobs, he has no economic control over his household at this point in the play, and he sees no way of turning his diminutive job as a chauffeur into some sort of meaningful employment. Like Wright’s chauffeur, Bigger, Walter does not quite know what to do about his castrated state or exactly who to blame. Though Bigger resorts to criminal activity for economic viability, Walter insists that Ruth convince Mrs. Younger to invest his father’s insurance money in a business where he would be one of three Black male proprietors of a liquor store, something his mother ardently opposes. In opposing his dream of entrepreneurship Walter claims that his mother is an unwitting accomplice to Euro-American men as they deny phallic authority to men like himself.

According to Walter, entrepreneurship is the only way a Black man can assert his own masculine identity through work in America, because “owning one’s own business and being the boss has allowed individual black men to find dignity in labor” (hooks WRC 29). Though Ruth works as well, Walter expects her to support him indubitably. When speaking of his dreams to a nonchalant Ruth, Walter declares, “A man needs for a woman to back him up…” (32). After describing something bordering illegality, Ruth reacts in an unenthusiastic manner. His dream of owning a liquor store with his shady friends, BoBo and Willie, does not sound feasible, and “this
dream is in conflict not only with the dreams of the Younger women, but with reality. But Walter appreciates only his differences with —and blames—the women” (Baraka 15). Walter declares: “That is just what is wrong with the colored woman in this world…Don’t understand about building their men up and making ’em feel like they somebody. Like they can do something” (34). Yet, Black males like Walter Lee experience a kind of systemic racism and employment/wage discrimination that makes this task a nearly impossible feat. Because Black males (and females) unquestionably accept patriarchal definitions of gendered masculinity, they look to scapegoating and assigning blame when they cannot achieve their dreams, “The Man, treacherous black women, bitches of all colors and so forth are all making it hard for them to get ahead” (hooks WRC 85). They blame others vehemently and avoid evaluating the standards to which they hold themselves and the biased system within which they live. As a Black, working class woman, Ruth questions the hierarchical struggle that Walter, and thousands of other Black men, seem to engage in with white men. She flippantly says to Walter, “So you would rather be Mr. Arnold than be his chauffeur. So—I would rather be living in Buckingham Palace” (emphasis Hansberry’s 34). Ruth understands that for many African American men, the struggle for Civil Rights in America could be reduced to a hierarchal power struggle where Black men simply replace the Euro-American hegemonic class. In this case, what would change for Black women? If men simply take the helm of a Eurocentric patriarchal rule, it stands that Black women would not benefit from any revolutionary change men may bring about.

As an African American woman who works outside the home, Ruth’s experiences often parallel those of her husband. She works in a subservient job as a domestic to a wealthy Euro-American woman, and endures the same daily humiliation and dehumanization as her husband. In this case, the Euro-American woman enjoys the same phallic authority as Ba’s patriarchal
Aunty Nabou, and Marshall’s Harriet and nameless British benefactress. Hansberry, like Marshall, uses the figure of Northern, white woman to comment upon America’s system of discrimination and exploitation. Ruth’s employer, because she is a white American woman, can oppress Ruth with the phallic authority the same way that Walter’s boss may subordinate him.

In the scene immediately following Walter Lee’s diatribe against African American women, Hansberry leaves Mama and Ruth alone to talk amongst themselves. Mama tells Ruth that she looks tired and should stay home from work. Ruth replies, “I can’t stay home. She’d be calling up the agency and screaming at them, “My girl didn’t come in today –send me somebody! My girl didn’t come in” (42). Ruth is an adult woman, in her early thirties like her husband, but the Euro-American condescendingly refers to her as “my girl.” This parallels the common practice of Euro-American men who refer to adult, African American men as “boy,” verbally denying them adult masculinity or manliness. Further, when Ruth suggests that Mama should travel to Europe with her money, Lena jokingly replies, “Something always told me I wasn’t no rich white woman” (44). Hansberry’s commentary here alludes to Black women’s rejection of white American feminism, and places her in the tradition of other early African American feminists such as Sojourner Truth, Lydia Maria Stewart, and Anna Julia Cooper. As Angela Y. Davis explains in her texts Women, Race, and Class, from its inception, one of the principal goals of white American feminism was for Euro-American women to share phallic authority with white American men and not the universal upliftment of all women. As author and critic Toni Morrison and other African American feminist scholars note, if African American women felt at all excluded from the Women’s Liberation Movement in its various phases, it is because historically they were. Having suffered as slave women and domestic workers under the tyranny of patriarchal white American women in the United States, African American women such as
Ruth and Lena Younger simply did not feel the welcoming arms of sisterhood that white American feminists claimed were open and waiting for them.

One of the African American female characters, Beneatha, escapes dehumanization at the hands of patriarchal Euro-American women. However, chauvinistic bias manifested by Walter Lee, also extends toward his sister, Beneatha, who attends college with the hopes of becoming a doctor. Walter asks, “Who the hell told you you had to be a doctor? If you so crazy ‘bout messing ‘round with sick people –then go be a nurse like other women –or just get married and be quiet”(38). Of course these venomous words are met with resistance by Beneatha: “His rage at her defiance created negativity and conflict, diminishing the well-being of both of them and of the family as a whole. Rigid rules, support of male dominance in decision-making even when it is wrong-minded, are both part of patriarchal thought” (hooks WRC 136). Aside from her brother, Beneatha has a suitor, George, who “still thinks that’s pretty funny” (50) when she mentions she wants to become a doctor. In one particular scene, George tells Beneatha, “You’re a nice looking girl…all over. That’s all you need, honey…As for myself, I want a nice – (Groping) –simple (Thoughtfully) –sophisticated girl…not a poet –O.K.”(96). George’s comments represent the kind of sexual constraints and politics that severely limit the opportunities available to Black women. Since George can neither respect her thoughts and feelings nor understand that education exists for more than monetary purposes, Beneatha tells him “good night” for the final time. Like Aissatou, Beneatha uses education to advance her personal goals and she escapes the phallic authority of patriarchal white American women who employ her sister-in-law and mother, and she does not want to subject herself to oppressive and demeaning patriarchal authority in marriage. Like Ramatoulaye, she rejects the marriage even though it would mean financial stability and social advancement for her.
While Mama can understand Walter’s restlessness, she cannot accept his desire to enter into a capitalist system which ultimately killed his father. Walter passionately decries his job as subservient and castrating. He says, “I open and close doors all day long. I drive a man around in his limousine and I say, ‘Yes, sir; no, sir; very good, sir; shall I take the Drive, sir?’” Mama, that ain’t no kind of job…that ain’t nothing at all….Mama, I don’t know if I can make you understand” (73). Walter does try to make his mother understand by explaining to her that white men, not much older than he, are “turning deals worth millions of dollars” (73). However, it is his desire to possess and control money, ultimate symbols of power in a capitalist society that Mama disapproves of and not Walter’s disdain for his job. She asks, “Son –how come you talk so much ‘bout money” (73). Walter replies that money is life itself. It is obvious, at this point, that Walter stakes his masculinity upon the possession and control of money. Like Leesy in The Chosen Place, this definition of masculinity is startling to Lena Younger whose criteria for manhood never included money. She replies, “In my time we was worried about not being lynched and getting to the North if we could and how to stay alive and still have a pinch of dignity too…You my children –but how different we done become” (73). Her children’s internalization of capitalist values seems like a rejection of the values she and her husband tried to instill in them. These values include family harmony, a love of children, and a separation of occupation and identity. In Vera Walker’s generation, a man’s job does not define him, neither does money. Walter Lee’s obsession with obtaining money and material goods for his family reeks of materialism, something his mother most certainly disapproves.

As Vere’s fatal accident demonstrates, rampant materialism has devastating consequences for Black men. In fact, “hedonistic materialistic consumerism with its overemphasis on having money to waste has been a central cause of the demoralization among
working men of all races” (hooks WRC 29). As the family awaits the 10,000-dollar check, it is peculiar that Mama is the only one who truly mourns the loss of Walter Lee, Sr. Beneatha’s suitor, a Nigerian man, Asagai, forces even the liberal Beneatha to reassess her values. He asks, “…isn’t there something wrong in a house—in a world—where all dreams, good or bad, must depend on the death of a man” (135). It seems that beneath her acrimonious rejection of both Walter’s and George’s male chauvinism, Beneatha blindly accepts her father’s death as an inevitable consequence of race-based capitalism. Asagai chastises her “suggesting that not only should the Youngers question the material aspects of their individual ambitions and values, but that we should all interrogate the capitalist principles on which modern society is structured” (Gordon 124). If people are to interrogate systems of oppression that collude to subdue others, they must accept that even capitalism, with is meritocratic claims, is a system built upon racism and gender inequality.

Throughout the play, Mama tries to teach Walter that acceptance of the tenets of race-based capitalism for economic gain is to accept notions of Black inferiority. In Chosen Place, Merle learns that economic generosity, even with it comes from a seemingly well-intentioned source in the metropole, comes with stipulations; she loses her marriage, child, and sanity. Mama understands that for Walter Lee, it means trading in a sense of human dignity, and therefore, any agency and autonomy. After all, the North American system of race-based capitalism and the attempt to acquire enough money to provide for his family, killed her husband Walter’s father. He must find another path toward masculinity. Mr. Lindner, a representative of the home association where Mama wants to live, offers the Youngers a handsome sum, double what they receive from their father’s death, not to move into the mostly-white neighborhood. As Walter Lee ponders accepting the money, Mama says, “Son—I come from five generations of
people who was slaves and sharecroppers –but ain’t nobody in my family never let nobody pay ‘em no money that was a way of telling us we wasn’t fit to walk the earth. We ain’t never been that poor” (143). As Merle painfully learns, earning money through adherence to prescribed roles is neither independence nor freedom. However, Walter does not make Merle’s costly mistake: he rejects Lindner’s offer and the family decides to move. Pleased, Mama declares, “He finally come into his manhood today, didn’t he? Kind of like a rainbow after the rain…” (151). Masculinity, as a gender role, is something that must be internally derived. All notions of gender should be family or communally based rather than one based on individual aspirations.

With her Diasporic novel, Marshall makes obvious the lingering effects of race-based chattel slavery on the Caribbean, and her character Merle, explicitly announces that Euro-American patriarchal supremacist ideology is a global system that oppresses those on the Continent and throughout the Diaspora. It cannot be relegated to a single country such as South Africa, or a single portion of an industrial nation, such as the Southern portion of the United States. Vere’s death also demonstrates why Black males should not take on Euro-American notions of masculinity; it inflates them with a false confidence that can only lead to disaster. Ba’s narrative, written during a post-independence era, brings to light a pivotal concept in governance. If Black men simply replace their own colonial masters as leaders without challenging and changing the gender bias imposed upon Africans by Europeans, Black women would stand to gain very little. Additionally, she adds religion into her oppressive systems; in patriarchal societies, religious texts are often interpreted to favor the men who benefit from those interpretations.

Ba, Marshall, and Hansberry take different approaches to Black male abuse than most traditional feminist activists and writers. As bell hooks declares, “Often feminist activists talk
about male abuse of women as if it is an exercise of privilege rather than an expression of bankruptcy, insanity, and dehumanization” (hooks FT 77). This is also the one important factor that separates Black female artists such as Ba, Marshall, and Hansberry from their male counterparts; rather than create individualistic tales of the struggle to achieve masculinity, women produce works where even ideals of gender should be shaped to benefit families and communities. In these texts, Euro-Americans are not central characters, but peripheral to the action, which occurs mainly in the home. Yet, Euro-American patriarchal discourse is pivotal to the plot and character development in each text. Though there are no direct confrontations, no monologues or soliloquies of identity declaration, and no disintegration into violence, these Black female writers make biting statements about racial and gender inequality. Pugilistic, hierarchal struggles do not bring about change. As in the case of Ba’s Senegal and Marshall’s Bourne Island, progress never occurs if the color of the faces presiding over an unequal system change and systemic exploitation remains. Though Black men do experience some male privilege in any patriarchal system, characters like Walter Lee Younger, the only major Black male character who lives in this grouping of books, must stop to evaluate such a system and cease to engage in individual behaviors which impede the progress of the women in his society. And since situations do occur in which women oppress other women Ba, Marshall, and Hansberry also do not advocate that a matriarchy or matrifocal societies replace current patriarchal ones. Rather, they advocate a new definition of masculinity that is not based on subordination, but upon mutual understanding and cooperation between races and genders. They envision and prescribe a system of gender complementarity.

