

5-2018

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Implementing Critical Analysis in the Classroom to Negate Southern Stereotypes in Multi-Media

by

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A Thesis submitted to the faculty of
Gardner-Webb University
in partial fulfillment of the requirements
for the degree of Master of Arts
in the Department of English

Boiling Springs, N.C.

2018

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Chapter 1: Introduction

Although billions of people occupy Earth, individuals themselves move in much smaller spheres, with comparatively few connections to others outside of family. Many people only experience the world as far as their city limits or county or state line. Contact with others of different regions or cultures is limited, with knowledge about those from “outside” coming from books, magazines, television, and movies. Ideas and beliefs about others who are different, therefore, have “to be pieced together out of what others have reported and what we can imagine,” which inevitably leads to preconceived, generalized opinions of groups as a whole based on certain behaviors and characteristics of the few – in short, stereotyping (Lippmann 79). Stereotypes are, more often than not, an unfair and oversimplified method of classifying people. In his book, *Public Opinion* (1922), Walter Lippmann explains how stereotypes occur: “In the great blooming, buzzing confusion of the outer world we pick out what our culture has already defined for us, and we tend to perceive that which we have picked out in the form stereotyped for us by our culture” (81). Modern cultures continuously rely on the preconceived ideas established by outdated cultures, allowing the past to determine for the present an understanding of a world much larger and more traveled today than yesterday. As such, stereotypes are passed down from generation to generation, inexorably becoming part of a region’s culture with the most common stereotypes being those based on class, race, gender, and/or region.

Stereotypes have been and continue to be perpetuated in several different ways: those who manage to rise from a lower class to a much higher one may experience a figurative pain “stemming from a developing hatred for the ones left behind;” disadvantaged people have a proclivity to see themselves as society sees them; and, finally, literature and other forms of media, such as art, television and film, music, and advertisements continue to support and sustain

stereotypes (Carr 64). These stereotypes usually encompass such characteristics as senseless rage, slow-witted and unteachable, amoral, lazy and shiftless, racist, and inbred. Believing that stereotypes in any society can be completely eliminated is idealistic, but naïve; the key to alleviating the devastating effects, however, lies in education. Exposing students to the world's cultures has never been more possible than today. In the United States, educators might invite native guest speakers, procure specialized traveling museum exhibits, show regional documentaries, participate with an interactive educational online site, or connect to another school on the other side of the world; the possibilities are infinite, the goal: teaching others, especially society's young, that "different" is not synonymous with "inferior." In order to reach this goal, educators and students alike must become skillful in the ability to 1.) recognize stereotypes in literature and other media forms, 2.) understand *why* they are stereotypes, and 3.) decide whether the stereotype can be negated and if so, how. In other words, both educators and students must become proficient in critical literacy by learning and continuously practicing critical analysis of many different mediums – texts, film, music, and advertisements to name but a few.

Critical literacy encourages students to actively participate in analyzing texts with the goal of uncovering any underlying messages. Those who are critically literate have mastered the aptitude to read, analyze, critique, and question those messages intrinsic within nearly all forms of texts and media. By critically analyzing books, magazines, Internet sites, movies, television, and music, students can be taught to recognize socially formulated ideas such as inequality, repression, prejudice, or intolerance. Once able to recognize these concepts, students will then be able to challenge them, thereby gaining a much deeper understanding of their world, both internal and external. Students will have a better understanding of how societies decide what is

“normal” and what is not, what is acceptable and what is not. They will also begin to realize that by challenging social ideas, they can enact social change.

In his “Cognitive Skills of Effective Teaching” video series, Dr. Stephen Chew, Professor and Chair of the Psychology Department at Samford University in Birmingham, Alabama, teaches that students are “highly resistant to correction” and that misconceptions and incorrect information are extremely difficult to unlearn (2015). Therefore, as the youth across this nation begin to learn about great American classic and contemporary works, especially those from Southern writers, and those portraying the Southern way of life, they should also learn how to critically analyze such works in order to recognize any stereotypes of class, race, gender, rural life, and region within those studied works. Once students are able to identify stereotypes and understand how they negatively impact the targeted group, they can then learn how to deconstruct the stereotypes, destabilizing, undermining, and weakening prejudices portrayed in novels, movies, and other aspects of the media.

Stereotypes, although a nationwide issue, seem to be most prevalent in the southern region of the United States, especially the deep south. Following the Union defeat of the Confederacy, many white Southerners were ruined economically, shattered physically, and traumatized psychologically. As a means of healing, white Southerners developed a new ideology called the Lost Cause, which described the Confederate objective as heroic despite its defeat. Promptly after the war ended, sentimental literary works and historical recordings began to appear, idealizing the South and what its white citizens perceived as her lost culture: “The Confederates won with the pen (and the noose) what they could not win on the battlefield: the cause of white supremacy and the dominant understanding of what the war was all about” (Loewen). Beginning in the last decade of the 19th century, the Veterans’ History Committee,

chaired by Carolina-born, aristocrat, Confederate ex-General Stephen D. Lee, the United Confederate Veterans, the United Daughters of the Confederacy, and the Sons of the Confederate Veterans denounced sectionalist Northern historians, claiming that their caustic criticisms of the Southern ideologies were nothing short of evil and highly prejudicial; therefore, “they expunged offending works from schools and libraries, silenced dissident teachers, and indoctrinated Southern children with aristocratic social values unchanged since the antebellum epoch” (Bailey 508). These groups then depended on their own regional writers such as Thomas Nelson Page and Daniel Lucas to represent their interests in history in “an attempt by the South’s aristocracy to secure in the hearts and minds of all the region’s youth victories denied in the defeats of 1861 to 1865” (508). These Southern histories villainize the North, describe recently freed slaves as being happy and satisfied before their emancipation, and describe slave owners as paternalistic.

Reasons stereotypes continue to prevail in this region in particular have historical and social ties to the Civil War, the Agrarians, the Civil Rights movement, and what Southerners feel were forced culture changes by Northerners and the Federal Court system. Contributing factors, however, can most certainly be attributed to authors of fictional works. In *A Question of Class: The Redneck Stereotype in Southern Fiction* (1996), Duane Carr notes that Southern characters are represented stereotypically because “many authors do not write about rural people from first-hand experience. Instead they too often assume they already ‘know’ these people in the same way so many whites of all classes assumed – before the civil rights movement of the sixties, at least– that they ‘knew’ African-Americans” (5). These antagonistic illustrations of rural people, painted on the pages of popular novels by white urbanite authors, unfortunately contributed to the nation’s generalized ideas of rural people and their culture. William Byrd, Thomas Nelson Page, Erskine Caldwell, and Cormac McCarthy are examples of Southern writers whose works

stereotype against African-Americans, women, poor whites, and/or Southern ruralists or “rednecks.” The underprivileged characters portrayed by these authors, and others like them, were written from the perspective of the outsider (the privileged white) looking in, not from any personally experienced insider information. Their works, and other works like them, should be critically analyzed against Southern writers whose works are written from an insider’s frame of reference, which subvert the stereotypes of their *individual* experience; however, no one person’s narrative can possibly speak for the fundamental lifestyles and experiences of any group as a whole regardless of insider perspective. Works analyzed from both perspectives simultaneously will make the conflicting portrayals of stereotyped characters more transparent. This in turn will assist in deconstructing the stereotypes.

A select few Southern writers, writing from first-hand experience, have contributed works centering on a disadvantaged person in a Southern rural setting. This unique group of writers creates strong, minority protagonists (both male *and* female), who overcome socially imposed shame and defy historically sanctioned stereotypes, breaking the pattern considered the norm for their class, race, and gender. Three such authors and their works include Zora Neale Hurston, *Their Eyes Were Watching God* (1937), Delores Phillips, *The Darkest Child* (2005), and Dorothy Allison, *Bastard Out of Carolina*, (1992). These three writers infuse their fiction with their own personal experiences, which give their underprivileged characters and rural Southern settings a depth and realism often missing from the many works written by their more privileged white contemporaries such as William Faulkner and Cormac McCarthy.

Born in 1891, Zora Neale Hurston was fortunate enough to have been raised in Eatonville, Florida, a self-governing, all black community and the first of its kind in the United States. Eatonville was the only town where Hurston could walk with her head held high, unlike

other African-Americans of her time living in other Southern communities, which were governed by Jim Crow laws; yet, despite being part of this peerless district, Hurston felt isolated and alone (Beauchamp 75, 76). Her mother, too, gave her a unique upbringing by not restraining her solely for her gender, encouraging her to speak her mind, a characteristic which was not condoned by her father (Hurston, *Dust Tracks*, 13). Hurston brings these feelings and sense of independence to her protagonist, Janie Mae Crawford. Set during the 1930s, and at one point in a fictitious version of Eatonville, Janie feels alone and isolated. Her grandmother and first two husbands treat her like chattel as they each control her actions, appearance, and words. However, when Janie meets her third husband, she is able to break free from her bonds, and in this way Hurston destabilizes the gender and race stereotypes.

Born in 1950 in Bartow County, Georgia, Delores Phillips, too, gives readers an insider's view to life as a Southern African-American female. Phillips' novel is set in the fictional town of Pakersfield, Georgia, spanning from 1958-1961, just as the Civil Rights movement is in its infancy. The story is told through the eyes of Tangy Mae Quinn, one of ten children born to Rozelle Quinn. Although Tangy lives in utter poverty, endures physical, mental, and emotional abuse at the hands of her mother and others, and is expected by the white community to feel shame for the color of her skin, she refuses to be a victim or succumb to a stereotype. Phillips disrupts the conventional image of African-Americans as unteachable, violent, and sexually promiscuous through Tangy, who proves to be a reliable witness to unwarranted and inappropriate actions by whites against blacks. Hurston and Phillips each subvert stereotypes by juxtaposing their positive heroines against antagonists who represent Southern Agrarians, white supremacists, and a patriarchal society.

Dorothy Allison, like Hurston and Phillips, brings a sense of realism to her novel. She grew up part of a large, rural, poor family and suffered abuse at the hands of her stepfather like her protagonist, Bone. Although Allison's novel does include characters acting in stereotypical ways, these characterizations are used to help contrast the growth of Bone's character throughout the novel as she fights to overcome the demons of a world in which she never asked to be a part. Allison infuses her protagonist with positive qualities, giving Bone an ability to survive a fatalistic genealogy without succumbing to "white trash" stereotypes. These are the realistic experiences Allison brings to readers in order for them to understand that Southern disadvantaged whites are not "white trash" nor is this social class anything in which to be ashamed, which is an invaluable lesson especially for today's youth as they are bombarded with such stereotypes in the media.

The pervasiveness of stereotypes in the media continues to negatively affect all Americans, not just the minority groups being stereotyped or the victims of oppression or exploitation. These nefarious media images are found in commercials, film, fine art, cartoons, music, and, of course, the Internet, which makes reaching millions of people around the world possible – both a blessing and a curse. Entertainment, advertisement, and news agencies continue to irresponsibly produce and publish works that sustain prejudices based on race, gender, and culture, so accountability must fall to the media agencies because of the methods used to propagate socially harmful imagery; however the receiver of the message carries some accountability in how he or she subscribes meaning to the images being presented by the mass media. Through vigilant and dynamic guidance, chiefly in the area of critical literacy, educators can teach students how to recognize images portraying minorities in a negative, damaging light and counteract them in less generalized, more positive ways.

Only through a commitment to changing attitudes toward how society sees each other can the diminishing and marginalizing of stereotypes occur. Educators have a responsibility to their students to teach critical literacy through critical analysis of myriad works, to overrule the misconceptions that the negative behaviors of individuals or small groups from like ethnicities or geographical locations represent the whole. They must educate them to go against a natural instinct to look for patterns in behavior and then associate those patterns with any intersectional identity, for it is these patterns that make stereotyping *appear* natural. Hurston's *Their Eyes Were Watching God*, Phillips' *The Darkest Child*, and Allison's *Bastard Out of Carolina* can be used to give all students, regardless of individual background, an opportunity to experience, and learn from, the perspectives of others. Students who learn how to deconstruct the stereotypes in nearly all aspects of media will gain new perspectives of different cultures, understand how stereotypes are formed and perpetuated, and conceivably cease associating behavioral patterns of a few to the whole.