1 Recently, scholars like Hilary Beckles have been recovering the history of UNIA women and publishing scholarly works on them. See the Beckles’s entry in the bibliography of this project.
2 In previous chapters, I have also made use of the theories of Michel Foucault. Sadly, though, I do not find Foucault’s writing to contain much on gendered existences. Even in Madness and Civilization, in which he explores
the imposition of “madness” upon society, he fails to mention the common practice of writers such as Rebalais to characterized madness and folly as female personas.

3 Male Daughters, Female Husbands: Gender and Sex in an African Society by Ifi Amadiume centers around Igbo traditions of present-day Nigeria, and the complicated gender ideology practiced by Igbos both before, during, and after colonialism. This is a perfect example of an African society in which gender is not determined by biological or sexual functions, but by achievement, kinship, and other criteria.

4 When compared to their African American counterparts, women in the Caribbean produced offspring at a much slower pace. Many historians, such as Kolchin, believe that this is due to two factors: calculated infanticide on the part of slave women, and the harsh method of punishment doled out to female slaves by masters and overseers. Even while pregnant, female slaves were made to lie on the ground facedown and were beaten with the lash.

5 While I agree with Harris-Perry here concerning slavery, she limits the brutality of slavery to “Southern whites.” It is true that the rash of lynching which occurred during the “American Holocaust” were mainly relegated to the South; scholars must be careful and never relegate American slavery and racism specifically to the South. After all, Isabella Bonfree, otherwise known as Sojourner Truth, was a slave in New England colonies. She suffered the same physical and psychological violence as female slaves in the lower South. Also, one of the most brutal lynchings ever recorded in America occurred in Nebraska, and the Ku Klux Klan made its strongest resurgence during the 1920s in mid-Western states outside of the South such as Ohio, Indiana, and Illinois.

6 In Negro Family: the Case for National Action (1965), the matriarch comprises a “tangle of pathology” (5) in the African American community, and it is “out of line with the rest of mainstream American society” (5).

7 Black women across the Diaspora have been hesitant to accept feminism for several reasons. Collins explains, “U.S. Black women have long recognized the fundamental injustice of a system that routinely and from one generation to the next relegates U.S. Black women to the bottom of the social hierarchy” (79). Though Black males do receive some benefits because they are males, Black women have traditionally not seen any advantage in fighting for equality with Black or white men, because patriarchy and race-based capitalism are both systems built upon inequality. They exploit lower classes of people, as bell hooks claims. Second, Black women reject feminism because the middle class white feminists who articulated the theory often “did not distinguish between the passive role many women assume in relation to male peers and/or male authority figures, and the assertive, even domineering, role they assume in relation to one another, to children, or to those individuals, female or male, who have lower social status, whom they see as inferiors” (hooks FT 93). In many cases, particularly in slave societies, white women have been just as oppressive to Black women as Euro-American men. White women also routinely employed and underpaid Black women, keeping Black women away from their husbands and children, and also engaged in wage discrimination and psychological abuse of Black women. Third, white women also emphasized work as a form of economic independence. Hooks declares, “work, they argued, would allow women to break the bonds of economic dependency on men, which would in turn enable them to resist sexist domination. When these women talked about work, they were equating it with high-paying careers; they were not referring to low-paying jobs or so-called ‘menial’ labor” (hooks FT 96). Their aversion to what is considered lower-class work defines their relationship to power and with that of white men. Fourth, “as U.S. feminists point out, many Black women reject feminism because they see it as being antifamily and against Black men. They do not want to give up men—they want Black men to change” (Collins 164-165). Black women simply want Black men to evaluate critically the patriarchal system in which they want inclusion, and reassess how destructive that system has been/is/will be to Black communities throughout the Diaspora.

Like Pan-Africanism, feminism started in the West. However, it did not translate well in an African context for several reasons. First, many Western feminists write of African men as the ultimate patriarchs who deny women basic rights. They often “make no reference to history—the history of slavery, imperialism, colonization, and racial domination of non-Western peoples, and the emergence of Western hegemony world-wide” (Oyewumi 31). Second, many feminists, when writing about African men as ultimate patriarchal overlords use the continual practice of polygamy in West African societies as veritable “proof” of their claim. Indeed, “for many Western feminists, polygamy is barbaric, it degrades and oppress women, and it is alien to the civilized (read ‘Western’) societies from which they come” (Oyewumi 31-32). Though any system of marriage comes with myriad problems, Western feminists, African Americans included, often write about the injustice of polygamy without input from its “victims.”

8 Even some well-meaning African American feminists have mistakenly attacked African men and cultural structures without any input from African women. For instance, Alice Walker’s portrayal of a “typical” African nation, in which African girls are not allowed to become educated in The Color Purple drew ire from African feminists.
In Alice Walker’s book, *In Search of Our Mother’s Garden*, on page xi she defines womanist as “(Opp. of “girlish” i.e., frivolous, irresponsible, not serious.) A black feminist or feminist of color. From the black folk expression of mothers to female children, ‘You are acting womanish,’ i.e., like a woman. Usually referring to outrageous, audacious, courageous or willful behavior. Wanting to know more and in greater depth than is considered ‘good’ for one. Interested in grown-up doings. Acting grown up. Interchangeable with another black folk expression: ‘You trying to be grown.’ Responsible. In charge. Serious. Also: A woman who loves other women, sexually and/or nonsexually. Appreciates and prefers women’s culture, women’s emotional flexibility (values tears as natural counterbalance of laughter), and women’s strength. Sometimes loves individual men, sexually and /or nonsexually. Committed to survival and wholeness of entire people, male and female.”

Here, I do use discourse and ideology interchangeably. In this sense, discourse and ideology are not opposing theories, but rather complementary. In a theory articulated by Trevor Purvis and Alan Hunt in their 1993 essay, “Discourse, Ideology, Discourse, Ideology, Discourse, Ideology, Discourse, Ideology…” the two concepts do not compete or meet with catastrophic results. Rather, discourse overcomes the limitations and deficiencies in ideology. According to Hunt and Purvis, “ideology exhibits a directionality in the sense that ideology always works to favor some and to disadvantage others” (478). Althusser’s theory of interpellation is the link between discourse and ideology. Whereas they pontificate philosophically on the similarities shared by the two theories, Ba simply uses her epistolary novel to demonstrate how the two collude.

Like many Caribbean immigrants, Vere went to America to work in agriculture. Many immigrants are granted work visas, which allow them to work temporarily in the United States. Like many of those immigrants, Vere sent his hard-earned money home. However, he did not send money to Leesy, but to the girl he loved.

Of course, when *Raisin* first debuted, many African American male activists and critics dismissed the play. In fact, Amiri Baraka declares, “We thought her play ‘middle class’ in that its focus seemed to be on ‘moving into white folks’ neighborhoods,’ when most blacks were just trying to pay their rent in ghetto shacks” (19). Works such as Baraka’s *The Dutchman* and other Black Arts Movement works, called explicitly for murder of white Americans – liberal supporters included. Other criticisms of the play were aimed at Lena Younger, who was derided as the castrating Black matriarch popularized by fictional works like Wright’s *Native Son*, and sociological works such as the 1965 *Moynihan Report*. In an apologetic critical reevaluation released several decades after *Raisin’s* debut, Baraka proclaims of his own violent work, “But neither of these plays is as much a statement from the African American majority as is *Raisin*. For one thing, they are both (regardless of their ‘power’) too concerned with white people” (Baraka 19). Decades later, Baraka understands what Lena Younger tried to give her son: a definition of himself that was internally derived.
CHAPTER 6: OUT OF NECESSITY: BLACK MEN EVALUATE DEFINITIONS OF MASCULINITY

The American ideal, then, of sexuality appears to be rooted in the American ideal of masculinity. This ideal has created cowboys and Indians, good guys and bad guys, punks and studs, tough guys and softies, butch and faggot, black and white. It is an ideal so paralytically infantile that it is virtually forbidden –as an unpatriotic act –that the American boy evolve into the complexity of manhood. James Baldwin in “Freaks and the American Ideal of Manhood”

With the establishment of a Black female literary tradition, Black women –from the slave narrative autobiographies of Mary Prince and Sojourner Truth to the contemporary fiction of TsiTis Dangaremba, Michelle Cliff, and Bernice McFadden –use their pens to articulate alternative identities for Black people, and to critique the various manifestations of Euro-American patriarchal supremacist discourse within their respective societies. They show how Black males often unquestioningly accept patriarchal thought and simultaneously hold Black males accountable for their individual actions and the way those actions perpetuate colluding systems of oppression.
Black male writers, even when engaged in counter-discursive art, often fail to interrogate the tyranny of patriarchal oppression that affects personal relationships with the women in their lives. Many times, they accept without question the heteronormativity of patriarchy and heterosexuality.

With the introduction of patriarchal women into the conversation, Ba, Marshall, and Hansberry demonstrate that Euro-American patriarchal discourse is highly effective and may even seem ubiquitous. Yet, I operate under Foucault’s assumption that neither ideology nor discourse, taken together, are totalizing; there is always the opportunity, even within a seemingly totalizing discourse, for the irruption of a counter-discourse or alternative to its violent imposition of its truth.¹ In any discourse, including the heteronormativity of patriarchy, there arise apertures prompted by seismic political, cultural, economic, or even environmental challenges. These apertures provide individuals as well as collective societies the perfect opportunities to develop counter-discourses and ideologies concerning identity, including masculinity and femininity. I agree with Keith Clark when he writes that any “conceptualization of masculinity is based on a socially oriented conception of gender informed by society’s obdurate figurations of manhood –ones rooted in strength, power, authority, and heterosexuality” (2). This chapter focuses on the alternative heterosexual masculinities developed by Black male writers and the conditions that caused them to re-evaluate definitions of masculinity within their respective cultures. In Ousmane’s God’s Bits of Wood, Ousmane uses the railroad workers’ strike of 1947 in Senegal to define clearly the role of women in modern, Islamic Senegal; in Masters of the Dew, Jacques Roumain presents a Haitian village in the grip of a life-threatening drought, which prompts the protagonist to explain that women must not only take part in the daily, private tasks of village life, but must also be incorporated in its public political affairs; and
finally, Gaines’s *In My Father’s House* performs a gendered assessment of the Civil Rights Movement, and illustrates that for all of its magnificent accomplishments, it failed to free African American women from the ravages of Black male chauvinism in many instances.²

Hailing from different regions, historical epochs, and religions, these texts all lean toward a more cooperative, egalitarian view of gender. In the texts discussed here, each hero hails from a different religious background. Bakayoko, the male leader of the strike in Senegal, in *God’s Bits of Wood*, is Islamic. Manuel, the protagonist of *Masters of the Dew*, has a Haitian Vodou background, and Phillip Martin, the local Civil Rights leader of *In My Father’s House*, is a Baptist minister. These religions, in addition to the support of their respective communities, act as sources of strength and inspiration for the male leaders as they challenge the systemic oppression that seeks to arrest their progress.

Perhaps, the formation of alternative heterosexual masculinities began well before the publication of any of the aforementioned texts. The masculine rhetoric and posturing of the 1930s Cold War gave way to the rhetoric that espoused democracy, freedom, equality, and a meritocratic economic system. People of African descent in the New World and in Africa who faced daily discrimination due to segregation, apartheid, or colonialism demonstrated that there was a gross breach between rhetoric and practice, and they opposed this vehemently. As a result, the 1940s saw renewed interest in Pan-Africanism. With the blessing of W.E.B. DuBois, the sixth Pan-African Congress convened in Manchester in October of 1945. According to Collin Legum, the West Indian component was “still strong, led by George Padmore, C.L.R. James, and Dr. Peter Milliard. But for the first time, it was a Congress of Africa’s young leaders” (31). Kwame Nkrumah, Jomo Kenyatta, and Chief S. L. Akintola are just a few African members in attendance who would go on to achieve leadership positions in their respective homelands.³
There is a sharp demarcation between the Congresses prior to World War II and the newer ones. First, African Americans no longer played prominent roles within the organization: African Caribbean and African men took more leadership positions. Second, the rhetoric of Pan-Africanism, though still saturated with masculinity, no longer resembled the essentializing nature of Negritude, or the total victimhood of Wright’s protest naturalism. Arguments about identity, while still mostly masculine, were more nuanced than ever before and the complexity continued long after this monumental meeting. On the one hand, some Pan-Africanist theorists were vehemently rebutted by critics like Wole Soyinka for their essentialism and acceptance of Black emotionalism—an idea created and perpetuated by Euro-American philosophers such as Thomas Jefferson. On the other hand, Pan-Africanists were influenced by other theorists, like E. K. Brathwaite from the Anglophone Caribbean, who wrote extensively of the syncretic identities formed by African people during the Middle Passage and advocated using these identities in art instead of striving for a purely African one. From the Francophone Caribbean, Glissant articulates a similar theory of syncretic African Diasporic identity. Like Brathwaite, he acknowledges the mutual roles of literature and history within Black West Indian writing claiming, “Literature is not only fragmented, it is henceforth shared. In it lie histories and the voice of peoples. We must reflect on a new relationship between history and literature” (77). The history of Black people in the Caribbean begins with and continues to be influenced by the Plantation and global mercantilism, and so should the literature. Glissant explains further:

However, our diverse histories in the Caribbean have produced today another revelation: that of their subterranean convergence. They, thereby, bring to light an unsuspected, because it is so obvious, dimension of human
behavior: transversality. The implosion of Caribbean history (of the converging histories of our peoples) relieves use of the linear, hierarchical vision of a single History that would run its unique course. [66]

The notion of transversality, with its constant subterranean root, allows writers to find the commonalities in their histories, cultures, and works without creating monolithic, intransigent representation of African peoples in the Caribbean. Transversality also provides a stark contrast to universality. Glissant claims that “if it was necessary for Sameness to be revealed in the solitude of individual Being, it is now imperative that Diversity should ‘pass’ through whole communities and peoples. Sameness is sublimated difference; Diversity is accepted difference” (98). The notion of transversality allows Black male writers to explore their respective masculinities by highlighting their own specific cultural influences while acknowledging how the cultures influence one another.

In Fanon’s last work before his un-timely death in 1961, *The Wretched of the Earth*, he offers a warning of rapid decolonization, sometimes violently, by the colonized people of the earth, and this text influenced many of the anticolonial movements throughout Africa and the Black Diaspora. Fanon warns that “[t]he colonized, who have made up their mind to make such an agenda into a driving force, have been prepared for violence from time immemorial. As soon as they are born it is obvious to them that their cramped world, riddled with taboos, can only be challenged by out and out violence” (3). In fact, the more militant leaders of the Black Power phase of the Civil Rights Movement credit Fanon’s writings, specifically *Wretched*, with educating them about not only revolutionary violence, but also the connection between racism, colonialism, and imperialism. Fanon’s sphere of influence cut across geographical, linguistic,
and even religious boundaries and is a testament to his ability to appeal to the commonalities shared by people of African descent across the globe. Sadly, however, even as a new era in Pan-Africanism dawned, all talk of identity remained masculine. Even with a well-developed canon of Black women writers, the artistic focus also remained on works produced by African and African Diasporic males.

Yet, even in the postwar works created by Black men, gender and the tension patriarchal masculinity creates cannot be ignored. For instance, the 1947 railroad workers’ strike in Senegal serves as inspiration for Ousmane’s _God’s Bits of Wood_; this strike, though ultimately called due to wage discrimination, has roots in the French concepts of gender and gender role performances forced upon the Senegalese during French colonial rule. In fact, “the majority of workers who received wages in 1945 were male, and as officials thought about work in the ensuing years, they tended to define ever more explicitly the kinds of things that men did as ‘work’ and the kinds of things that women did as something else” (Cooper 131). Though African women did most of the daily work of running households and families as well as working outside the home in the marketplace, the French relegated their efforts to the domestic sphere and devalued their contributions to society. In this way, African women were treated much the same as French women, who were expected to remain in the private sphere of the home and raise the next generation of workers. However, the strike ensued because “the key issue, for both sides, was family allowances. By this time, French citizens received a series of benefits, on a per household or per child basis, designed to ease the financial burden of family formation and thus to promote natality” (Cooper 133). Though French citizens received family allowances, French authorities made exceptions for African families for two major reasons. First, many of the West African cultures colonized by the French practiced Islamic-sanctioned polygamy; thus, the growth of African families
outpaced that of their French counterparts, whose Christian-based marital traditions encouraged children born in-wedlock to monogamous parents. Second, many French colonialists who resided in Africa felt “that family allocations for Africans would augment the wrong population, and in the case this was not self-evident, officials pointed out that Africans produced children at rapid rates and would use any family aid to marry more wives” (Cooper 133). Though all French citizens were eligible for allowances in the metropole, only African workers employed by French companies were eligible in Africa. Only African men who worked for the French-owned and controlled railroad were recognized by the French government as men deserving of any sort of allowance. Yet, recognition as head of household did not guarantee socio-political or economic phallic authority for those African men as they could not hold any managerial positions in which they commanded white Frenchmen. Coupled with the rampant wage discrimination and the lack of vertical economic advancement opportunities available to the French African population of Senegal, tensions arose and this led to a general strike in 1947. Though family allowance was the immediate cause of the strike, a more distant cause was France’s attempt to define and impose its own version of masculinity on the African men of Senegal.

*Masters of the Dew* was written during the beginning of strong anti-American sentiments in Haiti. United States armed forces occupied Haiti from 1915 until 1934, and “transformed [Haiti] into an American colony in all but name” (Irele “Harlem Renaissance Negritude” 769). American authorities gave several reasons for the occupation, most notably the instability of the government. Yet, American occupation brought with it the paternalism and racism of Euro-American thought concerning the actual ability of people of African descent to govern themselves. For instance, American historian and sociologist Ulysses Weatherly declares that Haitians are incapable of government simply because they are not Euro-Americans. He wrote
that, “political and social forms taken over outright from France and America were set to work among a population at once unfamiliar with them and notably weak in capacity for social organization of any kind” (Weatherly 357). He also based the “weakness” of Haitian people on their Latin American status by declaring, “The background of her culture being French, it is not inaccurate to class Haiti with the Latin-American countries. Like other Latin Americans, the Haitians have always been weak on the side of practical civil society” (Weatherly 363). Furthermore, unlike their African American counterparts, Haitians never experienced the benefits of national fathering by whites: “After emancipation had taken place in the other West Indian islands and the United States, the blacks continued to live in close contact with their former masters and remained largely under white tutelage. They entered organically into a well-established social order and had their place in a going economic system” (357). Since Haitians, as Black people, did not know their “place” in Euro-American supremacist patriarchal discourse, American forces would teach it to them. In Haiti, as in other islands, the ability to govern one’s own nation is also seen as a hallmark of masculinity. As the location of the Western Hemisphere’s only successful slave revolt and Black-led republic, the imposition of American rule was an affront to the island’s collective masculine leadership.

Furthermore, Roumain returned from Europe in 1927 to find Haitian people enraged and filled with anti-American sentiment, which he identified with. According to J. Michael Dash, “the Nationalist cause gained momentum in its hands and matters were brought to a head by a student strike in 1929 which eventually turned into a general strike” (Dash “Introduction” 5). Fueled by anti-American sentiments, “it was thought in the 1920s that Haiti should not only defend its sovereignty but should also create a strong and real cultural awareness” (Dash “Introduction” 5). Roumain and his peers wanted a nationalist literature based strongly in
peasant roots that would combat racially-sanctioned, paternalistic attitudes like those exhibited by Weatherly and inspire the Haitian people with a sense of culture and pride. Ironically, the American Occupation exposed Haitians with a literature that provided the structure for the new literature of the peasant. Irele argues about the surprisingly positive literary influence of the American occupation in his essay “The Harlem Renaissance and the Negritude Movement” stating, “the American occupation brought with it an acquaintance with the literature of the Harlem Renaissance that soon developed into a determining influence on the expression of the younger generation of Haitian writers” (769). Once translated, the Harlem Renaissance literature provided Haitian counterparts with themes centered on different aspects of Black life. Haitian writers began writing pieces of literature that focused on the Haitian peasant class, and not the elite, Creole Haitian ruling class –creating Haitian indigenism. Haitian indigenism, situated between Harlem Renaissance and Negritude, is “the link between the two movements symbolized by these publications, and it was largely through their mediation that the themes and preoccupations of the Harlem writers found their way into black poetry in the French language” (Irele 772). However, Jacques Roumain issued a challenge to Negritude artists with the creation of his characters. Roumain neither romanticized nor demonized elements of Haitian peasant culture; rather, he created realistic portraits akin to the ones created of Senegalese culture by Sembene and Ba. Roumain implies that some peasant customs are useful for modernity while others are harmful and should be discarded. For instance, in traditional Haitian society, women do most of the household chores and manage household budgets, yet they remain silenced in public, political matters like the rest of their island counterparts. Like their Anglophone counterparts, most Haitian men believe that leadership in public, national matters is the domain of men, and women should remain in the private, domestic sphere. In Masters of the Dew, the
protagonist understands that this sharp gender division, one that is predicated upon the subordination of women, can only hurt his village and small island country. The entire village faces a drought and *all* individuals must unite in order to bring life-saving water.

Making a similar assessment of African American struggles for equality in *In My Father’s House*, Gaines uses two historical movements in the struggle for African American equality to craft veritable male and female characters: the earlier, integrationist phase of the Civil Rights Movement as well as the Black Power Movement, which developed subsequently. First, activism within African American culture first began during enslavement. African American abolitionists such as Frederick Douglass did not ask for freedom; they demanded it vociferously through oratory and autobiography. The modern-day Civil Rights Movement began post-World War II when Black soldiers returned home to a still-segregated South. Historians agree that “when black men and women confronted segregation and disfranchisement in the 1950s and 1960s, they contested white supremacy in the South and questioned long-held assumptions about race and gender in American society” (Estes 7). The nonviolent phase of the Civil Rights Movement started first in the South where “lynching, disfranchisement, and segregation solidified a social order in the American South based on white male supremacy” (Estes 5). African American men and women protested peacefully and without physical retaliation for the violent acts committed against them. The nonviolence phase of the Civil Rights Movement was influenced directly from the teachings of Christianity and stemmed from the socio-political activities of the African American collective church. Historians Lincoln and Mamiya write about the African American church as a socially active, political organization claiming, “[f]rom the beginning, the [C]ivil [R]ights [M]ovement was anchored in the Black Church, organized by both activist black ministers and laity, and supported financially by black church members”
(165). As the Civil Rights Movement spread to the racial equalities in Northern cities during the late 1950s and 1960s, the tone of the movement became more violent. In addition to Fanon, Nation of Islam leader, Malcolm X, also heavily influenced the newer, more militant leaders. They began to portray their Southern counterparts as weak and effeminate for their commitment to nonviolence. Since both of these phases of the movement drew on religion for both spiritual and tactical inspiration, they both influence In My Father’s House. Yet, it is not a national event that forces the protagonist to re-evaluate himself, but a personal crisis; a bastard son, one created with a woman that Phillip Martin treated as a sex object, returns to confront him about his absentee fathering. Though Phillip is an outstanding fighter against racial oppression and its inhibiting effects on Black masculinity in the American South, he accepts patriarchal thinking like his Northern counterpart, Walter Lee Younger, the male protagonist in A Raisin in the Sun. Unlike Manuel in Masters of the Dew, Phillip Martin does not understand how gender and racial exploitation collude and interact to impede African American socio-political progress. While protesting and working vehemently and tirelessly to change racial relations in the South, Phillip never addresses how his own definition of masculinity—one built upon the objectification, subordination, and exploitation of Black women—undermines and even reverses any progress he makes through nonviolent progress.