Chapter 2: Media on the March

In 2002, CBS attempted a new reality show called the *Real Beverly Hillbillies*. The concept, like the 1960's sitcom, *The Beverly Hillbillies*, was to find a Southern, multi-generational, highly rural, low-income family and transplant them to a glitzy mansion in Beverly Hills, California, for one year. During that year, they would be given an unspecified amount of money to spend as they wish, have maids, drive expensive vehicles, and eat at opulent restaurants while being filmed for the sheer entertainment of American audiences. CBS talent agents focused their search to the Appalachian region of the southeasterly states, primarily Kentucky. The network offered residents of Kentucky up to \$1,000 to recommend families, and \$500,000 to a family willing to relocate to Beverly Hills for one year (James 2003). CBS, hoping for the same success with this reality show that they had with the sitcom, never expected the fierce, adverse reaction from critics who quickly dubbed the search "a hick hunt" (James 2003). A few months later, CBS shut down the project without shooting even one scene. Using examples from reality television and other forms of entertainment, as well as the news media, this chapter demonstrates that media has been, and still is, more than any other source, responsible for disseminating stereotypes of marginalized subcultures. Entertainment and news media, like novels, should be critically analyzed to discover and subvert pre-existing notions of certain social groups, especially Southern stereotypes.

Very few people ever have the luxury or opportunity to travel the world and experience, let alone appreciate, the myriad cultures that exist across the seven continents; therefore, many people's ideas of different cultures are based primarily on information gathered from the multitude of multimedia available to the public, not on first-hand knowledge. For example, here in the United States, many Americans, regardless of region, believe that nearly all Southerners

must have fought for the Confederacy during the Civil War because it was a war between the North and South. Adding to this fallacy are numerous misconceptions and inaccuracies that can be found in the history books of American schools and historical sites throughout the South and what were considered border-states (slave states that did not join the Confederacy or secede from the Union). This misinformation is due in part to Southern educators not allowing many works written by Northerners. As discussed in Chapter 1 of this thesis, close to the turn of the 20th century, the Veterans' History Committee, the United Confederate Veterans, the United Daughters of the Confederacy, and the Sons of Confederate Veterans denounced sectionalist Northern historians, claiming that their caustic criticisms of the Southern ideologies were nothing short of evil and highly prejudicial; therefore, offensive historical works were obliterated from Southern schools. Southern children were taught the history approved by Southern aristocracy and written by Southern writers. Misconceptions and inaccuracies became so rooted in Southern society that they extended into the modern Southern culture. The consequence of this distorted understanding of Southern culture became a caricature of the poor white Southerner and the South in general.

In *A Question of Class: The Redneck Stereotype in Southern Fiction* (1996), Duane Carr discusses William Byrd II, a Virginian planter and author who wrote among other works, *History of the Dividing Line*, which was “published posthumously in 1841” (15). Byrd developed *History* from a diary he kept while surveying the boundary line between Virginia and North Carolina in 1728; however, Carr writes that Byrd’s book was based on “creative embellishments of skeletal diary entries made during the expedition” (15). These embellishments were initially intended to mock only his colleagues, but he later twisted his so-called observations and instead fabricated “broad, grotesquely ‘comic’ caricatures of the backwoods frontiersmen of North

Carolina...[succeeding] in creating crude stereotypes of lazy mountaineers that have become prototypes for a seemingly endless parade of writers and cartoonists” (15). Works like Byrd’s would most likely be one of limited sources of rural cultural information for non-rural societies during the latter half of the nineteenth century since many people would be unable or unwilling to travel to such remote areas to experience the same frontiersmen-type folk first hand. Today lampooning and ridiculing of the South continues to be perpetuated and promulgated through differing modes of mass media such as editorial cartoons, movies, and even the news media.

The media today, whether it is in cartoons, print, or video, has made a science of understanding how the public uses and reacts to images. Marketing agencies specialize in this understanding, and good companies can make millions appeasing their corporate clients. Manufacturers of such products as health and beauty, household cleaning agents, breakfast foods, drinks, and baby supplies have no problem spending hundreds of thousands to millions of dollars on marketing agencies for research and developing ads that will entice certain demographic segmentations. Teen magazines will include ads aimed only at pre-teens and teens, soap operas will play commercials generally of interest primarily to women, while televised sporting events are aimed primarily at men; in this way, media contributes heavily to stereotyping. Since imagery often appeals to an audience’s emotions, it “[s]ubtly or explicitly shape[s] our perceptions of reality” (Elliot 10). In their article, “Media Images and the Social Construction of Reality,” William A. Gamson, David Croteau, William Hoynes, and Theodore Sasson write: “Images are ... reproductions ... a mental picture of something not real or present” (374). Because interpreting images is subjective, advertisements designed to attract a certain demographic may include incidental affects “whether or not the designers are conscious of this intent” (374). For example, an alcohol commercial that includes a beautiful woman may be

meant only to sell alcohol to men, but incidentally convey a message of both men's and women's gender roles. Because people rely on what they see to define their world, it is understandable how easy stereotypes are developed.

How can images be so powerful as to heavily influence a nation's, even the world's, idea of Others? Erin Stueter and Deborah Wills explain in their essay "Drawing Dehumanization: Exterminating the Enemy in Editorial Cartoons:"

[It] is based on principles fundamental to semiotic analysis: that images and objects signify or mean things that go beyond their immediate literal meaning, and that this extended or figurative meaning is based on and can infinitely expand the relationship of the object or images to the larger systems of meaning (cultural, economic, textual, and so on) that provide their context. (324)

In other words, the images media present to the public are generally "decoded" by a society or culture based not only on strict, exact denotations, but also on metaphorical, symbolic connotations. All forms of media are interactive with viewers. Media presents a certain message, but the viewers depend on their own knowledge and experiences to interpret the message. Individual knowledge and experiences are, in turn, highly influenced by the society and culture in which they are a part. This makes audiences extremely susceptible to accepting stereotypes.

Imagery is one of the most powerful methods used to shape perceptions of reality. Photojournalism, print ads, commercials, movies, and television all use imagery to "sell" a product. With monetary rewards being the end goal of media, the means for reaching that goal can be deceitful and manipulative. Deceit and manipulation are often successful because the public generally trusts most avenues of media to deliver the truth and tends to believe what it sees. In her essay, "Ethical Responsibilities and the Power of Pictures," Deni Elliot writes, "At a

broader social level, the whole community has been indirectly harmed by the decrease in trust” when the media acts irresponsibly by showing harmful or deceitful images (13). Deception is successful because people expect the truth and they tend to believe what they see (Elliot 14). With today’s technology, manipulating images is extremely easy, but only a select few are schooled enough to pick out a manipulated image. Not only does the public have to contend with the possibility of deceitful images, but also the cutthroat competition between news media agencies. Because the major newspapers and news channels are corporate owned, enormous pressure exists to get “the story” out first. Because of this, the public is fed inaccurate information almost akin to rumors and speculations rather than good, ethical, professional journalism.

Unfortunately, much of the public today tends to believe what they see and hear through almost any type of digital media. Most disturbing is the influence such media have over the public’s interpretation of issues and events, which opens the way to the possibility of creating stereotypes on a much larger social scale. Negating stereotypes promulgated through media avenues could conceivably be an extremely difficult task, but not impossible. The primary way for media outlets to lessen the stereotypes is to be willing to act in a more ethical, less economy driven way. They must be willing to pander less to owners and sponsors, and concentrate more on educating the public by portraying stereotyped minorities in more realistic ways.

Cooke-Jackson and Hansen echo Walter Lippman’s explanation of how and why society stereotypes, which is essentially to create shortcuts of how the world is perceived in order to handle the overwhelming amount of information needed to classify individuals. Thinking in terms of types and generalities is much easier and more efficient when looking at the big picture; however, these generalities tend to get passed down from generation to generation. In 2018,

cultural types and generalities are no longer confined to pockets of communities, but disseminated through the vast network of multimedia. Cooke-Jackson and Hansen note, “Modern media have tremendous power to create and perpetuate stereotypes” (185). Because of this incredible influence over how the public views certain subcultures, the media have an ethical responsibility of portraying these subcultures as accurately as possible. Acting unethically “can result in social injustices for individuals who make up that subculture” (Cooke-Jackson 186). Most damaging of all when media support stereotypes is the likelihood of minority subcultures to assimilate (whether consciously or unconsciously) negative opinions and ideas of who they are, which in turn may create a sense of shame and condemnation. In many cases, the purpose of such imagery is to dehumanize minority subcultures.

Dehumanization is a stratagem used for centuries; “[i]ndeed, they have been in place since the first intercultural encounters and are part of a rich symbolic world developed and relied upon by Europeans and Americans” to put *others* in their place (Steuter and Wills 47). In his book, *Last Chapter*, war correspondent Ernie Pyle recounts his first impression of the Japanese people during World War II. Upon seeing Japanese Prisoners of War, or POWs, shortly after landing in the Marianas, Pyle writes:

In Europe we felt that our enemies, horrible and deadly as they were, were still people. But out here I soon gathered that the Japanese were looked upon as something subhuman and repulsive; the way some people feel about cockroaches or mice. Shortly after I arrived I saw a group of Japanese prisoners in a wire-fenced courtyard ... wrestling and laughing and talking just like normal human beings. And yet they gave me the creeps, and I wanted a mental bath after looking at them. (4)

In other words, European enemies, such as the Germans during World War II, were viewed as human beings while the Japanese were considered vermin. Even American war time propaganda perpetuated this dehumanizing view of the Japanese by printing cartoonish images of rats and mice with narrow, slanted eyes, buck teeth, and somewhere in the image would be the Japanese insignia. The metaphoric imagery was so successful at instilling fear in the American people, that internment camps were created specifically for Japanese-Americans. Further examples of dehumanization abound even in recent history – African-Americans, Latinos, and disadvantaged Southern whites – to name but a few.

Cooke-Jackson and Hansen further note, “Stereotyping cultures is one tactic dominant cultures use to implement control” (186). One good example of this tactic is how slave owners would stigmatize and vilify their slaves in order to not think of them as people (Enteman 20). Also during this time, disadvantaged whites were viewed as human only when compared to slaves. Although great strides have been made in society and government, inequalities between African-Americans and whites in general can still be found; however, blatant stereotyping of African-Americans in modern writings, movies, and television is, for the most part, deemed socially unacceptable while disadvantaged whites still seem to be fair game as they continue to be marginalized and dehumanized. In his NPR article, Eric Deggans, TV and media critic for the *Tampa Bay Times*, asks, “So why haven’t these other shows stereotyping white people seen protests just as strong [as those against negative shows of minorities]? I suspect it’s because too many folks see stereotypes as a problem mostly for people of color” (Deggans). Gurney Norman, an editor of *Back Talk from Appalachia*, criticizes Robert Schenkkan, author of the Pulitzer Prize winning play *The Kentucky Cycle*, for his negative portrayal of Appalachians. Among other

points, Norman criticizes Schenckan for “tromping on real people and the real facts of their history” (9). Norman later tells Kentucky author, Bobby Ann Mason:

America *needs* hillbillies ... Mountain people are the last group in America it is acceptable to ridicule. No one would stand for it for a minute if you took any other group – Native Americans, African Americans, Hispanics, women – and held it up as an example of everything that is low and brutal and mean. But somehow it’s OK to do that with hillbillies (Billings 9, emphasis original).