All of these events, general and specific, provide apertures in the ideology, moments when “common sense” things and actions do not seem logical at all. In the three scenarios listed above, definitions of masculinity are challenged and do not seem sufficient to overcome the challenges specific to each culture. The Black male protagonists must evaluate and interrogate their identities as men. It is true that “many black men have seen their social, gendered status as men as something fiercely contested and persistently withheld” (Clark 1). It is also true that
even in oppressive situations male privilege and manhood deserve the same rigorous scrutiny as "whiteness," as a normative value in Western society. For "like whiteness, maleness was so powerfully positioned as a normative complex that initially issue of inequality were raised without questioning maleness itself" (Ling and Monteith 4). As demonstrated in the previous chapter of this project, during initial struggles for freedom and equality in Africa and the African Diasporic nations of the New World, those posing the challenge did not interrogate the status quo of Black male domination of leadership positions. Those struggles focused on human rights for all people. In the United States of America, African Americans used America’s Enlightenment ideals of subjectivity to demand rights; masculine agency was the equivalent to the ultimate subjectivity. In the late 1800s, men were the only people allowed to vote in the United States of America, and “since men were the only voters in most nineteenth century political contests, voting rights and citizenship were directly linked to manhood. This connection between citizenship and manhood shaped the language, strategies, and objectives of political and social reform” (Estes 2). The slogan, “I AM A MAN” popularized during the Civil Rights Movement, is a cry not only for the recognition of Black masculinity in America, but for all of Black humanity in America. However, gender discrepancies began to play a large factor during the Civil Rights Movement and thereafter as Black women also seriously talked about the sexism in their own communities and created their own narratives about racism and sexism.

Ousmane, Roumain, and Gaines place their Black male protagonists in situations that involve cooperation between male and female for the good of the entire community. This means, for these communities, new definitions of what it means to be a man and woman must be born. In God’s Bits of Wood, the strike affects not only the men, but also the women who depend upon their husbands’ wages to purchase food at the market to feed their families. Before
the strike, men in Senegal took for granted the roles women play in that society: “In this country, the men often had several wives, and it was perhaps because of this that, at the beginning they were scarcely conscious of the help the women gave them” (33). During the strike, though, men see for the first time how their activities do affect entire families and villages, starting within their own houses. According to the narrator, “[w]hen a man came back from a meeting, with bowed head and empty pockets, the first things he saw were always the unfired stove, the useless cooking vessels, the bowls and gourds ranged in a corner, empty. Then he would seek the arms of his wife, without thinking, or caring, whether she was the first or the third” (33). In addition to signaling a new awareness for men, the strike also signals the end of an era and the beginning of a new for women. The men learn “that if times were bringing forth a new breed of men, they were also bringing forth a new breed of women” (34). Notions of gender, particular masculinity, are changing. The strike forces Senegalese men to recognize their interdependence with women.

As the women and men learn in Ousmane’s dramatic fictional account of the strike, women support men privately and must learn to support them publicly. Since supporting the strikers through acquiring food for the men is considered a public act, Tiemoko, one of the strike leaders, decides women must speak publicly, and no longer be relegated to the private, domestic sphere: “We are not ashamed to admit that it is the women who are supporting us now…” (93). This new way of thinking about the roles women play domestically or publicly comes about as “an egalitarian discipline has been enforced upon the community by the goals and the ordeals of the imposition of an inferior status on the indigene, its wage-discrimination and inadequate social facilities” (Soyinka 118). For the woman, Hada Dia, “it was the first time she had ever spoken at a meeting of the men, and she was filled with pride. Another, older woman went up to speak, going this time directly to the stage. Her name was Sira, and she spoke rapidly and confidently”
According to the overall strike leader, Ibrahim Bakayoko, women must learn to think as men and grow comfortable in those public roles. Men, for their part, must learn to support women in those roles—not exclude them—if the strike is going to be successful. Other strikers convince the men of the dignity in assisting the women as they assist the strike. For instance, “Alioune had succeeded in persuading a considerable number of the men that their old feudal customs had no place in a situation like this. Now, husbands, sons, and even fathers could be seen every morning, leaving their homes in search of water and returning at night, triumphantly pushing a barrel or carrying a sackful of bottles” (205). The men learn that “women’s work” is not a trifle feat. They learn also to manage daily household affairs; for example, they learn just how many barrels of water it takes to sate entire family compounds. Bringing water to the compounds is normally women’s jobs, but when the strike reached its height, gender roles must be shared due to a scarcity in wages, food, and water.

Similarly, a three-year drought causes a new awareness for the people in the rural Haitian village of Fonds Rouge in *Masters of the Dew*. When Manuel returns, he finds a “narrow, shallow ravine open before him. It was dry…Dead roots crumbled in his fingers when he examined the rough grained earth, so dry that it trickled like powder” (35). Upon talking with his mother, Délira, and his father, Bienaimé, he discovers that drought is eating up the crops, but a white American landowner has water with lush sugar cane. The white landowner is getting the water from some source that the peasants obviously do not know about, and since none of them look for the source, they seem resigned to dying by thirst. It is at this moment that Manuel realizes that the peasant way of life, their acceptance of things as they come, must change. First, he starts with how peasants like his parents use religion as a source of resignation with life’s misfortunes. He declares to them:
Resignation is treacherous. It’s just the same as discouragement. It breaks your arms. You keep on expecting miracles and providence, with your rosary in your hand, without doing a thing. You pray for rain, you pray for a harvest, you recite the prayers to the saints and the loas. But providence –take my word for it –is a man’s determination not to accept misfortune, to overcome the earth’s bad will every day, to bend the whims of the water to your needs…And there’s no providence but hard work, no miracles but the fruit of your hands. [55]

Here, Manuel references both Christian and Vodou beliefs by mentioning saints and loas in the same instance. He does not disdain religion, as the text later demonstrates, but feels that people should use religion as a source of inspiration for their plans of actions; people must formulate a plan in order to better their own situations instead of relying solely on religious miracles of any sort. Part of Manuel’s plan involves formulating new roles for men and women in his village. Like their Senegalese counterparts, the people of the village must realize that women and men are interdependent. Interdependency should create a sense of egalitarianism, not an uneven binary in which masculinity is more important than feminist contributions to the society.

Though Manuel is a man of action who does not rely solely on his religious beliefs to placate his worries, he does draw inspiration from Vodou, a syncretic religion that derives from Christian and West African beliefs. In fact, “the Yorùbá religion is generally regarded as the most salient surviving traditional African belief system in the New World (Fandrich 775). The Vodou ceremony, performed at night, acts as liberating force for Manuel. Religious historians often recognize that, “Vodou, the religion that had empowered the rebellious former slaves to kill
and expel their masters became a despicable evil in the literature throughout the Western Hemisphere, and from the point of view of the slave holders, it was indeed a major threat to their economical basis” (Fandrich 780). Of the performance’s effect on Manuel, the narrator says, “Manuel let himself go in the upsurge of the dance, but a strange sadness crept into his soul. He caught his mother’s eye and thought he saw tears shining there” (71). In the text, “the polytheism, the multiple voices of the Vaudou religion, are reduced to one voice as Manuel offers the structuring vision, the ordaining voice to the community” (Dash 79). His appeal to Vodou rather than Christianity as a source of inspiration is an implicit reference to his vision of a system of gender cooperation and complementarity. In Christian tradition, positions of leadership are dominated by males, but in Vodou tradition, women as well as men are equally powerful and are thought equally capable to carry out leadership responsibilities and performance of religious rites.

Though Gaines introduces influences from the Nation of Islam and the Black Christian Church early in the text, he also incorporates the exclusion of women –of any religious persuasion–rather early in the text as well. A tenant appears in the small Louisiana town of St. Adrienne and only gives his name only as “Robert X.” The omniscient narrator declares that the boarding house receptionist “couldn’t remember now whether it was the Black Panthers or the Black Muslims” (5). It is obvious that Malcolm X and his teachings influenced the young man, Robert, who comes to St. Adrienne from Chicago. In the Nation of Islam, “converts shed their ‘slave names,’ which the Muslim argued correctly were often the surnames of former masters, in favor of an X” (Estes 91). For those fatherless young Black men, as the text implies about “Robert X,” the teachings of Malcolm X seemed to offer them a veritable path into Black masculinity. In the 1960s, “many listeners—especially, but not exclusively, young men were
drawn to him as a father figure, because of his self-styled image of militant manhood” (Estes 104). “Robert X” wants to meet the Rev. Phillip Martin, a local Baptist minister and Civil Rights Movement activist. Everyone sings the minister’s praise. His choir director claims that he is “Our Martin Luther King, you might say” (16). Like Martin Luther King, Phillip Martin also heads an organization akin to the Southern Christian Leadership Conference. However, both of these organizations and their leaders shared one commonality: they elevated the status of men as leaders at the expense of women and their contributions to the Civil Rights Movement. In the Nation of Islam and in the Black Church, historically, women were not allowed to hold leadership positions, and were chided to keep silent. According to NOI doctrine, “in the Nation, these ministers argued, a black man could reclaim his manhood and take his rightful position as the head of his household. Black women recruits were promised the respect, protection, and admiration that they deserved as women” (Estes 88). Yet, this “protection” is often nothing more than veiled paternalism within the organization in many instances.

Both the Black Panther Party and the Southern Christian Leadership Council carried with them the chauvinism from their religious affiliations into their secular activities. For example, that the receptionist cannot tell the difference between “Black Panthers or the Black Muslims” (5) in the text shows the close alliance of the two. Within the Black Panther Party, many of its male leaders considered themselves heirs of Malcolm X. Their leadership style was marked by masculine bravado, rampant homophobia, and downright misogyny. From the beginning, “the Black Power movement’s affirmative message countered traditional stereotypes of black male powerlessness and instilled a positive black identity into many activists. At the same time, however, the gendered discourse it produced tended to perpetuate black women’s subordination” (Wendt 544). Yet, the misogyny did not mean that women did not participate in the Party at all.
Much like the UNIA, the Black Party relied on the daily activities of women to support its organization.

Inside the SCLC, the male chauvinism of the Black church, with its tendency to silence women, also continued into the organization. Like the BPP, women did much of the groundwork, “in addition to serving as bridges, women would also be asked, in turn, to serve as local leaders who could recruit, raise money, and mobilized protest activities” (David and Houck xvii). Also like in the BPP, women were effectively silenced as leaders. As recounted by Dorothy Height, president of the National Council of Negro Women (NCNW) and civil rights worker long before Martin Luther King, Jr. entered into adulthood, “the women of the [C]ivil [R]ights [M]ovement had been thoroughly rebuffed in seeking at least one speaking opportunity for the women; such sex-specific glory-seeking, they were repeatedly told, was anathema to the movement and the many women involved in its several organizations” (Dixon and Houck ix).

Ella Baker, long time civil rights activist and former director of branches for the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People, grew tired of the disrespect she received at the hands of male leaders within King’s organization, and moved to form her own civil rights organization, the Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee. Though King and others tried to muffle accusations of their rampant sexism and misogyny, Septima Clark, another powerful Black female civil rights leader, corroborated Baker’s story. When “interviewed for an oral history project at the King Center, she complained that ‘those men didn’t have any faith in women, none whatsoever. They just thought that women were sex symbols and had no contribution to make’” (Clark in Ling 106). Though Ella Baker and Septima Clark were Civil Rights Movement veterans before King ever entered it, their contributions were down-played alongside King simply because they were not men. Women, at the time, were accorded neither
the authority nor the respect of leadership within a movement that they actually helped to organize. Though they faced the same water hoses, dogs, police brutality, and violence as Black males, they often go/went unrecognized for their efforts.

Gaines alludes to this misogynistic attitude in the text through Martin’s treatment of his wife, Alma. Early in the text, after Shepherd introduced “Robert X” to Alma and he promptly ignores her, “Alma wasn’t surprised. Most people usually ignored her and worshipped her husband” (28). As a minister’s wife, Alma is granted upward social mobility within the Black community of St. Adrienne, but she has no voice with the people or her husband. Alma rebuffs him saying, “You come to me for this bed, for nothing else…That is true, Phillip. For this bed. Cook your food. Follow you to that church. That’s all you married me for. You never come to be for any kind of problem” (134-135). As the wife of a minister and activist, Alma’s character further corroborates the charges leveled at Black Christian men in leadership by Baker and Clark. Phillip has no faith in his wife’s ability to understand his past life, and therefore shields it from her. He does not allow her to speak with him concerning any problems or personal discretions because he feels she does not have the capacity to solve anything as a woman.

Ousmane also re-evaluates the Islamic traditions of devaluing women by introducing the reader to Assitan, a traditional African woman who may not fare well in modernity. Here, Ousmane’s importance as a writer cannot be understated; he attempted to show rounded portrayals of African women who were active in struggle, just as Ba’s Ramatoulaye and Assitou. He contrasts Senegal’s warrior women with Assitan, who “by the ancient standards of Africa…was a perfect wife: docile, submissive, and hard-working, she never spoke one word louder than another. She knew nothing whatever of her husband’s activities, or if she did, she gave no appearance of knowing” (106). Assitan lives by custom, never taking agency in her own
life, even her choice of husbands: “Nine years before, she had been married to the eldest of the Bakayoko sons. Her parents, of course, had arranged everything without even consulting her. One night her father had told her that her husband was named Sadibou Bakayoko, and two months later she had been turned over to a man whom she had never before seen” (106). After the death of Sadibou, her first husband, there was no deliberation for Assitan like the protagonist of *So Long a Letter*; instead, she strictly followed Islamic custom. The narrator declares, “once again the old customs had taken control of her life; she had been married to the younger Bakayoko, Ibrahim. He, in turn, had adopted the baby and gave her her curious name, Ad’jibid’ji” (106). Marriage is a matter of personal choice and love for both the women in *So Long a Letter*. One feels the passion and heartbreak of destroyed relationships and hearts that are distraught. This is not so in Assitan’s marriages. The narrator bears witness to Assitan’s lack of agency, “She was as submissive to Ibrahim as she had been to his brother. He might leave her for days at a time, he might even be absent for months, he faced dangers she knew nothing of, but that was his lot as a man, as the master. Her own lot as a woman was to accept things as they were and to remain silent, as she had been taught to do” (107). According to Manuel’s logic in *Masters of the Dew*, passivity and acceptance can be dangerous. Here, Assitan’s passivity prevents her cooperation with her husband in his strike efforts. Her passivity causes tension between Assitan and Bakayoko: “This wall had always been between them was difficult to tear down. It had been built a long time ago, on the first day of the union that custom had forced on them. Months had gone by then before Bakayoko could bring himself to accomplishment of his conjugal duties…It would have been hard to know whether Bakayoko ever felt remorse for infidelities” (238). He cheats on her with many women and does not feel guilty about his nefarious affairs. Yet, the strike and the sufferings of others mature Bakayoko
and he at least learns to pity Assitan. After the strike, he impedes her duties until she eats a good meal. Because of his concern and kindness, Assitan feels some warmth for the man she married for the first time in her life.

In Masters of the Dew, as Manuel formulates a plan for a group coumbite, he learns that a feud between brothers and their families prevents cooperation between men and silences the women of either side. His father relates the story of the family feud to his son: “We finally got the land divided up, with the help of the justice of the peace. But we also divided up all that hate between us. Before, we were just one big family. That’s finished now” (63). This lack of cooperation between men poses one challenge to Manuel’s cooperative, Communist-inspired plan, but his love interest, Annaise, notices another problem. She listens patiently as Manuel shares his dream of egalitarianism with her. He says, “You see, the greatest thing in the world is that all men are brothers, each weighs the same on the scales of poverty and justice” (91).

Listening to Manuel, Annaise, a woman, asks one simple question of him, “And I, what’s my part” (91). Heretofore, Manuel had not thought of the role women would play in his plan to bring water to Fonds Rouge. Like many struggles for survival, “In Haiti, as in many other peripheral societies, issues of gender hierarchies and inequalities are not at the forefront of sociopolitical and cultural struggles for social change” (Charles 169). In answering Annaise’s question, Manuel realizes that he must enlist the help of women to bring about cooperation and water. In Haiti, as in many West African countries, “Women are generally expected to contribute financially to all household expenses, especially if they get an income from their market activities. There is a clear dependence of men on the labor of women…Such potential also creates space to renegotiate the meaning of womanhood and sexuality” (Charles 173). Since Haitian women wield some kind of economic power within their households, Manuel enlists
them, through the diplomatic connections that Annaise holds, to bring about cooperation between
the men. Manuel plans, “…the womenfolks are going to nag their men to no end…Then they’ll
say, ‘All right, women, oui! It’s all right, we agree” (92). Though the women’s private
diplomacy effectively brings the men to a meeting about the water, the women do not attend the
meeting, as the women of God’s Bits of Wood. However, Manuel does make strides in tackling
the gender inequalities that seem to plague his village. In spite of his father’s foul objection,
Manuel asks his mother, Delira, what she thinks of his plans. For the first time in the old
woman’s life, a man asks her opinion on an important public matter.

The men in Gaines’s novels are important in that “Gaines captures black men in various
stages in development. Clearly, he deromanticizes black maleness and portrays his characters as
works in progress: they are fallible and scarred, but they also possess the means to forestall their
deformation” (Clark 76). In Gaines’s text, he neither totally victimizes Black men nor does he
try to present them in a theogenic manner. They are victims and victimizers. For instance,
Phillip Martin is a community leader and respected pastor, but his past, in the guise of Robert X,
forces Phillip to remember a past when he victimized women by treating them as sex objects and
the children he produced from these meetings as trophies. The narrator gives the history of
Phillip’s children with Johanna and how he disregards the mother and the babies: “He saw the
baby a week later when she brought him to the gate wrapped in a blanket. A year later there was
another boy, and year after that a little girl. They still lived separately. He had no time for
marriage, for settling down. There were too many other things to do; there were too many other
women in his life” (63). Instead, Phillip gave Johanna three dollars: one for each child. Then
she moved away with the children, and Phillip put Johanna and his children out of his mind. The
narrator further describes Phillip’s lack of love for Johanna and his irresponsibility as a father to
their children, saying, “That was over twenty years ago. He hadn’t sent her one penny or written her one letter in all that time, and neither had he received one letter from her” (64). Robert X’s presence at Phillip’s house causes him to grow weak and stumble, and the burden of keeping the secret keeps him in an agitated manner.

Here, Gaines broaches the subject of fatherhood and Black men. In an interview concerning In My Father’s House and the spectacle of failed Black fatherhood, Gaines declares:

> We knew that on the slave block in New Orleans, or Washington, D.C., or Baltimore or wherever the slave ships docked, families were separated. Mothers were separated from their children, husbands from their wives, fathers from their sons, mothers from their daughters. And I feel that because of that separation they still have not, philosophically speaking, reach each other again. I don’t know what it will take to bring them together again. I don’t know that the Christian religion will bring fathers and sons together again. I don’t know that the father will ever be in a position –a political position or any position of authority –from which he can reach out and bring his son back to him again. [Gaines and Rowell 40]

Like Okonkwo in Things Fall Apart, Phillip refuses to treat women as equal –both in his youth and after his apparent religious conversion. And like Things Fall Apart, the dismissal of women severely affects the father-son relationship. Phillip’s religious conversion did not eradicate the objectification of women nor did it re-establish a relationship with his children. Instead, his past
indiscretions and continued irresponsibility makes his eldest son abhor him and all things that remind him of Phillip in much the same way that Nwoye comes to disdain Okonkwo.

If Black female writers are always busy accomplishing “something else,” as Carole Boyce Davies claims, that something else includes incorporating individual notions of gendered identity into a community, and demonstrating how gender identity operates in tandem with other identities in respective Black communities. Gaines attempts to rewrite, or to signify, both Wright’s and Ellison’s individualistic ideals of Black masculinity, and to situate Phillip Martin and the illegitimate offspring he produced inside a community. Gaines’s “fictive machinery is ignited not by black men’s lack of money or even white perfidy but by a desire to articulate alternative vehicles for black male subjectivity, ones not rooted in financial exigency, misogyny, or patriarchal masculinity” (Clark 75). There are horrible things outside of the confrontation with Euro-American racism that Black men do to Black women. Robert X states that in “treating [his mother] like a common whore” (101), Phillip turned him into a “eunuch” (99). In failing to acknowledge Johanna, her affection for him, and the children that they created together, Phillip perpetuates a vicious cycle of Black male psychological castration. He efficiently denounces and confronts Euro-American supremacist patriarchal discourse, but fails to see how his own actions mirror that of the hegemonic masculinity. For his son, Black and white masculinity exist symbiotically in that they are both validated through the objectification of Black women’s bodies. Just as white men produce mix-raced children through backdoor affiliations with Black women that they do not claim, so do Black men like Phillip.

As part of a family and a broader community, Robert X explains, there are other, alternative definitions of manhood and gendered spaces that Phillip could have exercised. Robert X tells Phillip he had more than just the accepted definition of manhood to offer Johanna.
and his children: “You had a mouth, a voice. You had arms, you had legs. You coulda walked out that door. That’s all she wanted. You to walk out that door and call her back. That’s all she wanted” (101). X implies that Johanna simply wanted reciprocity in their heterosexual relationship. She wanted the same love, respect, and adoration from her lover that she gave him, and for Phillip, that was asking entirely too much. For X, those were all of the things that not even Euro-American patriarchal supremacist discourse controls. As repressive and as effective as discourse can be, X declares that Phillip’s fight with white American men did not prevent him from showing concern for his children, particularly the two sons who often felt castrated by their father’s absence. Here, “the author maintains that his protagonists can affect their own reconstruction and regeneration if they are willing to do the Herculean work of entering the emotional terrain of both themselves and [B]lack men with whom they share physical and psychic space” (Clark 75). But in many instances, including during the turbulent 1960s, Black men, even those who espoused Christian brotherhood and agape love of Christ, did not do the “Herculean work” of rearticulating what it means to be a Black man in the United States of America. The acceptance of definitions based upon sexuality and objectification of women’s bodies leads to the paralysis that Baldwin defines pronounces in the epithet of this chapter. Indeed, Phillip claims that he could not be a father based on traditional definitions because he was “paralyzed” (102). Phillip tries to rebut Robert’s angry outburst and explain his feelings of inadequacy by telling his son, “Yes I had a mouth, but I didn’t have a voice. I had legs, but I couldn’t move. I had arms, but I couldn’t lift them up to you. It took a man to do these things, and I wasn’t a man. I was just some other brutish animal who could cheat, steal, rob, kill –but not stand. Not be responsible. Not protect you or your mother. They had branded that in us from the time of slavery” (102). Phillip’s paralysis lies in the acceptance of his status as a faux
man, in Euro-American patriarchal supremacist discourse, and as far as Robert X is concerned, he did nothing to create an alternative definition of himself as a lover or father. Phillip’s explanation and his inaction reflect Baldwin’s assessment of American manhood as “paralytically infantile.” When faced with his own failings as a responsible man and his boyish actions in the past, Phillip literally could not move. Phillip’s irresponsibility and boyishness robbed his sons of any type of hope for alternative definitions of themselves as African American men.

In *God’s Bits of Wood*, the paralysis of African men concerning how they define themselves is broken by the poverty and despair caused by the strike. As the men learn to play supporting roles to the women, women learn to lead. The novel liberates into a polyphony of women warriors: Maimouna, Mame Soufie, Ramatoulaye, and Penda. Maimouna and Mame Soufie offer spiritual support for the women, and Ramatoulaye and Penda play leadership roles. Maimouna is blind, but her lack of eyesight does not hinder her; indeed, her lack of physical sight clarifies her vision. Maimouna explains to Penda how she maintains her independence and gains her ability to understand people and to live with children and no man: “After I lost my sight, my ears replaced my eyes. I have learned to know what people are thinking, and to understand what is said between the words that are spoken…” (198). Her clarity of vision also plays an important role to the development of the strike and march. Maimouna and her songs “reflects a collective memory of principles and values of West Africa traditional oral culture and transmits through the songs and presence of the griotte in the midst of women and society” (Reneau 139). Early in the book, she sings a song about the legend of Goumba N’Diaye, a woman who could work as hard and long as any man. She measures her strength against that of a man who is a stranger to the village. Maimouna describes the legendary feats of the woman in
her song, “For two moons they cleared the land/And neither the stranger nor Goumba N’Diaye/Would confess to being vanquished” (22). Maimouna sings this as French soldiers descend upon the women’s market and a battle ensues. The women, encouraged by Maimouna’s song, fight with courage. According to the song, Senegalese women can be strong warriors, because the epic of Goumba N’Diaye assures them that they have been warriors before. Her songs of Senegalese women’s history inspire the women as they march and face untold dangers in the name of winning concessions for their men.