This ridiculing has a greater impact than just stereotyping, it also draws attention away from not only their magnificent and unique subculture, but also the deficiencies of basic resources such as “adequate housing, quality education, health care, and accessibility to other resources urban dwellers take for granted” (Cooke-Jackson 188). Add to this the way most media channels consistently present Appalachians and other disadvantaged whites as laughable, uneducated, sexually deviant, and violent. Even the subculture that is the center of such stereotyping most likely will begin to believe and internalize the negativity as well. Regardless of race or class, minorities who internalize negative stereotypes are more likely to be ashamed of their culture (Cooke-Jackson 186). So, with whom does the responsibility lay to interpret images in a non-stereotypical way? Does it lay with the creator of the message, or the receiver?

The media shoulders the majority of the burdens of responsibility since their messages are meant to reach as many people as possible with an intentional message. Disseminating unethical imagery has the power to influence the opinions and ideologies of audiences. But, the media cannot be held completely responsible; the public must accept its part in how far negative imagery spreads. Audiences should not take everything it sees or reads at face value, but should do their homework and educate themselves, especially when different cultures, ethnicities, or

racism are depicted in a negative or questionable manner. Most Americans may not question a story the press publishes or airs, but then most Americans may not realize that a very small cluster of corporations own many of the media outlets (news agencies, book and magazine publishers, television, and movies). The result of such concentrated ownership could have “grave consequences for democracy: concentrated ownership of media inevitably narrows the range of information and imagery that is disseminated” (Gamson et. al. 376). Information that might portray an agency’s owners in a poor light may be either not reported on at all or the full story not revealed. Coursework that studies ownership as it relates to the news and entertainment industries would be extremely beneficial to students in better analyzing what is real and what is manipulation. But news agencies are not the most popular media today.

Comic strips are one of the oldest mediums of entertainment, predating television, movies, and most recently the Internet. Comics were and still are used to graphically show both the good and bad sides of almost any society’s culture. Comics have been known to spread biased, malicious information. This negativity can best be seen in one of the earliest forms of the medium – editorial cartoons. As a teaching tool, instructors can have students consider such questions as: What is/are the implication(s) of the cartoon? Who is/was the intended audience? How would the cartoon have been received during the time period it was first published versus how it would be received in today’s time? Is it possible to deconstruct the cartoon in order to subvert the probable intended “message?” By answering such questions, students will be learning the fundamentals of critical analysis that can later be expanded upon and applied to other media forms. Educators can utilize editorial cartoons by having students analyze such aspects as how cartoonists represent minorities, racial or class differences, or those groups considered “enemies” of America.

A very common illustration is anthropomorphically drawing a symbol or an individual of the enemy. Many times this means using vermin, insects, reptiles, or any other creature the average American sees as dirty, disease riddled, evil, or vicious. Rats, insects, and snakes seem to be the favorites of illustrators. Representing the perceived enemy in a bestial, repulsive manner generally has the affect of dehumanizing the enemy; therefore, those who make up the group being editorialized no longer resemble humans. When we stop thinking of Others as human, then any disparagement or violence visited upon them can be seen not only as warranted, but justified. False imprisonment, torture, and killings are deemed acceptable. After all, rats equal disease, insects equal terrifying infestations, and snakes have almost always had the reputation of being evil and dangerous.

In relation to the South, cartoons were published portraying African-Americans as ignorant, uneducable children, incapable of taking care of themselves, thereby justifying slavery as humane and beneficial to the enslaved. This justification was necessary to the slave states since they depended so heavily on the free labor. The intent of the images was not only to convince anti-slavery activists that the enslavement of the black people was done out of compassion and kindness, but to also convince themselves of the same thing. To give up slavery would be too costly, as they would have to begin paying labor wages, not to mention the loss of the monies paid on their initial “investment.” Southern slavery propaganda would also use its imagery to denounce abolitionists as depraved individuals who encourage the “evils” of miscegenation. The intent of these types of comics was to make the audience think that any abolitionist was disgusting, and therefore should be hated. And still other cartoons portrayed them as dangerous animals, thereby justifying the horrific violence acted upon them. To counter such delusional imagery, the North would publish its own editorial cartoons showing the realities

of slavery and the people caught up in its dehumanizing grip. These cartoons showed the South treating African-Americans as nothing more than property no different than cattle, land, or household goods. They also tended to show just how self-reliant and capable the enslaved actually were.

Southern stereotyping editorial cartoons around the time of the Civil War centered on the South's exploitation of African-Americans and uncompromising determination to continue with the Agrarian culture. By the 1950's and 1960's, editorial cartoons about the South had not really changed in theme. These later editorials moved from concentrating on the South's use of slaves to their unfair, unequal treatment, and violation of the civil rights of African-Americans. These cartoons, although no doubt "politically" accurate, generalized *all* Southerners as rigid, uneducated, small minded, racists. Educators can use such editorial cartoons along with Southern history, from both the Southern and Northern viewpoints of the time. Analysis of the editorial comics in conjunction with analysis of the history will assist in revealing how many of the Southern stereotypes came to be. Such analyses and discussions can be how students begin to learn how visual imagery is used to manipulate how people think about society and its people.

Analyzing editorial comics can easily segue into the analysis of other imaginative drawings that mock the Southern working class and disadvantaged. During the early 20th century, comic strips such as Billy DeBeck's *Snuffy Smith* (1935) and Al Capp's *Li'l Abner* (1935) were immensely popular nationwide. These comics mocked Southerners, stereotyping them all as "hillbillies" who are lazy, live in run down shacks, mangle the English language, have illegal moonshine stills, gossipy wives, and a total disregard for the law (Clark). Although humorous, DeBeck's and Capp's farcical portrayal of those living in the rural South was quite harmful, even among urban Southerners. According to Thomas Hanchett, curator of the 2007 Levine Museum

exhibit “Stripped: A Revealing Look at Southern Stereotypes in Cartoons,” comics that showcased the hillbilly way of life during the 1930’s were extremely popular because of the Depression affecting all Americans. These comics of poverty-stricken mountain families offered an opportunity to laugh for those hit hardest by the infamous stock market crash (Clark). During a time of great feelings of fear and hopelessness, *Snuffy Smith* and *Li’l Abner* were much needed, albeit brief, distractions. One result of such entertaining distractions is the stereotyping of Southerners as backward, lazy, dishonest, mountaineers, a perception later fortified by television and movies.

Movies took the already harmful images of Southerners from the still life of the page to the movement of video, transferring negative thoughts of mountain folk from cartoons to living people making the stereotypes even more believable. Movies such as *Deliverance* (1972), and the *Wrong Turn* franchise (2003, 2007, 2009, 2011, 2012, 2014) set in areas considered the “deep south,” portray rural Appalachians as insane, violent, inbred rapists intent on murdering *anyone* they consider an outsider, which is anyone living outside their isolated social strata. Movies and television shows, however, are rife with surface distractions such as scenery, make up and wardrobe, and speech patterns making critical analysis more difficult than for editorial cartoons and comic strips. Building on the skills developed analyzing comics, students should begin digging below the superficial to find the deeper meaning in the setting, character appearance, and speech.

Considered to be the embodiment of all that is Southern, *Deliverance* based on the novel of the same name by James Dickey, is replete with Southern stereotypes. The story follows four, presumably affluent, men from Atlanta, Georgia, who decide to canoe down the fictional Cahulawassee River, located in the backwoods of Georgia, before the river valley is flooded by

the construction of a dam. While travelling to their launch site, the four men, Lewis, Ed, Bobby, and Drew, encounter a few of the river valley locals who are contrasted heavily against the sophisticated city boys. One of the first locals encountered is a young, mentally handicapped boy on the porch of a small country store. The appearance and actions of the boy insinuate the stereotype of incest in the South. To leave no doubt that the protagonists view the boy in a stereotypical way, Bobby mentions the “genetic deficiencies” of the locals. Later, Ed and Bobby are attacked by two “hillbilly” men, one of whom rapes Bobby while evoking one of the most well-known movie quotes, “You got a real purty [sic] mouth.” This early scene sets the tone that the residents of this rural area are uneducated, cruel, violent, and sexually deviant. A more contemporary example is the *Wrong Turn* franchise. This movie and its sequels take place in the West Virginia backwoods, but other than location, the premise of *Wrong Turn* is very similar to that of *Deliverance*: Young sophisticated city dwellers come to the West Virginia woods for a quick vacation, but for various reasons, they become stranded on an isolated road. Cue the stereotypical uneducated, violent, sexually deviant, inbred backcountry Southerner. One major difference between *Deliverance* and *Wrong Turn* is the actual characterizations of the antagonists. Where the “hillbillies” in *Deliverance* look somewhat normal, and speak clearly if not intelligibly, those in *Wrong Turn* are horribly disfigured and communicate only with grunts and gestures clearly due to years of inbreeding. Despite the fact that the characterizations of the antagonists in *Wrong Turn* are woefully farfetched, the franchise perpetuates the *idea* of rural Southerners as extremely frightening, murderous, lunatics.

Quoting Brent Brown, a cartoonist for Mountain Xpress, which is based in Asheville, North Carolina, Paul Clark writes, “A lot of people get their ideas of the South from movies like ‘Deliverance’ [sic]. Inbred rednecks descending on them in the woods fulfills [sic] their

expectations of Southerners as backwoods, toothless types. There are a lot of misperceptions, but it's an easy shorthand to figure things out quickly" (Clark). These movies, and others similar to them, have the potential to instill fear and loathing in viewers, especially those with little to no chance of ever meeting an actual person or people from the locations depicted. Individuals who have long generational ties to these locations run the risk of shame and humiliation, feeling that the public view of nearly all Southern mountaineers are not just menacing and repulsive, but also comedy fodder, a laughingstock. Deeper analyses of these movies, though, subvert and disrupt the stereotypes of rural Southerners by revealing just how poor and depressed the region truly is.

In their article, "Appalachian Culture and Reality TV: The Ethical Dilemma of Stereotyping Others," Angela Cooke-Jackson and Elizabeth K. Hansen write, "Appalachian people have been described as ignorant, lazy, uneducated, and incestuous, when in reality they live in poor, depressed regions far from access to quality resources such as grocery stores, employment opportunities, or quality health care" (187). For example, *Wrong Turn* and its sequels all juxtapose the sophisticated, educated suburbanites against rural mountain dwellers. The suburbanites (the outsiders) represent the ideal, elite, privileged, primarily white upper class; they are stylishly dressed, well educated, and physically fit. On the other hand the rural "hillbilly" family (the outcasts) represents the surreal, underprivileged refuse of society. Where the outsiders have the luxury of purchasing all of their needs from shopping centers, the outcasts live in the woods and depend on archaic weapons to hunt and kill their food. The healthy outsiders have perfect teeth, perfect hair, and flawless skin. The outcasts, however, are hideously deformed, nearly toothless, have stringy, greasy hair, and sallow skin. Comparing the perfect to the imperfect in the context of society as a whole, *Wrong Turn* and its sequels can be construed

by analytical viewers as a movie about class struggle instead of the predictable stereotypical Southern, backwoods redneck “slasher” film.

The fact that media present poor Southern whites in such a predictable way is why younger generations must be taught that truth is subjective; judgment should be reserved until all the facts are known. Using examples of both ethical and unethical media reports, educators can instruct young people on how to become well versed in spotting the difference. Editorial cartoons and comic strips can be used to teach the power of imagery, while news media and films can be used to represent marginalized cultures in a positive light, works that reflect both the differences and *similarities* among these marginalized, diverse cultures in relation to the wealthy white class. The only hope of ending persistent stereotypes is to expose young people to both the positive and perceived negative aspects of all cultures. The most important lesson to learn is that while *some* people in a group do live up to the stereotypes, they do not and should not be applied to the whole. Finally, today’s technology can be, and should be, used to reach out to the world. Through web connections, students not only across America, but also across the planet, can “travel” the world from their own classrooms. Students must learn to seek the truth for themselves instead of letting anyone else, especially media outlets, tell them what and how to think or perceive “Others.”