Ramatoulaye is the embodiment of bravery. In the narrative “she takes on different kinds of responsibilities, which performs admirably and creditably” (Agho and Oseghale 608). At the height of desperation during the strike, the goat of a wealthy merchant eats the little rice the women reserved for feeding their children. Ramatoulaye kills the goat, feeds the starving children, and is arrested by French authorities. Ramatoulaye, a pragmatist, is not afraid of jail time. In killing the goat, Vendredi, she finds a plausible solution to a pressing problem explicitly stating, “In the cruel times we are living through we must find our own strength, somehow, and force ourselves to be hard. If Vendredi had not destroyed the only hope we had for today he would still be alive; and if he had killed me, you would have wept – but in weeping you might have forgotten your hunger, at least for today” (69). Though Ramatoulaye encourages the women to continue fighting for concessions, her arrest and detention by French authorities, coupled with the burning of some of their homes by the French soldiers and police, demoralize the women. Mame Sofi, an elder, leads another fight against the soldiers. She also leads a march to ensure Ramatoulaye’s release. Upon seeing Mame Sofi and her followers, the French authorities bring out fire trucks and water hoses to scare the women. However, “Mame Sofi leaned far forward, putting her head between her knees and grasping her ankles with her hands,
so that only her shoulders and the top of her skull were exposed to the spray” (122). She endures each blast of cold water that assaulted her body and survives. One of the protesters, Houdia M’Baye, however, does not. Like a good general, Mame Sofi attends to the rest of her protesters and demands that the men obtain a wagon so that the body of Houdia can be taken home to the village and properly buried according to Islamic tradition. Though women, these two leaders stand their ground against men. They risk their lives for the rest of the women warriors, the entire village, and their children. In a sense, these women, particularly Penda, take the same action as men and definitely face the same violent consequences as their male counterparts. Their audacity makes them equal to the male strikers at this point.

As the strike intensifies, Lahbib, one of the male strikers and union members, recruits Penda, a gruff and promiscuous woman, to assist them in their affairs. As a leader, Penda speaks with women and men: “She kept the women in line, and she forced even the men to respect her. She came to the union office frequently to help with the work, and one day, when one of the workmen had stupidly patted her behind, she gave him a resounding smack. A woman slapping a man in public was something no one had ever seen before” (143). Penda is not a mere shadow of Bakayoko, but his equal in intelligence, leadership and organization abilities, and physical bravery. Ousmane, “by creating women figures who do not merely represent shadows of the male figure, nor echoes of the male voice, Sembène’s works reflect the complexities of a changing Africa” (Wallace 64). The women decide to march “armed with a vision as well as clear political objectives – higher wages, increased benefits – a group of women march from Thiès to Dakar. Their march opens the door to a new understanding of the role of women within the context of Francophone African literature” (Mortimer 546), and the men must play the supporting roles while they march. Sadly, “Penda the courageous woman and indefatigable
leader of the women is killed by the police who refuse them safe entry into Dakar (Agho and Oseghale 610). Maimouna, in singing of the epic of Goumba N’Daiye, adds Penda’s activities and leadership. Bakayoko mourns Penda. Though Penda was certainly promiscuous and sometimes displayed unbridled hatred toward men, he feels that she was his equal, deserving his respect and marriage proposal.

In portraying Haitian peasant society, Roumain does not delve into the mystical world of bush and ghosts as does Tutuola, nor does he revert to portraying the African/Caribbean wilderness as a sacrosanct space. Instead, “[a]nthropology seems to have provided him with the kind of totalizing discourse that could assert a new origin for Haitian society, away from the horrors of Western civilization, so fresh in Roumain’s mind because of the Occupation and World War II” (Dash Other America 78). He crafts Gervilen, a violent drunkard prone to fighting and fits of jealousy, as a foil to Manuel. Fueled by clairin, a strong alcoholic drink flavored with cinnamon, the violence of the land feud, and jealousy concerning Manuel’s relationship with Annaise, he stabs Manuel after the hard-won cooperation at the meeting. Manuel’s death, which not only causes grief in his parents’ home, forces Annaise, a woman, into a public role; she carouses the men to continue Manuel’s vision for the coumbite and shows them where to find water. Though Manuel dies in the process, his leadership and willingness to provide a public space for women’s voices removes the paralysis that plagues the village due to feud, religious passivity, and drought. The drought, fresh water, and Annaise’s pregnancy provides the Haitian village with a verrition moment in which new, more egalitarian identities can be realized.

In signifying both Wright and Ellison, Gaines demonstrates the detrimental effects of individualist notions of manhood. I thoroughly agree with literary critic Keith Clark’s
assessment of individualistic manhood when he writes, “For all of their technical and even
taxonomic distinctions –naturalism versus realism and surrealism, modernism versus
postmodernism –these supreme texts overwhelmingly apotheosize Anglo-American
constructions of gender and selfhood, Native Son being a black boy’s American Dream fantasy
and Invisible Man a sable Huck Finn” (6). The protagonists each leave behind their own
communities in favor of irruption into white American patriarchal History. One consequence of
Phillip’s complete abandonment is the forcing of the role of fatherhood onto Robert X. In this
manner, In My Father’s House closely resembles Native Son. Chippo, a long-term friend of
Phillip, relays Johanna’s strange relationship with her oldest son, Robert X, or Etienne, his
former name. He explains, “Etienne had to work, help bring money in the house. He was the
man of the house. The man of the house. She told it to him that day he left from here…I told
her he wasn’t but a chap himself, and it wasn’t right…But she didn’t hear a word I said” (193-
194). Like many young men, including Bigger, the eldest male child in Black, female-headed
households often took the place of their missing fathers. They provided for their families
economically, and in many cases, became protectors of their younger siblings and co-parents to
their mothers. According to Chippo, after one of Johanna’s boyfriends viciously rapes her
daughter, they expect Robert X to avenge the rape as the eldest male in the family. Robert relays
the sad story of his family’s subsequent demise here, “Instead of me taking the gun like I shoulda
done, I took her in my arms and called on God” (102). His younger brother “found the man,
shooting pool; and blew out his brains” (103). As if this news is not devastating enough, Phillip
learns that his son committed suicide while he is trying to learn how to help him from Chippo.
Here, Gaines turns the Moynihan Report on its head; instead of placing the blame on the fictional
“Black matriarch,” for the impediments Black families experience, Gaines demonstrates that

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African American males’ internalization of an individualistic notion of masculinity helps destroy African American families. He does realize the error of his ways, but it is too late to save Robert X, who gave in to alienation and hopelessness brought upon him by a father’s absence and lack of caring.

In a somber moment, the narrator allows the reader a view into Phillip’s psychological interior as he thinks on his past behavior concerning women: “Men see their bastards walking by the house every day—some even joke about it. He had done the same. This was not his only child out of wedlock. He had children that he knew of by three or four other women. And he had been as proud of it as any other man” (150). Not only do men like Phillip Martin objectify, victimize, and abandon Black women, they rejoice in their virility. Masculinist leaders like Phillip “boldly believe that the race can claim the modern advance guard only by asserting an aggressively sexualized identity, at least for leading men within the race, and thus set out to sex the race” (Ross 24). As the text closes, Phillip wonders what goods his civil rights activism, preaching, and suffering has wrought, since his past life destroyed his own flesh and blood. With a grievous spirit, Phillip admits to his wife, “I’m lost, Alma. I’m lost” (214). Alma simply responds, “We just go’n have to start again” (214). Phillip, like many African American male leaders, must move toward a gendered identity that incorporates gender complementary and mutual understanding between men and women.

Though Ousmane, Roumain, and Gaines write from different religious, cultural, and historical eras, they share two commonalities. They situate their male characters within a community, and they move toward a definition of masculinity that operates in tandem with femininity. Ousmane, Roumain, and Gaines produce texts here that challenge “Eurocentric scripts of Black masculinity and Black femininity, not just to receive better treatment for oneself,
but to undermine and change prevailing sexual politics” (Collins 169). Unfortunately, when critics discuss Black male writers, they certainly do not center them within a community. Clark offers examples of this lack of critical insight: “For instance, words like ‘community,’ ‘healing,’ ‘ritual,’ and ‘space’ often function metonymically, as they are associated with a distinctly gynocritical discourse that engages epistemological questions deemed unique to women’s literature and theory” (3). However, Ousmane, Roumain, and Gaines complicate the accepted paternarartive by situating their male protagonists, even in their leadership capacities, inside a community where their actions have an impact on myriads of other people within their respective communities.

Within Diasporic communities, identities based upon individualism such as Okonkwo’s, is often detrimental to that particular protagonist. For instance “in Bigger Thomas, Wright’s ‘most influential shaping force’ embodies a modern codification of black manhood inscribed as powerless, animalistic, and inarticulate” (Auger 1). Individualistic notions of manhood do not create a space for healing of psychological wounds inflicted upon them through the discursive violence inherent in Euro-American patriarchal supremacist ideals. This type of manhood ideal is often couched in sexuality, physical strength, and subordination of women leads to psychological paralysis that perpetuates a vicious cycle of psychological castration, as demonstrated by Robert X and his absentee father. Robert X’s sad fate reveals that Black men are not isolated individuals. Their actions affect their immediate families, as demonstrated by the strike in Gods Bits of Wood; sometimes their decisions affect entire communities, as in Masters of the Dew; and sometimes their entire national strivings for equality are simply undone by boyishness and selfishness as in In My Father’s House. Recognition of family and communal responsibility, as Bakayako, Manuel, and Phillip discover, allows a male to transcend from
boyishness to manhood. Paralysis in Black masculinity can be overcome by embracing gender complementarity rather than shunning it for individualistic definitions of what it means to be a Black man.

1 Foucault’s *The Archaeology of Knowledge* and the essay, “Discourse on Language,” included in the appendix 2 Gaines’s *In My Father’s House* is his least taught, discussed, or analyzed text. For instance, a quick search on Google Scholar, J-Stor, or even MLA International Bibliography reveals only one work that mentions the book, an interview with Ernest Gaines conducted for the scholarly journal, *Callaloo*. When scholars analyze Gaines’s treatment of masculinity, they almost always discuss *A Gathering of Old Men* or the more recent *Lesson Before Dying*. However, this text is important to my study because it is not only a very early gendered reassessment of the Civil Rights Movement, but a direct signification of Wright’s *Native Son* that complicates the notion of Black man as victim.

3 Nkrumah became the first president of an independent Ghana in March of 1957. Jomo Kenyatta became the first president of independent Kenya in 1963, and Akintola succeeded Nigeria’s first premier, Obafemi Awolowo. Many of the leaders present at this conference represented problems to the United States, which was still embroiled in the Cold War with the U.S.S.R., because they refused to declare themselves as “pro-American” or “pro-Russian.” Instead, they claimed to be “pro-African,” with the rallying slogan, “Africa for Africans,” according to Legum.

4 In Chapter 2 of this project there is an example of Jefferson’s literary analysis of works created by Africans. Jefferson claims that Africans are intellectually inferior to Europeans while neglecting to mention the illegality of literacy for Africans in the Americas. Next, he claims that literature produced by African people, in spite these restraints, is no more than mere mimicry or emotionalism. According to Jefferson, there is no intellect involved.

5 *Wretched of the Earth* was shaped by Fanon’s involvement in the Algerian nationalist movement against French colonialism. Leaders of the SNCC (Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee) such as James Foreman and Stokely Carmichael also studied Fanon and *Wretched of the Earth*.

6 In Chapter 2 of this project, one of the qualifications for manhood, as stated by Euro-American philosophers, is the ability to govern. Thomas Carlyle used the political instability of Haiti, a free and independent Black Republic, to “prove” that men of African descent are not real men.

7 The narrative of Sojourner Truth was not written by herself; rather, it was dictated to and written by an amanuensis.

8 It is interesting here that Roumain chooses a drought, and not the Haitian Revolution or the many political/military skirmishes that occurred since Haiti’s declaration of independence in 1804. For instance, C.L.R. James’s *Black Jacobins* (1938), is a theogenic text that features the apotheosized Toussaint L’Ouverture as the leader of a revolution of mystical proportions. Though Manuel is a theogenic leader in the sense that he becomes a legend through song, his status is not borne of conflict with man, but with the earth.