Chapter 3: No Longer Playing the Shame Game

By 1865, the Civil War had dragged on for four long, agonizing, bloody years. Southern slaves began abandoning their masters and the fields, which threatened the starvation of the Confederacy. General Lee quickly surrendered after seeing that his only two options were to: 1.) free the slaves; use them to fight the North, and promise never to treat them as bondsmen again, or 2.) surrender with the supposition that the North would help defend their right to own slaves, as it had done before. Lee, supposing correctly, surrendered, and for the next one hundred years, the North allowed, and in most cases judicially supported, the South's continued master-like grip over the black race (Zinn). Within the Southern region, control of African-American lives was taken from the hand of the individual and given to the states' governing bodies. Through the advent of the Jim Crow Laws, spreading propaganda throughout the white communities, and tagging the black race, especially black women, as the root of America's social and economic problems, the white political majorities continued to keep Southern African-Americans shackled by shame (Harris-Perry).

In *Sister Citizen: Shame, Stereotypes, and Black Women in America* (2011), Melissa Harris-Perry notes that shaming differs from guilt in that "guilt is focused on bad acts" while shame "proclaim[s] that the person herself or himself is defective" (108). She further explains that shame comes in two forms: Reintegrative, considered a somewhat positive shaming that comes about within the "context of loving and respectful relationships," and stigmatizing, the negative, injurious form of shaming intended to "label [individuals] as outcasts" (107). Dissemination of propaganda in advertisements, books, movies, songs, and even games and toys portrayed African-Americans as lazy, deviant, childlike fools, violent savages, thieves, and rapists, stigmatizing them through white scrutiny of communal black actions, which led to

stereotyping. This stigmatizing and stereotyping of African-Americans instilled fear in the minds of white society primarily fear of violence against their women and fear of “inferior” black blood mixing with “superior” white blood. The propaganda and fear paved the way for the political goal of disenfranchising the Southern black community and their personal goal of dehumanizing the race to assure white supremacy, enabling them to pass segregation, anti-miscegenation, and the Jim Crow laws. The passing of these laws surely far surpass any expectations of these small-minded, supercilious men, for although today schools and public businesses are no longer segregated, interracial relationships are common occurrences, and Jim Crow laws have been abolished, evidence exists that African-Americans still carry a sense of “otherness” brought on by a feeling of shame, which has been instilled, consciously or unconsciously, within the black culture generation after generation since the days of slavery. Shame, even today, is culturally, economically, and, above all else, *politically* motivated.

Political shaming of whole groups based on identity alone influences social judgment of those groups, which then develop into stereotypes. Since the time of American colonialism, African-American women have been stereotyped as lazy, irresponsible, sexually promiscuous, immoral, dishonest, ignorant, overbearing, and, more recently, solely responsible for the degeneration of their race. To negate the stigmatizing affects of shame, one must experience positive role models and situations to nurture a healthy self-esteem (Harris-Perry). One method to achieve this is through literature with strong, positive, African-American protagonists in real settings, subverting and deconstructing the stereotypes that have permeated society. This chapter will discuss two such pieces of literature: Zora Neale Hurston’s *Their Eyes Were Watching God* (1937) and Delores Phillips’ *The Darkest Child* (2004). Both of these works, written by African-American women about African-American women, avoid pandering to white expectations and

undermine stereotypes by juxtaposing positive heroines against antagonists who represent Southern Agrarians, white supremacists, and the patriarchal society.

During the 1920s and 1930s, the Harlem Renaissance, a cultural, social, and artistic movement, was started in Harlem, New York. The movement is generally characterized by its conspicuous racial pride that manifested itself through the creation of art, music, and literature, which openly questioned, confronted, and opposed the racial stereotypes that saturated black communities and cultures. Supporters of the movement sought to advance their own political plans, which included racial and social integration, and to inspire and revive the African-American race (History, A Brief Guide, Wall). In 1937, toward the end of the Harlem Renaissance, Hurston's seminal novel, *Their Eyes Were Watching God*, was published and met with extreme criticism from some Renaissance supporters such as W.E.B. Du Bois who felt that Hurston's work was counterproductive to the movement. But, Hurston wrote what she knew and what she experienced; she was not interested in creating "idealized societies in which to promote [a] political agenda...She wrote of her people." She did not want to show her people as oppressed, powerless, helpless, or defeated, but physically, psychologically, and spiritually healthy and thriving, with dynamic traditions, brilliant creative visions, and inventiveness. Writing from her own experiences brought a sense of realism to her characters and settings, negating societies' stereotypes of "her people" (Bevill 3).

Hurston has also been accused of "'play[ing] shameless' to rich whites who fancied themselves the champions and guardians of 'black vitality'" (Delbanco 106). One such critic, Richard Wright, called Hurston's work "'naïve 'Uncle Tomming'" (Bevill 2). In his review of *Their Eyes*, Wright maintains that Hurston persists with the conventional, racist view of African-Americans developed through "the minstrel technique that makes the 'white folks' laugh;"

keeping her characters safe within the realm where white-America feels most comfortable when it comes to black society: “between laughter and tears” (Wright 25). However, what Wright, and other critics like him, failed to appreciate about Hurston’s work was that it was actually very similar to their own in that it was written from an African-American perspective, but an African-American *female* perspective. In *Dust Tracks on a Road* (1942), Hurston writes, “[...] from what I had read and heard, Negroes were supposed to write about the Race Problem. I was and am thoroughly sick of the subject. My interest lies in what makes a man or a woman do such-and-so, regardless of his color” (171). This assertion is clearly visible in *Their Eyes Were Watching God*, a novel less concerned with race relations, and more concerned with personal, human relations. Creating an even more personal narrative, Hurston blends aspects of her own particular history, including her fortunate vantage point as eyewitness to the development of the first all black, self-governing community.

On January 10, 1861, delegates meeting in Tallahassee, Florida, voted to secede from the United States, becoming one of the original six Southern states to form the Confederate States of America. In 1887, twenty-two years after the American Civil War ended, Eatonville, Florida, a unique small town six miles north of Orlando, incorporated. What made Eatonville unique was the fact that it is one of the first all African-American, self-governing municipalities in the United States. Contributing further to the uniqueness of Eatonville is the fact that this all black, self-governing town managed to survive Jim Crow, the Great Depression, and the Civil Rights movement of the 1960s, times in American history known as the most turbulent and violent times for African-Americans.

Zora Neale Hurston was among the more notable residents of Eatonville, which was a culturally supportive community where neither Hurston, nor any other African-American

community member, need fear being inculcated as a subordinate or second-class citizen. In *Speak, So You Can Speak Again*, Hurston's niece, Lucy Anne Hurston, writes,

In Eatonville there was little hierarchy of race and class and no segregation or discrimination based on superficial matters such as skin color and hair texture...the people in authority looked like their fellow citizens and dealt lovingly with them. The children were thus allowed to thrive with a sense of pride and security that was denied to many black people in the South. (Beauchamp 75)

With a population of only 125 at the 1900 U.S. Decennial Census, strong, positive black role models, both male and female, surrounded Hurston, everywhere she looked and everywhere she went in Eatonville. Her father, John Hurston, and other black men established the first laws that governed the town. Her mother, Lucy Potts Hurston, and other black women were charged with directing the Christian study programs at the two churches in town. Neighbors and relatives could be seen visiting with each other on front porches and at the village store – relaxed, happy, and comfortable, exchanging lives and experiences through bold and imaginative stories – and young Zora, fortunate to be a part of such a community, absorbed every aspect of it.

One cannot argue that Hurston's life in Eatonville contributed to her abundance of self-assurance and assertiveness, but it also sheltered her from the cruel reality of the outside world. In her autobiography, *Dust Tracks on a Road*, Hurston attributes her self-confidence, outgoing personality, and high-spirited nature to her mother who “exhorted her children at every opportunity to ‘jump at de sun,’” but her father did not share her mother's optimism. With regards to her father, Hurston wrote:

It did not do for Negroes to have too much spirit. He was always threatening to break mine or kill me in the attempt...[Mama] conceded that I was impudent and given to

talking back, but she didn't want to 'squinch my spirit' too much for fear that I would turn out to be a mealy-mouthed rag doll by the time I got grown...[Papa] predicted dire things for me. The white folks were not going to stand for it. (13)

Despite John Hurston's threats and predictions, after leaving Eatonville and working several menial jobs, Zora would eventually go on to study anthropology at Barnard College and receive her degree from Howard University. Following graduation, she travelled extensively in the American South and Caribbean researching cultural practices. Much of her fictional writing was guided by her observations while on her anthropological travels.

Fortunate to live as part of an all black community that governed themselves, Hurston's favorite place in town was the store porch where the townspeople would often gather to talk and tell stories. She wrote in *Dust Tracks on a Road*, "For me, the store porch was the most interesting place that I could think of. I was not allowed to sit around there, naturally" (46). Yet she still felt a sense of loneliness and isolation: "always I stood apart within. Often I was in some lonesome wilderness...A cosmic loneliness was my shadow" (43). Hurston wrote these same feelings into Janie Mae Crawford, the protagonist in *Their Eyes Were Watching God*, creating a positive heroine. In *Render Me My Song: African-American Women Writers from Slavery to the Present* (1990), Sandi Russell writes, "[...] Janie Crawford is the first black woman in American fiction who is not stereotyped as either a slut, a 'tragic mulatta', a mammy or a victim of racist oppression;" instead, Janie is an encouraging, confident role model, both as an African-American and female (Russell 40). As such, Hurston develops Janie's character from one of objectivity to one of subjectivity. Hurston's ability to write Janie in such a way is due in part to Hurston's own environment that gives her the courage to defy stereotypes in an attempt to foster positivity in those who may not have been as fortunate as she.

From Nanny to Logan Killicks to Joe Starks, Janie is treated as nothing more than an object, just some *thing* to own. But when the younger Tea Cake enters the picture, Janie stops being just an object of the world and finally becomes a subject, an emancipated equal with her male partner. Janie's journey is a pilgrimage of self-discovery, but for Hurston, Janie's journey is a mode of deconstructing the binary oppositions of race, class, and gender. Nanny, Logan, and Joe objectify Janie and represent the privileging of white over black, aristocrat over working class, and male over female, while her relationship with Tea Cake disrupts these binary oppositions by Hurston putting Janie and Tea Cake on equal ground.

Nanny sets Janie's feet on the path that will lead to her eventual liberation by forcing Janie to marry Logan Killicks. When Janie defies her, Nanny "violently" slaps Janie's face and tells her, "'the white man is de ruler of everything as fur as Ah been able tuh find out... So de white man throw down de load and tell de nigger man tuh pick it up... but he don't tote it. He hand it to his womanfolks. De nigger woman is de mule uh de world so fur as Ah can see. Ah been prayin' fuh it tuh be different wid you'" (14).

Nanny's brutal actions characterize her as a domineering, authority figure in Janie's life; her follow up commentary proves to foreshadow the years of domination and ownership Janie is facing at the hands of her future husbands. Logan intends to make Janie his mule. Joe, on the other hand, develops into "the white man... de ruler of everything;" he desires only to possess and control everyone and everything around him, including Janie.

By forcing Janie to marry Logan, Nanny is transferring ownership of her granddaughter to an older man with the largest farm in the county, like one slave owner to another. Nanny's prophecy is soon fulfilled as Logan leaves one morning to purchase a second mule to run a second plow, finding one "'all gentled up so even uh woman kin handle 'im'" (27). The

implication is quite clear, Logan intends for Janie to work his fields. He also demands obedience from Janie, echoing the voices of the aristocratic Old South when he says, ““You ain’t got no particular place. It’s wherever Ah need yuh. Git uh move on yuh, and dat quick”” (31). In the short time that Janie and Logan are together (less than a year), Logan occupies not only the privileged role of male, but also aristocrat and Master, which combines to symbolize the Old Southern white race. However, like the slaves of the Old South, Janie too is liberated. At first, her liberator is the ambitious Joe Starks, who plucks her from Logan Killicks’ farm and plants her in Florida; however, Janie soon learns that she has only traded one Master for another. Many years will pass before Janie actually meets her true liberator with the help of Vergible “Tea Cake” Woods, her true liberator being Janie herself.

Janie and Joe run away together to Hurston’s fictional Eatonville. Soon after, Janie learns of Joe’s big plans for the town and finds herself enslaved by a misogynistic symbol of the industrialized New South. The industrialized New South is characterized by the assumption that mill owners, like plantation owners before them,

...were ‘benefactors,’ saving the poor from a life of extreme depravation and providing for their needs with low-paying jobs, low-rent housing, and a company store...taking care of the workers, maintaining the paternalistic system...put into place by the plantation owners in the Old South...[believing] the workers were actually ‘like children, and we have to take care of them’ (Carr 37).

Joe views the citizens of Eatonville as “idle, chattering time wasters, unambitious and pathetic” and can be said to represent this paternalistic system of the New South (Beauchamp 79). This representation is demonstrated when Joe, after finding out Eatonville has no mayor, asks a group of men: “Well, who tells y’all what to do?” One resident responds by saying, “Nobody.

Everybody's grown," to which Joe replies in a deriding tone, "No wonder things ain't no better" (35). The response by the resident that "Everybody's grown," is completely dismissed by Joe, who looks at these men as if they are still children. His first order of business is to put the men to work carving out two roads into Eatonville and building him a town store.

Joe, putting the men of the town to work doing his bidding, mirrors the views of such men as author John Gould Fletcher (1886-1950) whose essay "Education, Past and Present" appears in *I'll Take My Stand*, a collection of essays written by a staunch group of Southern Agrarian supporters. Fletcher writes, "The inferior...should exist only for the sake of the superior" (119). For Fletcher and other Agrarians like him, those who were inferior included all minorities and women. That is to say, if one was not a European white male, his or her only purpose for living was to serve his or her betters. Since Hurston has not provided a detailed background on Joe, speculations must be made as to how he absorbed his white mentality. One assumption could be made that perhaps Joe was raised in the North where African-American and white relations were more tolerated; therefore, Joe could have possibly been in close contact with the white community affording him the ability to affect white attitudes and mannerisms. During the twenty years that Joe rules over Eatonville, he obviously believes himself to be in an elite, almost aristocratic, class all his own:

Take for instance that new house of his. It had two stories with porches, with banisters and such things. The rest of the town looked like servants' quarters surrounding the "big house." [...] And look at the way he painted it – a gloaty, sparkly white. The kind of promenading white that the houses of Bishop Whipple, W.B. Jackson and the Vanderpool's wore. (47)

Joe's house is large and superior while the surrounding homes are like "villages that resembled the slave quarters of old" (Carr 36). Securing his position as Mayor of the town fulfills his desire to be a "big man" and as such, no wife of his is going to demean him by condescending herself to the discussions of the townspeople. Because Janie will be known as Mrs. Mayor, Joe "didn't want her talking after such trashy people"(54). He is concerned only with how he thinks the town perceives him.

Joe's elitist attitude causes the women of the town to view Janie as arrogant and self-important, which in turn causes Janie to feel isolated and separate from the other women: "Janie soon began to feel the impact of awe of envy against her sensibilities. The wife of the Mayor was not just another woman as she had supposed. She slept with authority and so she was part of it in the town mind. She couldn't get but so close to most of them in spirit" (46). Like Hurston herself, Janie feels an overwhelming sense of isolation and loneliness. The only time she seems to find happiness and feel a part of the community is on the store porch listening to the others as they argue and tell stories; however, Joe always pulls her away, forcing her back into her place.

Along with the Southern Agrarian aristocracy, Joe also represents the misogynistic patriarchal society, psychologically enslaving Janie by controlling her appearance, actions, and voice. One of the first changes to Janie's appearance that Joe insists upon is making Janie wear a head-rag to cover her best feature, her hair. He did not want anyone else to admire her: "She was there in the store for *him* to look at, not those others;" she was there to serve his needs (55). At the dedication of the new town store, Joe dictated to her that she was to "dress up," that "he didn't mean for nobody else's wife to rank with her" (41). Hurston's use of the word "rank" here when relaying Joe's thoughts has a dual meaning. One connotation of rank in this context can be that Joe believes Janie is more beautiful than any other woman in town; her dress should reflect

this fact. The second connotation, the one most in line with Joe's character, is that he does not want Janie dressing like a commoner, but like his queen among their loyal subjects.

During the celebration of the store opening, the people prevail upon "Mist' Starks" to make a speech. When Joe was finished, one of the townspeople said, "And now we'll listen tuh uh few words uh encouragement from Mrs. Mayor Starks," but before Janie could even react, Joe steps forward and quickly makes a typical misogynist comment: "Thank yuh fuh yo' compliments, but mah wife don't know nothin' 'bout no speech-makin'. Ah never married her for nothin' lak dat. She's uh woman and her place is in de home" (43). Joe has essentially taken control of every aspect of Janie's outward existence, something that Janie may or may not have continued to tolerate. But, Joe not allowing her to make up her own mind on whether or not she wanted to make a speech is a turning point for Janie in her feelings toward her new husband: "It must have been the way Joe spoke out without giving her a chance to say anything one way or another that took the bloom off of things" (43). Disappointment begins to cloud her happiness. Her first marriage to Logan Killicks had been forced upon her and had been dreadfully oppressive as he used her to work his farm and for his own pleasures. Now Joe, too, it seems, sees Janie as only an object to be admired like a pretty, but empty vase of very little value.

Although Janie allows Joe to control her outward self, she never gives up her inner self to him. In this way, Hurston negates yet another stereotype, that women are weak and incapable of thought. When Janie is ready, Hurston breaks the metaphorical chains that have allowed Joe to enslave Janie for so long. The tool Hurston gives her for this purpose is the very tool Joe tried to suppress twenty years before – Janie's own voice. First, she tells some of the townsmen, "[...]how surprised y'all is going' tuh be if you ever find out you don't know half as much 'bout us [women] as you think you do. It's so easy to make yo'self out God Almighty when you ain't

got nothin' tuh strain against but women and chickens'" (75). Later, Janie delivers the coup de grâce directly to Joe himself with the same townsmen as witness, finally taking advantage of the opportunity to deliver a speech:

Naw, Ah ain't no young gal no mo' but den Ah ain't no old woman neither. Ah reckon Ah looks mah age too. But Ah'm uh woman every inch of me, and Ah know it. Dat's uh whole lot more'n *you* kin say. You bit-bellies round here and put out a lot of brag, but 'tain't nothin' to it but yo' big voice. Humph! Talkin' 'bout *me* lookin' old! When you pull down yo' britches, you look lak de change uh life. (79)

Her speech makes more of an impact than Janie ever imagined, robbing Joe of "his illusion of irresistible maleness that all men cherish...she had cast down his empty armor before men and they had laughed" (79). Joe dies shortly afterward, and as his widow, Janie inherits his wealth and becomes the sole proprietor of the town store, the hub of all activity in Eatonville. By having Janie speak her mind and placing her as the head of Eatonville, Hurston has effectively reversed the misogynistic privileging of man over woman, thus negating or rejecting stereotypes and providing a female protagonist with characteristics in which young girls (perhaps black girls in particular) can identify with, look up to, and aspire to obtain.

Soon inundated with suitors, both locally and from out of town, Janie is in no hurry to marry again and come under the rule of another man. She burns every one of her head-rags, officially ridding herself of the self-perceived physical symbol of her shackles. Now she experiences a different type of lonesomeness when going home at night, one she did not mind because "[t]his freedom feeling was fine" (90). At long last she is free to dress as she pleases and speak as she pleases, joining in with the men on the store porch as they talk and laugh. She does not even care how inappropriate her actions appear to the townspeople, who feel she should still

be in mourning and not enjoying her life: “‘Tain’t that Ah worries over Joe’s death...Ah jus’ loves dis freedom...Let ‘em say whut dey wants tuh...To my thinkin’ mourning oughtn’t tuh last no longer’n grief” (93). Hurston has freed Janie from the oppressive, patriarchal, New South white supremacy political ruling system, but she still has yet to fully understand and appreciate the true value of that freedom.

One day, not long after Joe’s death, a familiar looking, yet unknown young man stops in at the store while Janie is all alone. The two engage in small talk, then the stranger challenges Janie to a game of checkers. She admits she does not know how to play, to which the young man, much to Janie’s surprise, offers to teach her. She was thrilled “[s]omebody wanted her to play. Somebody thought it natural for her to play. That was even nice” (96). Someone was looking beyond the walls of the store, past the fancy house, below the surface of “Mrs. Mayor Starks,” to finally see Janie as a person, a person who just might want to play a simple game of checkers. Thus began Janie’s attraction to Mr. Vergible “Dey calls me Tea Cake for short” Woods, the man who would become her third and final husband (97). Tea Cake “encourages her to act on her new found freedom,” not only teaching her to play checkers, but also how to fish and shoot a gun, activities “previously the prerogative[s] of men only” (Beauchamp 83). With Tea Cake at her side, Janie builds the confidence necessary to shed the cocoon of gender stereotypes and complete her transformation into a strong-willed woman who refuses to conform to tyrannical, unendurable social expectations. Sadly, Janie and Tea Cake’s happy union lasts only a few years, ending when Janie is forced to kill Tea Cake, who is infected with rabies, in order to save her own life. As heartbreaking as Tea Cake’s death is, it is what releases Janie from all forms of patriarchal imprisonment.

After Tea Cake dies, it is a non-conforming, resolute Janie Woods who returns to Eatonville. The townspeople, still mired in their small minded, judgmental ethos, perceive Janie to be passing by in shame based primarily on the way she is dressed: “What she doin coming back here in dem overalls? Can’t she find no dress to put on? – Where’s dat blue satin dress she left here in” (2)? Like most who contribute to stereotyping, the residents of Eatonville, especially the women, make superficial assumptions about Janie based on her outward appearance. And, if they are not able to get the “gossip” straight from the source, they have no qualms about reaching their own conclusions, or as Janie says, “people like dem wastes up too much time puttin’ they mouf on things they don’t know nothin’ about” (6). If these gossipy hens were truly interested in Janie’s story, as her friend Phoeby is, they, like Phoeby, could begin their own transformation: “‘Lawd!’ Phoeby breathed out heavily, ‘Ah done growed ten feet higher from jus’ listenin’ tuh you, Janie. Ah ain’t satisfied wid mahself no mo’. Ah means tuh make Sam take me fishin’ wid him after this. Nobody better not criticize yuh in mah hearin’” (192). Janie is serving as a positive role model to Phoeby. Both women come from similar backgrounds and have lived within the same misogynistic community, but Janie went “outside” and found out about living for herself. With this knowledge safely in hand, she will be able to once again live in Eatonville without fear of ever having to surrender herself to the authoritarian confines of a patriarchal ruler. With the sweet memory of Tea Cake forever in her mind, Janie is now at peace, a free woman at last.

Like Hurston, Delores Phillips negates stereotypes through a positive heroine in her stirring novel, *The Darkest Child*. Phillips tells her story from the viewpoint of Tangy Mae Quinn, a 14-year old African-American girl growing up in Georgia during the latter years of the 1950s. Phillips takes a creative approach in showing the racism, cruelty, and abuse endured by

most Southern black communities and the very beginnings of speaking out against such treatment. Tangy's home life parallels that of Southern white supremacist societies, while trips outside her home parallel the beginnings of the Civil Rights movement where African-Americans are given a voice to the hypocrisies and injustices they face on a daily basis.