9 Haitian Vodou consists of one supreme being, Bondye, and several lesser entities called Loas.

10 I do not say that to say that Malcolm X would have approved of these behaviors, but only to acknowledge that those perpetrating these behaviors claimed to have been inspired by the words of Malcolm X.

11 The works of Ousmane are very important here. *God’s Bits of Wood* was published in “1960, when the novel was published, because Francophone sub-Saharan African women’s writing had not yet emerged” (Mortimer 546). This sentence is unclear because of the quotation that is not well integrated. Rephrase for clarity.

12 Michel Foucault *The Order of Things* and *The Archeaology of Knowledge* for a discussion of “discursive violence.”
CHAPTER 7: CONCLUSION: JAMES BALDWIN’S CHALLENGE

In this concluding chapter, I use the very ugly, public duel between James Baldwin and Eldridge Cleaver as a prime example of why definitions of Black masculinity through writing should be closely examined. I then summarize the definitions of masculinity discussed in this study and extend Gibreel Kamara’s argument concerning feminist identity and gender complementarity to include masculinity as well.

In choosing the texts for this project, it was extremely difficult to exclude James Baldwin’s semi-autobiographical text, *Go Tell It on the Mountain*. How can I discuss any alternative notions of heterosexual Black masculinity without discussing the repression reproduced by Gabriel within the walls of his home? First, the Gaines text covers this point excellently. Second, it is within his critical essays that Baldwin first questions and challenges heterosexist, violent notions of American manhood, specifically Black masculinity. His reasons for doing so remain unclear, but fissures in the thinking about how to define Black males began less than a decade following Bigger Thomas’s debut as I have discussed in the project. Baldwin is the first Black male to seriously challenge patriarchal thinking, and Cleaver’s visceral, personal response to Baldwin is a manifestation that Baldwin struck the right chord in challenging these assumptions.
In essays such as “The Fire Next Time,” Baldwin explores the volatile nature of American racism and accompanying Puritanical, juvenile ideals about manhood in America. He claims that white Americans in particular possess uptight constraints concerning sexuality and anything outside those constraints, they foist upon the bodies of Black men. In “Freaks and the American Ideal of Manhood,” he further links sexuality, masculinity, violence, and racism, writing, “The American ideal, then, of sexuality appears to be rooted in the American ideal of masculinity. This ideal has created cowboys and Indians, good guys and bad guys, punks and studs, tough guys and softies, butch and faggot, black and white” (815). As quoted in an epigraph of the previous chapter, this creation of binaries, many of them unequal and always favoring the cultures which created them, leads to a paralysis in psychological growth and identity formation. Baldwin writes that the tendencies to reduce something as complex as masculinity is “so paralytically infantile that it is virtually forbidden –as an unpatriotic act –that the American boy evolve into the complexities of manhood” (815). Baldwin does not only criticize these simplistic ideals of manhood, he also explicitly states women’s role in it, too. In this dualistic system, women simply become conduits for property exchange and propagators of cultural hegemony, or History. This type of simplistic thinking, according to Baldwin, fuels racism, violence against others, colonialism, and imperialism. He then discusses how American ideals of manhood have affected him personally as a homosexual, African American male. In order to solve many of the problems, Baldwin suggests, men should interrogate chauvinism and embrace feminine contribution to our personal identities and our societies –a plausible definition of manhood discussed in the previous chapter of this project.

For his challenge to accepted notions of masculinity, the militant writers of the Black Arts Movement vehemently attacked Baldwin. The most vociferous attack came from Eldridge
Cleaver in his classic text *Soul on Ice* when he attacks Baldwin, not for his creative endeavors, but for his essays. First, he declares that “Baldwin’s antipathy toward the black race is shockingly clear” (124). Ironically, Cleaver shows disdain for Baldwin’s assessment of the misogyny at the 1956 Conference of Black Writers and Artists saying that the writers were simply “glorifying in their blackness” (125), as if Black maleness is the only representation of Blackness, and the absence of women’s voices is somehow excusable. However, if Cleaver understands Baldwin’s assertion that Black women writers were absent from a conference representing Black writers, he certainly does not mention it. Next, Cleaver declares that heterosexuality is the only normative definition of masculinity that Black males should assume. He claims that in being homosexual, Black males commit a “racial death-wish” (127). Specifically speaking of Baldwin, Cleaver declares, “The racial death-wish is manifested as the driving force in James Baldwin. His hatred for [B]lacks, even as he pleads what he conceives as their cause, makes him the apotheosis of the dilemma in the ethos of the [B]lack bourgeoisie who have completely rejected their African heritage, consider the loss irrevocable, and refuse to look again in that direction” (129). Not only does Baldwin’s homosexuality qualify as a “death wish” to Cleaver, but it makes him somehow less authentically Black. Though Baldwin produced many fiery essays denouncing white racism, Cleaver conflates his homosexuality as a “hatred of Blacks.” In opposition to Baldwin’s homosexuality and his decision to challenge heterosexist, patriarchal notions of Black masculinity, Cleaver praises Wright and the Black male characters that he creates. Cleaver writes, “I think it can safely be said that the men in Wright’s books, albeit shackled with a form of impotence, were strongly heterosexual. Their heterosexuality was implied rather than laboriously stated or emphasized; it was taken for granted, as we all take men until something occurs to make us know otherwise” (132). Wright’s characters, with their
clearly-defined heterosexuality, are manlier and less effeminate than James Baldwin and are therefore more authentically Black. By Cleaver’s configuration, there is no space for alternative definitions of masculinity for Black males and any challenge to the violent, heterosexual manifestations of masculinity portrayed in Black literature by Black male writes is somehow seen as hatred for Black people.

Baldwin’s challenge to Black male misogyny specifically and American ideals of manhood in general and Cleaver’s vehement objection to it are indicative of the controversy surrounding manhood which drives this project. In the introductory chapter, Chapter 1, I discuss the types of texts which influenced my decision to do a project on Black masculinity in literature. I further discuss my decision to use the term “masculinity” rather than “manhood.” I chose masculinity because it combines biological and social features of gender performance, whereas other terms connote one or the other. I also set forth the theoretical framework. I use postcolonialism and Pan-Africanism, taken together to analyze my chosen texts. Postcolonialism covers the anticolonialist rhetoric in many of these texts while Pan-Africanism relates to socio-historical events that pertain specifically to Black people.

In Chapter 2, I explore the psychological violence inflicted discursively upon the Black man’s body by the racist philosophical writings of Euro-American men. Because African men, as gendered beings, often practiced a type of gender complementarity that was foreign to European gender practices, African men were labeled as faux men, beings who owned penises and the obvious physical strength of other men, but lacked the phallic authority to properly subdue women and men considered physically less dominant than themselves. Literature about African males painted them as physically effeminate and socially weak when compared to
African females. African females are portrayed as physically dominant and hyper-masculine. I call this process racialized degendering, and it is a dark legacy of the Enlightenment era.

Once in the New World, plantation laws that were enacted over several centuries fostered the objectification of Black men. Black women were added as objects of slaves; trinkets that served as incentives that bound Black men to Euro-American plantations. In time, her reproductive capacity was linked directly to the market economy. For several centuries, Black men in the New World endured slavery, subsequent colonialism, and Jim Crow laws and de facto within the United States. In Africa, sub-Saharan people suffered Euro-American racism and the violence of colonialism, which imposed European standards and ideals upon African populations which held their own long-standing beliefs. Much of the discursive and physical violence in the New World and in Africa was aimed at psychologically castrating Black men in order to make them more suitable as a working objects or cogs in an exploitative capitalist system. Pan-Africanism, which began in the New World by people of African descent, was a way in which Black people tried to combat the negative images of themselves and Africa.

In Chapter 3, I begin my discussion of texts produced in the twentieth century by first briefly discussing the history and developments of stereotypes which began in the nineteenth century and were augmented in the twentieth century by increased access to books and new technology. After the Civil War in the United States, which led to the Emancipation of slaves, white American men’s position in the global economy became tenuous at best due to economic crisis and the unsure nature of the new, competitive market-driven economy. White American males were forced to redefine their masculine identities, according to E. Anthony Rotundo. The new, Self-Made Man model developed by white American males during the late 1800s, was one based upon not only individual, meritocratic achievement, but also exclusion. In order to
solidify their socio-economic dominance in uncertain times, white Americans concocted an image of the freed ex-slave men as subhumanoid beasts who craved white female flesh and resorted to rape. A rash of lynching broke out in the Southern United States. Lynching Black males were communal events that reassured white American males of their top place in the economic pecking order.

The popularity of texts like Joseph Conrad’s *Heart of Darkness* and films like *Tarzan* helped spread the stereotype of Black men as rapist beasts and of Africa as a continental jungle globally. For a long time, Pan-Africanist writers tended to ignore the Black rapist beast stereotype. In 1940, Richard Wright’s *Native Son* burst onto the literary scene, and Bigger Thomas, for a while, became an international representative of the African American male experience in an industrialized nation. Meanwhile, on the Continent and among African Caribbean writers, they also wanted to portray the truly horrific conditions which Black men suffered under repressive regimes which included colonialism and Apartheid. At other times, they used images of Africa or the various Caribbean islands as pristine, unadulterated lands where Black men ruled autonomously without the castrating hindrances of Euro-American domination. Combined, these texts, along with the philosophical writings of Fanon, proclaim that the Black male experience of oppression is the experience of colonialism. Narratives such as these, the ones which feature modern societies as well as those relegated to the mystical realm, tend to be oppositional in nature. Due to their counterdiscursive nature, texts such as Wright’s *Native Son*, Cesaire’s *A Tempest*, and Tutuola’s *Palm Wine Drinkard* were heavily criticized as essentializing, and accepting of Euro-American patriarchal supremacist notions about the inferiority of Black masculinity. They also exclude the voices of Black women, and do not create a space for alternative definitions of masculinity outside of the accepted ones created by
Euro-American men. Men in Africa and throughout the African Diaspora successfully explored the external racism which often affected them individually and collectively, but failed to even mention accepted gender inequalities, let alone interrogate the gender practices which suppressed half of their populations, and continued to harm respective Black communities.

In Chapter 4, I discuss models of Black masculinity that are based on each writer’s national culture. As master craftsmen, Chinua Achebe, George Lamming, and Ralph Ellison create tales that feature Black male protagonists who fail to interrogate Black male chauvinism. *Things Fall Apart, In the Castle of My Skin,* and *Invisible Man,* respectively, are admonishments, recreations, and warnings. The texts admonish those Black male writers who attempt to create a normative Black masculinity and instead create Black masculine characters who use their own cultural markers as internal sources of masculine identity. Also, the texts also warn against suppressing feminine contributions to each protagonist’s society. In *Things Fall Apart,* suppression of the feminine only leads to stagnation and death. Lamming’s text, though allegorical of the colonial situation, is demonstrative of a type of Black masculinity which allows space for Black female contributions to personal and national well-being. In acknowledging the contributions of Black women, Black men may create a new definition of masculinity, and Lamming’s protagonist, G, represents a plausible Black masculinity that is hopeful at the end of the narrative. In Ellison’s text, the unnamed protagonist leaves his own community in favor of irruption into white American history. In his quest for visibility, he ignores Black women like the mother-figure, Mary, who provides support for him in spite of his economic instability. His willed blindness toward the many things Black women do only leads to disillusionment and social stagnation. The unnamed protagonist, like Okonkwo, commits suicide, though not a physical one. He simply drops into a manhole and out of society.
Though Achebe, Lamming, and Ellison warn Black men of Black male chauvinism, they also do not privilege the Black female voice. In Chapter 5, I discuss texts by Black female writers Ba, Marshall, and Hansberry who create male characters in their drama and fiction who internalize Euro-American definitions of manhood, and harm themselves and their relationships with others. In *So Long a Letter, The Chosen Place the Timeless People*, and *A Raisin in the Sun*, Ba, Marshall, and Hansberry, respectively, create men who are both products of and responsible for the perpetuation of Euro-American supremacist patriarchal discourse. Their behavior is symptomatic of colluding systems of exploitation that include racism, capitalism, and chauvinism. Ba also incorporates the abuse and misinterpretation of Islamic tenets. After the death of her husband, Ramatoulaye makes an overall assessment of anything which is harmful to a progressive Senegalese society. Marshall, on the other hand, explores the gender inequality left behind in the Caribbean by British colonialism, and a newer brand of masculinity encroaching upon the island as manifested by American materialism. Again, it proves detrimental to the man who internalizes it. Hansberry criticizes Black men for aspiring to be the wealthy, dominating patriarchs that white men appear to be.