Rozelle "Rosie" Quinn, matriarch of the Quinn household, which includes Tangy Mae and her nine brothers and sisters, all with different fathers, may have been African-American, but many mistook her for white because of her cream-colored skin, thick flowing auburn hair, and dark gray eyes. As such, Rosie comes to represent the white majority, acting out the social norms of the time period within their home that were present within their society. She is cruel, abusive, and racist, favoring her "white" children over her "black" children and her sons over her daughters. However, no matter how favorable she may treat one child over another, she still sees them all as nothing more than her property and existing only to serve her needs. None of them, including Rosie's grown sons, can "*just leave* [their] mother's house. Departure required consideration of consequences and a carefully planned escape" (Phillips 1). Tangy and her siblings felt they were being held captive, much like their enslaved ancestors before them. Leaving Rosie would prove almost as difficult as slaves fleeing their masters.

Rosie is further shown to be the metaphorical white society in constantly questioning or commenting on the shame of her older daughters, but refusing to acknowledge any shameful actions of her own: "She allowed our actions to shame her, and yet she was void of shame" (Phillips 122). For example, she angrily asks Tangy, "Did you go out and shame me for a bottle of gin," but then pimps her daughters out at the local whorehouse and does not care who knows, including Mr. Pace, Tangy's teacher: "He say they willing to give you pay if you go to that white school. I asked him how much he was willing to pay, but he wouldn't tell me. So I told

him you can't go but he can see you out at Frances's place any night he takes a notion'" (102, 295). Tangy is mortified to know that her teacher, a person she greatly respects and admires, knows what she has been doing out at the farmhouse. The thought never occurs to her that the shame is not hers, but Rosie's.

Shame can cause an individual to question his or her own worth, but when a community or society causes a specific group to feel shame (which can be done through stereotyping), the consequences of worthlessness spread beyond the intended specific group, like a particular race, and infect intersectional groups, such as the poor, women, or the disabled. Rosie's white physical traits and male domineering ways lend her an air of superiority at home that she lacks when in town where she is an inferior, African-American, unemployed, single mother of ten. Her subservient status within the white community is confirmed when she takes Tangy to the home of the wealthy Griggs, owners of the local furniture store, with the intention of Tangy becoming their cleaning girl. Upon knocking on the Griggs' door, Rosie is at first greeted respectfully by one of the Griggs' boys: "'Can I help you, ma'am?'" But when Rosie introduces Tangy as her daughter and the boy realizes Rosie is actually black, his demeanor and attitude completely changes to one of disdain and disgust:

'You're a nigger?' he asked... 'Every five minutes another bunch of you niggers come knocking on this door. What do you think we are?'

Without warning, he shoved open the screen door. The frame of the door caught Mama on one side of her face. She staggered back and sat heavily on the top step, and I saw a crimson teardrop appear at the outer corner of one beautiful gray eye.

(200)

Rosie's manipulative, violent threats were never nearly as effective with the white community as they were with the African-American community and her family. When her son, Sam, was arrested on suspicion of murder, her white appearance held no sway with the law to get Sam released. She was not even able to convince a white lawyer to take her case without first allowing him to use Tangy for his sexual pleasure as payment.

Regardless of what had to be done, as long as Rosie got her way, it did not matter how it was accomplished. Rosie's feeling of superiority at home exempts her from her own shameful behavior "because only the inferior can feel ashamed," which is why "[s]haming is a profoundly modern exercise of power" (Harris-Perry 112). Rosie uses shame as a means of controlling the small social sphere of her house. But, when Tangy ventures outside her home, she comes into contact with positive, encouraging individuals who open her eyes and mind to the possibilities of a life outside the shameful stereotypes being imposed on her and her race.

The Jim Crow laws that were enacted forced African-Americans to affect a literal stance of shame when in the presence of white people. They were expected to hang their heads with their eyes downcast and avoid touching any white person, especially in public. When Tangy Mae enters the Post Office to mail a letter, Mr. Nesbitt, the Post Master, treats her like she's ignorant, reminding her she has to pay for a stamp: "I already had the pennies in my hand, having been to the post office a hundred times and knowing full well I could not send a letter for free. He had waited on me the same hundred times and was well aware I knew the price of a stamp" (21). Mr. Nesbitt would not take Tangy Mae's pennies directly from her hand, but gruffly demanded she put them on the counter. Tangy Mae struggles with her anger, but continues to hold her expected stance of shame: "For a second or two I stood there staring down, knowing it would be considered impertinent of me to make eye contact" (22). By demeaning African-Americans, the

white majority could continue their feeling of superiority. The forbidding of African-Americans to touch any white person was intended to instill in American society the belief that all blacks were filthy and contaminated and should be kept segregated from whites.

Segregating public facilities sent the message to both the black and white races that blacks were harbors of infectious diseases that could spread to the white community: “Fears of miscegenation underscored the belief that blackness was a contagious disease that had to be quarantined. Separate and unequal public accommodations...gave substance to the infectious undesirability of black people...segregation was necessary for the comfort of whites” (Harris-Perry 111). When African-Americans began to demand equal treatment, opposition to segregation is where they would make their first stand. Some well known stands include: Rosa Parks refusing to give her bus seat to a white passenger; the “Greensboro Four,” later known as the “A&T Four,” sitting at a white only lunch counter, refusing to leave until they received service; and the “Selective Buying Campaign” in Birmingham, Alabama. In *The Darkest Child*, Junior Fess, friend of Tangy’s brother Sam, is the first voice Tangy hears speaking out against injustice and segregation: “[...] I went to the other policemen in that clubhouse they call a jail...One of them told me that the United States Constitution gave Chad Lowe the right to bear arms.’ Junior paused. ‘I asked him if it gave me the same right. He...told me to try it and see’” (60). Later, Junior, Sam, and some other young men of Pakersfield, discuss plans for drinking from the fountain at the courthouse, an extremely rebellious act by any African-American.

The words Tangy hears Junior Fess speak to her brother and his friends resonate with her. When she sees him again a few months later, he further encourages her to continue seeking knowledge: “‘There’re not enough books on the shelves of all the schools and libraries in this county to feed your hunger. You need more, and you’ll never find it here’” (134). This same

encouragement is later echoed and supported by her teacher, Mr. Pace: “‘I’ve been looking over college material trying to decide what to give you,’ he said. ‘I think I’ll give it all to you and let you make the decision as to where you’d like to go’” (253). These words are vastly important to the ears of any African-American of the late 1950s, but even more important to a poor, African-American female in the South. Phillips’ portrayal of Tangy as a smart, inquisitive, poor, black female with such supportive male figures invalidates the stereotypes against both her race and gender.

Despite the prejudices of her town and Rosie’s cruel, hateful, selfish nature that eventually turns all of her children against her— one will even attempt to kill her—, Tangy Mae rises above society’s expectations. Full of hope and possibility, she and her younger sister board a bus; the only clue to their destination is when Tangy tells her sister, “We’re crossing the Georgia state line” (386). This statement speaks to the references made throughout the novel to Rosie’s inability to ever cross the Georgia state line and leave her past behind her, but Tangy is proving to her mother, her family, her community, but most of all, to herself, that she is stronger than Rosie and could leave the shame and self-loathing behind. With an optimistic eye toward an uncertain, yet open future, Tangy’s departure from Pakersfield is symbolic of her refusal to submit to society’s preconceived expectations not only of her as a female, but also as the darkest child. Just as Janie Crawford found her strength and path to freedom deep within herself then conveys that knowledge to her best friend Pheoby Watson, so too Tangy intends to lead her young sister, Laura, down a path to her own freedom.

Both Hurston and Phillips have developed strong, positive African-American female characters. In Janie and Tangy, other African-Americans and females can learn that they do not have to allow their environment or the thoughts and views of others to define who they are or can

be. Janie and Tangy are also exemplary representations to model non-stereotypical characteristics to those who have not had an opportunity or appreciated the opportunity to understand and empathize with the appalling, objectionable, and unfair treatment suffered by women and African-Americans. They can teach students the importance of critical analysis in rejecting negative stereotypes and refusing to play the shame game.

Chapter 4: Taking Out the “Trash”

Author Dorothy Allison is all too familiar with being a part of the marginalized and dehumanized American sub-culture of disadvantaged Southern whites. Her writings reveal what life in this sub-culture is like from an actual insider’s viewpoint. Her works, both fiction and non-fiction, show her struggles with the feelings of shame, embarrassment, indignity, and humiliation. A bastard child of a teen mother, Allison was raised in a desperately poor environment where men were men and women knew their place. Women who forget were quickly reminded with fists and feet. Writing from personal experience, Allison’s stories are honest and authentic; her fictional characters are modeled after her and her family. In “Lecture II. What It Means to Be Free” given at Stanford University in 2001, Allison says of her childhood:

Growing up poor in the American south in the 1950s, I had every reason to develop a conviction that nothing I did would ever be admirable or even acceptable. [...] Growing up with a sense of being an outlaw, a member of a despised and violent class, tended to push me in the direction of greater violence, sharper resentments, and angrier expressions of outrage. (319).

These feelings of inadequacy and stubborn desire to be exactly what she thought her society had already labeled her comes through loud and clear in many of her stories. Her best known work is *Bastard Out of Carolina* (1992), a semi-biographical, insider’s view of what it is to be “white-trash” as seen through the eyes of her young protagonist, Ruth Anne “Bone” Boatwright. Bone tells her story of life with an abusive stepfather (both physically and sexually), a mother who cannot bring herself to leave him, and her family, loving toward her, but despised by the town of Greenville, South Carolina, during the 1950’s. Allison’s voice is clear as her pain and strength,

both physical and emotional, is transferred to the page through Bone. She further celebrates the women in her family as the source of her strength while the men are admired, and feared, for their tough, violent ways. The genuineness of her characters lends credence to her story, making it a reliable insider's view of the desperately poor. Her works make an excellent bridge between those who have lived similar lives and those who may have looked down on them. The realism of Allison's work gives students a chance to experience the life of a poor, white outcast. For some, Allison's work is validation that they are not alone and that it is all right to be who they are. For others, it is an opportunity to see into a world that they may have only caught a glimpse into through farcical, or stereotypical movies and television. For those who have not personally experienced such a life, it is an opportunity to stop compartmentalizing and categorizing those who are different.

Why do humans feel such an overwhelming need to categorize *everything* in their world? They categorize to make processing all the information encountered on a daily basis easier. Categorizing is slightly more acceptable when categorizing things or concepts but still problematic in general. Again, this would not be an issue if the categorizing did not lead to the generalization of people. Categorizing people is usually based on class, race, gender, sexual preference, job, or family members (hence the phrase "guilty by association"), to name a few. Of all the categories, though, the one *not* to be slotted into is any that carries with it a stigma, one that makes a person different from the "norm." In her essay, "A Question of Class," Allison writes: "I have tried to understand the politics of *they*, why human beings fear and stigmatize the different while secretly dreading that they might be one of the different themselves. Class, race, sexuality, gender – and all the other categories by which we categorize and dismiss each other – need to be excavated from the inside" (35, italics author's)

Since society seems to be unable or unwilling to stop the incessant classification, then those who are denigrated must refuse to accept the labels placed on them. Refuse to believe that others are better because of money or social status. Refuse to be invisible. Allison further writes, “I learned as a child ... that those who cannot change their own lives have every reason to be ashamed of that fact and to hide it. ... Why had I always believed us contemptible by nature” (“Question” 32). Fortunately, Allison’s strongest attribute, her stubbornness, empowered her to see beyond the contempt of others into the most admirable aspects of herself, her family, and her disadvantaged youth.

This introspection is well illustrated in *Bastard Out of Carolina* as Bone struggles throughout her young life to overcome her shame and becoming what society expects of her, as many from the same background do. Bone narrates, “I had nothing to be proud of, and I hated Aunt Raylene’s jokes that we were all peasant stock” (206). Watching *Gone With the Wind*, Bone wanted to be Scarlett O’Hara, but believes she will be no more than Emmy Slattery whose family is dirt poor and lives in the swamp: “Emma [sic] Slattery, I thought. That’s who I’d be, that’s who we were ... I was part of the trash down in the mud-stained cabins, fighting with the darkies and stealing ungratefully from our betters, stupid, coarse, born to shame and death. I shook with indignation” (206). Stereotyping disadvantaged whites causes Bone, and many others like her in the non-fictional world, to project the shameful stigma from fictional characters onto themselves. Many times those being stigmatized can only see the negatives that society tends to see without ever looking outside that scope to the overwhelming positives. Stigmatizing those who are different generally has the effect of only seeing the bad, never the good, more shame than pride. *Bastard Out of Carolina*, written from a young insider’s careful viewpoint, allows

readers to see what Bone misses, that her family members, although poor, working-class, often violent, are who give her strength of character.

Allison worked hard as a student securing herself an academic scholarship to a small, prestigious Presbyterian college. As a student, surrounded by classmates far more affluent than her, Allison found herself doing what other disadvantaged, extremely poor people tend to do when they suddenly find themselves in the midst of the more fortunate – she began to pull away from her family and her Southern, rural roots in the hopes of, and in exchange for, acceptance. She says of this time period:

... I felt as if I had suddenly become one of the elect ... invited into the preserve of the rich and the entitled. [But the] more I distanced myself from my family, the further inside the preserve I would be invited. If I could, as many before me seemed to have done, erase any echo of my origins, then I might be safer – though never fully without risk. (Allison, “What It Means” 321)

While in college, Allison enrolled in a seminar course centering on ethics. During a class exercise, the “Lifeboat” dilemma, Allison was struck by the profound realization that her non-working class cohorts were attempting to decide who would live and who would die if trapped in an overcrowded lifeboat filled with a diverse range of people from various races, cultures, and backgrounds. Bottom line, the lifeboat was filled beyond capacity and would not remain afloat much longer. With the prospects of a storm on the horizon, the passengers’ only hope was to lighten the load, and then *maybe* they would survive. Who should go overboard and who would get to stay? How were the passengers to decide? This was the dilemma presented to the class, a dilemma the students were to work out together. As Allison sat among her peers listening to them discuss how to decide who would die and who would live, it occurred to her that this was

exactly how the world works and she asked herself such questions as: “Who gets a scholarship? Who does not? ... Who got through college on his daddy’s money and his mama’s ruthless campaign to get that arrest record erased? Who goes to rehab? Who dies of an overdose? Who decides? Who is responsible?” (Allison, “What It Means” 322). These are understandable questions of fairness, but why did it appear that no one else in her class seemed to have a similar perspective? Perhaps because by not having a similar background, by not being judged unworthy trash as Allison had been while growing up, they did not see the passengers as *people* but rather positions in society, reducing the people to just things, much like the trash others thought her to be.

A predominant theme in Allison’s writings, both fiction and non-fiction, is “trash” – being called trash, being treated as trash, feeling like trash. But with her stories and essays, Allison embraces the term, actually uses it “to raise the issue of who [sic] the term glorifies as well as who [sic] it disdains” (Allison, “Introduction” xvi). Her work seems almost therapeutic, as a means to come to terms with and overcome her feelings of shame and humiliation as well as to find forgiveness for those who failed her and whom she, ironically, held in contempt, yet always loved. She writes in order for her voice to be heard, heard not only by those who have never experienced life like hers, but also for those who have so they know they are not alone; she writes to “join the conversation. Literature is a conversation – a lively enthralling exchange that constantly challenges and widens our own imagination” (Allison, “Introduction” xv). Allison’s belief is that through literature, which includes her own, a portal opens to the lives of myriad cultures, social orders, and economic levels, a peek at lives that may be extremely different than the reader’s. Allison’s stories in particular center on shame, anger, humiliation, stubbornness, and pride: “I wrote to release indignation and refuse humiliation, to admit fault and to glorify the

people I loved who were never celebrated” (Allison, “Introduction” xiii). Glorifying those she loved, though, was not always easy. She and her family tended to be viewed as trash, or “bad poor.” In her working-class society, women always seemed to have jobs while the men always seemed to be losing theirs. The men were often violent, lawless burdens on society, while the women were often pregnant before marriage, and old and wore out before they were 30-years old. Where most outsiders looking in may see nothing but “trash,” those on the inside looking out often feel love and admiration while also feeling outrage and shame knowing how others see them. This feeling of duality is an arching theme throughout *Bastard Out of Carolina* as Bone struggles with accepting who she sees herself as in relation to who others perceive her to be.

This conflict is personified in the paradoxical relationship between Bone and Shannon Pearl, a young albino girl who Bone befriends after other children on their school bus make fun of her. As Shannon boards the bus, one child begins chanting, “Cootie train! Cootie train!” (154). Bone reaches out and pulls her down into a seat across from her. She is drawn immediately to Shannon by the “impassive, self-sufficient, and stubborn” look on her face because “she reminded me of myself, or at least the way I had come to think of myself” (154). But Bone is conflicted by her feelings toward Shannon. Shannon’s appearance disgusts Bone who finds her “wholly monstrous, a lurching hunched creature shining with sweat and smug satisfaction” (155). She is also filled with jealousy because of the caring relationship Shannon has with both her parents, a relationship seriously lacking in her own life, a relationship that Bone envies tremendously. Her distaste of Shannon’s appearance and her jealousy of the bond Shannon has with her parents is contradicted by Bone’s need to defend her,

I purely hated her. But when other people would look at her scornfully or the boys up at Lee Highway would call her Lard Eyes, I felt a fierce and protective love ... My

fascination with her felt more like the restlessness that made me worry the scabs on my ankles. As disgusting as it seemed, I couldn't put away the need to scratch my ankles or hang around what Granny called 'that strange and ugly child'. (156)

This external paradox reflects Bone's inner paradox. Having her family referred to constantly as "trash," Bone fears this might be true; however, her strong, stubborn need to prove them wrong often overwhelms her. Through critical analysis, students should have no trouble accepting this theme of contradiction as symbolic. Those who live disadvantaged, rural lives endure such shame and humiliation that they often feel disdain, loathing, even hatred for others within their society. At the same time, they are indignant and incensed when those more fortunate look down on them. They rebel against the stigma of being considered trash.

Part of what makes Allison's work so authentic is how she "employs a language that is also simultaneously at home and alienated, drawing carefully and caringly on a regional dialect, but often to demonstrate how that specific language stigmatizes particular groups of people" (LeMahieu 651). Allison uses language as a means to get readers to think about and pay attention to those who are different, and to realize that those differences should not be what define a person. Poor Southerners are often careful in their speech "because [they] feel as if [they are] always being stared at." (LeMahiue 670). Through her use of language and her personal experiences, Allison "explores the complex intersections of socioeconomic status with sexual orientation, gender identity, and racial prejudice" (LeMahieu 652). One of the conventions of language Allison uses is something everyone does naturally – sometimes without realizing it – naming things in order to categorize and make better sense of the world. This naming that she uses brings "Others" from the background and puts them full focus into the foreground. Many times bringing certain characters into the foreground is uncomfortable for readers. For example,

in *Bastard Out of Carolina*, the young narrator, Bone, explains in the beginning how her mother despises the labels that society has tagged not only Bone with (bastard), but also her and her family,

Mama hated being called trash, hated the memory of every day she'd ever spent bent over other people's peanuts and strawberry plants while they stood tall and looked at her like she was a rock on the ground. The stamp on that birth certificate [bastard] burned her like the stamp she knew they'd tried to put on her. *No-good, lazy, shiftless.* (3)

Hating being called “trash” is a simple, but powerful, statement; it holds monumental connotations. The word “trash” brings to mind something extremely filthy and unpleasant, something that needs to be pushed away to the margins of society much like garbage to a landfill. Mama's statement is a statement of self-awareness that brings to the foreground for readers that the denigrating names spoken behind their backs do not go unheard or unfelt.

Again, Allison uses the conflict between Bone and Shannon Pearl to illustrate how disparaging remarks can be stigmatizing. Students analyzing a heated argument between Bone and Pearl, an argument that quickly turns to name calling, will see once again the symbolism of how the differing classes cause shame and humiliation simply through names. The argument between Bone and Shannon centers on Bone hearing a beautiful church choir singing. Bone suggests that Shannon tell her preacher daddy, who occasionally scouted out gospel singers, but Shannon points out that the choir being heard is from a black church. She informs Bone that her daddy

‘don't handle colored. An't [sic] no money in handling colored' ... Shannon's voice was ... shrill with indignation. ‘My daddy don't handle niggers' ... The way Shannon said ‘nigger' tore at me, the tone pitched exactly like the echoing sound of Aunt Madeline

[Daddy Glen's well-to-do sister] sneering 'trash' when she thought I wasn't close enough to hear. (170)

As the argument is coming to a close, Bone once again hears the choir as they sing, "*Was blind but now I see*" from *Amazing Grace*. How fitting the hearing of this verse is for Bone. Until this argument with Shannon, Bone has heard her family in many instances use the same racial slur Shannon uses, but it never affected her as now. Never had she considered the parallel between "nigger" and "trash."

In an interview with Michael LeMahieu for *Contemporary Literature*, Allison explained that she feels as a country, the United States' language and dialect have become "homogenized" everywhere except the South. The South has such a "recognizable regional dialect" that it is more "a poetry of the South" (668). The language and dialect of the South is part of what continues to make this region so unique and different from the rest of the country. Consider this bit of dialogue from Bone's Aunt to Bone's mother:

Still, I look at Glen and I can see he an't [sic] never been loved like he needed to be. But the boy's deeper and darker than I can figure out. It's you I worry about. I know the kind of love you got in you. I know how you feel about Glen. You'd give your life to save him, and maybe that'll make it come out right, and maybe it won't. That's for God to fix. Not me. (132)

The choice of words and the cadence of speech cause the readers to "hear" the Southern regional dialect. This use of language gives further authenticity to Allison's writing. Allison's deliberate employment of this regional language in her work can draw students in closer to her characters and help them empathize. Critical analysis of not only the rhythm of the speech, but also the

words and tone Allison chooses for her characters give a deeper understanding of just who these people are and how they are so much more than the stereotypical surface.

The stereotypical disadvantaged white is considered “lazy and shiftless,” but Bone’s mother works long hours on her feet as a waitress. Her stepfather, Glen, on the other hand, who comes from a wealthy family, cannot hold a job for more than a few months. Bone’s mother and aunts work tirelessly at raising their families while the men drink, fight, and run from the law; however, even the men have much to offer Bone. Her uncles and male cousins, although at times violent to the outside world, are very protective of their families: “... everyone there knew me and my family – particularly my cousins Grey and Garvey, who would toss you against a wall if they heard you’d insulted any of us” (154). For that matter, the entire family almost always has each other’s backs, with direct family members taking precedence over those through marriage. Unfortunately, the stigmas attached to certain family members have a tendency to be projected onto other family members, “affecting and infecting” them like some communicable, contagious disease. For example, Bone’s uncles and cousins are well known troublemakers; therefore, no one in town will mess with any Boatwright, not knowing who is dangerous and who is not. Another example is Bone herself. Her mother, Anney, having given birth to Bone outside marriage, and worse still, not telling who the father is, brands Bone a bastard and herself as contaminated goods. Through Anney’s actions, “she is marked as a socially undesirable and tainted woman – as someone suffering from a spoiled identity – and through the process of stigma contagion, her social stigma ends up affecting and infecting her daughter, Bone” (Bouson 105). This designation denigrates both Anney and Bone into being “nothing more than,” degrading them both into mere objects. Anney struggles to overcome this shameful image by working hard: “She’d work her hands to claws, her back to a shovel shape, her mouth to a bent

and awkward smile – anything to deny what Greenville County wanted to name her” (Allison, *Bastard* 3-4). While working hard to shun the stigma, she only succeeds in furthering her feelings of dehumanization, feelings that she will never be raised up in the eyes of those who despise her, believing those “above” her will never accept her as an equal.