Achebe, Lamming, and Ellison, and later, Ba, Marshall, and Hansberry effectively warn Black men of their chauvinism, but they do not create characters which demonstrate an alternative heterosexual Black masculinity. In Chapter 6, I discuss three texts by Black male writers who create plausible, alternative definitions of heterosexual Black masculinity. Ousmane’s *God’s Bits of Wood*, Jacque Roumain’s *Masters of the Dew*, and Ernest Gaines’s *In My Father’s House* cut across religious traditions, languages, and geographical locations. Due to extenuating economic, weather, and personal circumstances, respectively, each protagonist must seriously evaluate their accepted definitions of masculinity. In much protest literature, including
Wright’s, the community of Black men is broken and dysfunctional. Their group outings are nothing more than woman-bashing, testosterone-soaked, often quasi-criminal physical contests meant to showcase a brute, physical aspect of masculinity. Ousmane, Roumain, and Gaines show men in a variety of social settings and at different levels of maturity, and the characters that they present are neither innocent nor completely deviant. In re-placing Black male characters in their respective Black communities, these writers create an alternative space for even heterosexual Black masculinities.

Embracing feminine and masculine contributions to any society is an alternative to individualistic definitions of manhood. Gibreel Kamara argues that African-centered gender definitions often include complementarity. It is this same gender complementarity that European men first attacked African men for in the early stages of enslavement and colonialism. Rather than work toward destroying these African-centered notions of gender in Africa, the Caribbean, and the United States, these notions should be celebrated and a new Black masculinity must be crafted based upon reciprocity and mutual respect between men and women, and heterosexuals and homosexuals. Though Kamara’s article discusses feminist identities and African writers, I feel that it can be extended to masculinity as well. I agree with him concerning identity when he writes that it “is a struggle that requires the partnership of both genders” (215). I also agree with Baldwin’s assumption that accepting feminist contributions to societies, even for Black males, does not preclude Black masculine identity. Instead, it is an acknowledgment that any healthy identity needs both male and female attributes. These are the assumptions with which I began this project. In the beginning textual analysis in this project, definitions of masculinity are oppositional and confrontational. These confrontations closely resemble the binaries that James Baldwin eloquently put forward, and in the first two texts, there is a violent showdown between
the Black man and the white men who oppress them. In *Native Son*, Mary is simply a conduit for the message Bigger attempts to send white Americans concerning their oppression of men like himself. However, Black male writers revised that confrontational, essentializing definition of masculinity in favor of one which acknowledges that there can be no *one* Black male experience of oppression as Cleaver implies. Alternative Black heterosexual identities are developed in the last textual analysis. This identity is based on gender complementarity as Kamara suggests.

Though I have set out to extend the work of Irele, Alabi, Smith, McDowell, and others, I do not intend for this work to be considered a complete conversation about the texts that Black men produce in trying to define themselves. Other areas that I did not address but that are crucial to an understanding of Black masculinity include Black masculinity and homosexuality, Black masculinity and the environment, and Black masculinity in contemporary popular culture. I have also not addressed any Black Spanish writers or discussed some important authors like August Wilson and Wole Soyinka. Hopefully, however, using the unifying tenets of Pan-Africanism and the inseparable link between Black identity politics and Black writers, other projects will continue the conversation on how Black men are still defining and redefining themselves.
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NOTES ON FUTURE STUDIES FOR BLACK MASCULINITY

There are many other texts and issues concerning gender in general and specifically masculinity ripe for scholarly research. Choosing which texts to include and which topic to cover in this project and which ones to exclude was one of the most difficult aspects of writing a project of this nature. In this section, I review several works and topics which I did consider, but did not include.

For the past 40 years, Black male writers continue to challenge narrowly defined definitions of masculinity like that of Cleaver and embrace Baldwin’s challenge. Baldwin’s essays allows for male writers who do not fit the dichotomous power struggle which Cleaver claims heterosexual Black men must engage white men. For instance, African American male writer Percival Everett, in his novel *Erasure*, challenges the urban, hypermasculinity that characterize contemporary Black male writing. There are many African American males who do not fit this dynamic such as those who reside in rural areas, middle class males who live in the suburbs of large cities, and those African American males who chose careers in academia rather than those which traditionally garner popular respect such as medicine or law. The contemporary image of Black males in popular urban fiction does not address these classes of African American men and are sometimes nothing more than old stereotypes that have been repackaged for contemporary audiences. Some stereotypes include absentee fathers, hypersexuality and sexual promiscuity, and violent Black males who kill without conscience. Meanwhile, African American male writer, Randall Kenan, challenges individualistic and
normative heterosexual ideals of Black masculinity. His 1992 collection of short stories, *Let the Dead Bury Their Dead*, explores what it means to be poor, Black, male, and gay in the American South. In America’s popular imagination, gay men are effeminate and physically less dominant than heterosexual men. Cleaver even implies that homosexual men are not authentically Black. Kenan challenges this assumption by presenting characters that identify equally with Blackness and homosexuality. These are the types of complicated masculine identities that Baldwin challenges Black writers to perform.

While Black male writers answer Baldwin challenges, there are other African American female texts that need scholarly attention as well for their insightful analysis of Black masculinity as well. For instance, Ann Petry’s *The Street* has often been labeled by critics as a female version of Wright’s *Native Son*. This label and critical direction is inadequate. Though the text does feature a Black female protagonist, Petry empathetically portrays Black, under/unemployed males that inhabit the protagonist’s urban world. Though her husband does leave her, she posits that racially-discriminatory hiring practices end her marriage and not any moral failings in her husband. Similarly, Gwendolyn Brooks *MaudMartha*, a prose-poetry narrative of a woman’s interior, also highlights how subservient working conditions for African American men cause tension and strain in marriages.

In the Caribbean, Black male writers continue to challenge the gender inequality. For that reason, it was equally difficult for me to leave the writings of Earl Lovelace out of this project. I use Lamming, however, because he presents the reader with no only a complex text, but also an auto-ethnography. He shows how masculinity and national identity are often linked, as Baldwin suggests in his arguments on masculinity. Writers like Lovelace continue to address the poverty and colonial mechanism that continue to economically suppress large portions of the
Caribbean nations. In many countries, Black faces dominate the political apparatus, but their power is not based on any real wealth, but educational advancement and attainment of political office or some other service-oriented job. In *While Gods are Falling*, Earl Lovelace challenges the heterosexual, suppressive notions of masculinity. The protagonist rejects his brother, who serves on the police force of Trinidad, and also stops attempting to climb a corporate ladder in a job that does not operate on a meritocratic basis, but relegates him to positions in which he does not supervise white men, and becomes a community activist. In a later novel *The Dragon Can’t Dance*, Lovelace attacks colonial legacies of chromatism, racial division between the mainly East Indian merchant classes and Black Trinidadians, and gender inequalities. Set against a community in Port of Spain, Lovelace explores each person’s psyche and the protagonists psyche to define himself as a Black man in the slums of a deeply-divided, postcolonial city.

In Africa, Black male writers continue to challenge and assess colonial divisions as well as traditions that impede the progress of respective African societies. For instance, Ayi Kwei Armah writes about a disillusioned protagonist in *Fragments*. Having obtained an education in the United States, the protagonist returns to Ghana in search of employment and his Ghanaian heritage. He finds his nation gripped in materialism and relishing in the socio-economic gains bestowed upon Ghanaians who continue to perpetuate colonialist policies. One of the rhetorical strategies these writers use to portray the inept and treacherous leadership of many post-independent African countries is that of impotence. For instance, in *Xala*, Sembène Ousmane tells of the downfall of El Hadji. He has been cursed with xala, the Wolof word for impotence. After spending a considerable amount of his fortune in search of a cure, he learns that an old villager curses him because he manipulates a prime spot of land away from the villagers who rightfully own it. African women writers continue to explore how colluding discourses affect
even the most personal of relationships. In Ama Ata Aidoo’s 1991 novel *Changes: A Love Story*, she presents a career-oriented African woman who divorces her first husband in order to obtain the freedom to further pursue her career, but marries into a polygamous union for love. Though the protagonist does find the career freedom she seeks, she does not find the happiness of Assitou or Ramatoulaye in Ba’s *So Long a Letter*. TsiTsi Dangarembga in *Nervous Conditions* explores how male privilege and postcoloniality drive a young African girl into an eating disorder, and later, into complete nervous disorder.

Aside from pressing gender issues which threaten to divide African and African Diasporic cultures across the globe, writers of African descent continue to grapple with identity. Transnational writers explore what it means to be Black. They write in a very Pan-Africanist or even Glissantian manner; they understand the differences in various Black cultures and no longer subscribe to the essentialism inherent in earlier waves of Pan-Africanism. When Black writers mention Africa, it is no longer the mystical symbol, but a real place filled with real people and very real problems and also great social achievements. Language, religion, customs, and geography produce real differences in Black populations that writers simply do not try to overcome; instead, these differences are celebrated while the “subterranean root,” as Brathwaite and Glissant explain, is maintained. For instance, African Caribbean Canadian writer Dionne Brand writes neo-slave narratives that explore plantation atrocities in the Caribbean, and link them to British colonialism. Caryl Phillips, a Caribbean-born Black male writer who currently resides in England, also writes about various aspects of African American culture. Of course, Edwidge Danticat, Toni Morrison, and Jamaica Kincaid continue to explore, not just gender, but Black identity across the Diaspora.
As Black writers continue to grapple with identity, the gender division in Black communities, long seething and subversive, has spilled onto the international stage via popular culture. The most popular RAP artists, coincidentally, are the ones whose lyrical content are the most derogatory towards Black women. While these individual artists should be held accountable for the perpetuation of vicious stereotypes about Black women’s bodies and behavior, they are also reflections of America’s gendered, racialized society at large. For instance, in the middle of the most severe economic downturn since the Great Depression of the 1930s, conservative, white American male lawmakers in the United States have rehashed debates over women’s rights to birth control while desperately trying to remove the first Black male president in the history of the United States through subterfuge and voter restrictions. Many critics and historians, such as Honor Ford-Smith, recognize that the misogynist lyrics celebrated in Black male-dominated RAP music is a manifestation of the failure of Civil Rights Movement activists to adequately address and redefine masculinity and femininity and to move toward gender equality within the African American community. Likewise, Black women in the Caribbean and in Africa face severe, misogynistic backlashes for every gain they make. Instead of attacking the system of inequality and racism which continues to devalue Black men, these conservative critics often blame Black women for their successes they achieve: claiming that Black women are achieving success at the peril of Black men.

Amazingly, the communities from which Ousmane, Roumain, and Gaines write are still grappling with environmental devastation which augment the psycho-social dilemmas of the people who inhabit these areas. Continued deforestation of the West African coast contributes not only to the poverty that those West African nations experience, but also to the effects of global warming. As a continent, Africa contributes the least to the world’s pollution problems
but suffers its harshest consequences. A devastating earthquake hit Haiti in January 2010. The world responded to the crisis, but Haitian internal politics as well as interference from other powers block the aid from reaching the people who need it the most. Haiti’s status as a hated Black republic was also made manifest as its closest neighbor, the Dominican Republic, closed its borders, refusing to allow Haitian refugees to enter the country. In September 2005, Hurricane Katrina made landfall on the coast of Louisiana, causing catastrophic flooding and damage in New Orleans, Louisiana. The federal government’s slow response to cries from help from the mainly Black population stripped away America’s meritocratic image before the eyes of the world. And for the first time, the world saw America’s own problems with poverty, racism, and classism. In all three of these areas, people continue to grapple with personal/public/local/national identity issues while surviving devastating natural and man-made disasters. However, as I stated concerning Black homosexual masculinity, these issues deserve a project in and of themselves, and it is my sincere hope that further scholarly attention be devoted to the environment and gender.
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