Those on the outside looking in, but not taking the time to get to know those who are different, see only the weaknesses, never the strengths. In *Bastard Out of Carolina*, for all the flaws apparent on the surface of Bone’s life, it would be easy to miss the strengths her family passes on to her, especially those of the women. Bone’s life, like everyone else’s life, is filled with oppositions, a positive side and a negative side. In Bone’s story, readers “see” the flaws and weaknesses apparent on the surface, but students who go below the surface and seek out both sides of the oppositions will find the true fortitude contributing to Bone’s identity. Her Mama is strong physically and full of stubborn pride. Until the courthouse burned, Mama tried many times to have “bastard” removed from Bone’s birth certificate. Only after the courthouse burned was that horrible, stigmatizing label forever gone. Before that, the townspeople would tease and goad her about the label, trying to get a rise out of her, but she never took the bait.

Mama’s pride, Granny’s resentment that there should even be anything to consider shameful, my aunts’ fear and bitter humor ... all combined to grow my mama up fast and painfully. There was only one way to fight off the pity and hatefulness. Mama learned to laugh with them, before they could laugh at her, and to do it so well no one could really be sure what she thought and felt. She got a reputation for a [sic] easy smile and sharp tongue ... (10)

Mama’s weakness, like so many women, lies in her unhealthy belief that only a man can make her feel complete. This is a dangerous weakness as it usually makes them vulnerable to unstable,

abusive men. For Mama, that man is Glen, Daddy Glen to Bone. He knew how to manipulate Mama with his tears and little boy affectations; however, he often beat Bone, breaking her bones at times. Mama would become angry with Glen after the unwarranted, vicious attacks on Bone, but she would soon forgive him, harming Bone in a much deeper way than the physical abuse ever could. After one such beating where Daddy Glen beat Bone severely with his belt, Mama stood on the other side of the door, furious with Glen calling him a “son of a bitch;” however, as she begins tending to Bone’s wounds Mama asks: ““Oh girl. Oh honey. Baby what did you do? What did you do?” What had I done? I had run in the house. What was she asking? I wanted her to go on talking and understand without me saying anything. I wanted her *to love me enough to leave him, to pack us up and take us away from him, to kill him if need be*” (107, italics mine). Instead of being Bone’s savior, though, Mama, as she always would, chooses Glen over her daughter. All Glen ever has to do is cry on Mama’s shoulder, talk about his insecurities, and profess his love for her and the girls (Bone and her sister, Reese): “The sound of Mama crying grew softer, faded ... I heard Daddy Glen whispering, heard a murmur as Mama replied. Then there was a sigh and a creak of their bed as he comforted Mama and she comforted him. Sex. They were making love ...” (108). Mama leaves Glen occasionally, but she always goes back to him, or she sends Bone off to stay with Aunt Ruth or Aunt Raylene, Mama’s sisters. Most tragic of all, though, is Mama’s decision to pick Glen over Bone after she catches him raping Bone: ““Could she love me and still hold him like that ... I wanted everything to stop, the world to end, anything, but not to lie bleeding while she held him and cried” (291). Unfortunately, this part of Bone’s story is not unique in today’s world. Many students, regardless of class, race, or economical status, can most certainly relate to Bone’s tragic history. The betrayal of a mother and/or father knows no social bounds; it can happen to anyone, anytime, not just “white trash.”

In Bone's case, credit for her physical, emotional, and mental strength following these unfortunate incidents must be given to her family. Aunt Ruth and Aunt Raylene brought with them their own strengths and weaknesses, characteristics that also informed who Bone could potentially become, but Raylene, more than anyone else, taught her it is all right to be herself *whoever* that might be.

Aunt Raylene can be viewed as a metaphor for an ideal world, a world without judgment or stereotypes. Her opinion with regards to children is, "There's no evil in them;" they just need to be allowed to be themselves (178). Her view can be a metaphor about everyone in society. Different does not mean bad; people just need to be themselves. According to Raylene, when left alone "[t]rash rises ... Out here where no one can mess with it, trash rises all the time" (180). This is the first time Bone ever hears anyone talk about "trash" in a positive way. If society would not judge and stereotype, even those who would be considered "trash" can rise above their circumstances. People generally believe about themselves what they hear constantly from others and how those who look down on them treat them. Raylene shows Bone that it is all right to be herself; she does not have to believe what others say to or about her. She teaches Bone not to strive for conformity, but for individuality, to be distinct, to rise above social commonality. Raylene tells Bone, "I am so tired of people whining about what might happen to them, never taking no chances or doing anything new. I'm glad you an't [sic] gonna be like that, Bone. I'm counting on you to get out there and do things, girl. Make people nervous and make your old aunt glad" (182). In this respect, Raylene herself is an excellent role model for Bone. Having run away from home to join a traveling carnival, Raylene dresses and acts like a man, giving the impression of always being comfortable in her own skin and never apologizing for who she is. Once, when Bone's cousin, DeeDee, called Raylene a "lonely old woman," Aunt

Ruth responded saying, “a woman was only lonely who wasn’t happy with herself, and Raylene was probably the only person any of us would ever meet who was completely satisfied with her own company” (179).

The above example of Raylene’s strengths and weaknesses illustrate how women can be admired in spite of their flaws. Society is the same – weak/strong, good/bad, loving/hateful – no one person or social group can escape these oppositions. Those around us make us who we are; it is up to us to decide which side to strive for. Truthfully, we all have strengths and flaws, and embody both sides of the coin. We cannot control the life we are born into, but we can control how we perceive and treat each other. Allison’s work *Bastard Out of Carolina* makes an excellent tool for teaching students how to look at others from an empathetic viewpoint by drawing on her own life experiences.

Dorothy Allison’s childhood memories include feeling as if she “could not escape [her] place or class” (LeMahiue 670). As the daughter of a waitress and truck driver, she was destined only for the local textile mill regardless of how smart she always proved to be. Good grades and high test scores meant nothing to the school or her community. At one time, she scored so high on an IQ test that she was made to retake it again because the school thought she had cheated (LeMahiue 670). The lesson she learned from that was that education was not to be her escape. She would have to get herself out. Educators more than anyone else in any social group should present themselves as doorways to something other than what society expects. Denying a child the opportunity to reach his or her full potential should be criminal, especially when to do so is based almost entirely on preconceived notions of the individual or his or her family. That is not what education is meant to do. On the flip side, educators of those more fortunate should pass along the lesson of the “Lifeboat.” Students could debate this ethical dilemma, much as Allison’s

class did, at the beginning of a course. Toward the end of the course, after analyzing several examples of both negative and positive aspects of working- and non-working class peoples, students should debate the ethical dilemma again. Have perspectives changed? Have stereotypes been set aside so that the passengers are now viewed as people and not just positions or things in society? Those who refine their critical analysis skills and work toward becoming critically literate have a higher probability of knowing what it truly means to be free and to remember the lesson of the Lifeboat.

Chapter 5: Conclusion

“In the postmodern era, it is no longer acceptable to marginalize voices;” unfortunately, the American Southerner is not considered a marginalized group (Slattery 162). Stereotypes abound in this country. No one can escape them whether they are based on gender, race, social class, geographic location, or any other of a number of overgeneralized, preconceived ideas of any number of categories of people. More than any other region, the southern region of the United States seems to encompass nearly every conceivable stereotype. The previous chapters have discussed stereotypes of African-Americans, disadvantaged Southern whites, and how the media continues to perpetuate these stereotypes. The chapters have also discussed how these very stereotypes can and are disputed through such resources as Southern literature like Zora Neale Hurston’s *Their Eyes Were Watching God*, Delores Phillips’ *The Darkest Child*, and Dorothy Allison’s *Bastard Out of Carolina* as well as responsible media outlets. The resources available to counter stereotypes, however, are only as good as the ability to sufficiently use and understand them.

Critical literacy is one extremely valuable tool students can utilize to recognize and respond to negative generalities, and promote positive aspects of diverse cultures. The Southern writers discussed within this thesis only typify a small number of Southern writers who strive to expose the damage stereotypes represent. The media discussed, too, typify only a small sample of stereotype negativity; however, in today’s society, the media has the potential for far more damage since television, movies, and music pervade the public so dramatically. A better understanding of cultures will lead to a more empathetic view of the people who make up the cultures. In the United States, Southerners, especially those in the rural and mountainous areas, are probably the most misunderstood. Along with critical literacy, a more comprehensive study

of the Southern background can lead to more compassion and sensitivity toward those who make up this unique demographic.

Most citizens of this country tend to associate Southern states with primarily slavery and the Civil War without taking into consideration the much broader scope of this dynamic. Both African-Americans and disadvantaged whites had no choice but to work for the elite white upper class – African-Americans because of slavery and disadvantaged whites because they needed to feed their families. A highly agricultural region, the elite made sure their plantations continued to produce and produce well. Since farming was the primary occupation, very few Southerners believed education was important; school was not a priority. Despite the fact that the Southern wealthy would have the northern states think them highly academic, history indicates otherwise. Like some who attempt to use “big words” in an endeavor to appear more educated than they are, the elite class would often quote Latin phrases or lines from Shakespeare in an attempt to appear much more refined and educated than they really were, all while “the South overran the American average for (white) illiteracy” (Cash 92). Not only the masses, but the planters too, could not read or write. This façade, however, was based on a great desire to appear superior to the North. In *The Mind of the South*, W.J. Cash writes, “Say that the South is entitled to be judged wholly by its highest and its best. The ultimate test of any culture is its productivity. What ideas did it generate? Who were its philosophers and artists? And – probably the most searching test of all – what was its attitude toward these philosophers and artists” (92)? Any “true” artist was not recognized if he or she did not ascend from an elite heritage, but even one who did, like painter William Alston, born an aristocrat, would have to travel overseas to foreign land in order to gain acceptance. Upon his return to the states, Alston would settle in New England where his art would be appreciated (Cash 93). In other words, the South, although

boasting the greatest number of universities and libraries, fancied themselves highly intellectual but were in fact below average. This Southern pride would carry from pre-Civil War to modern day times and contribute a great deal toward the Southern stereotype.

In the years since the Civil War, great changes have occurred, not only changing from a primarily agrarian economy to an industrial one, but also with the importance of education to their society. As the older generations pass away, so too are the ways of the “Old” South. Younger generations coming up since the first decades or so of the 20th century bring with them signs of the “New” South. This passing between the old and new ideas is often seen in works written by Southern author, Ron Rash. In his novels *One Foot in Eden* (2002) and *The World Made Straight* (2006), Rash demonstrates this economical and cultural transition through conflict between an agrarian father (country) and his industrialized son (city). In an interview he conducted with Rash in 2007 for the *Appalachian Journal*, Thomas Ærvold Bjerre comments to Rash:

TB: From a literary point of view, the way I see these conflicts is that they mirror this clash ... between traditional Appalachian Agrarian ideals and the New South: the tobacco farmer and the children moving away into town.

RR: Yes, that’s the way I want it to work. One thing I am very interested in ... is a sense of mirroring in my work and resonance, so that things are constantly interwoven. (221)

Students who are taught to critically analyze such works as Rash’s might then understand this economical and cultural conflict. In turn, perhaps they will compare Rash’s metaphorical conflict with their own present, personal cultural conflict between themselves and their parents or

grandparents. Those who are able to consider another from an empathetic viewpoint are less likely to stereotype.

Education is the key. For some it is an escape from a life economically or emotionally deprived. For others it means advancement in a world of which they feel more certain. Regardless of class, race, gender, or geographical location, education provides doorways into which others may enter and possibly walk in the shoes of those with whom they have little or no contact. Critical analysis can and should be applied to works that either do or have the potential to stereotype based on race. These works should be compared and contrasted with those written by the group being generalized. This is not to say that the works that overgeneralize and marginalize are bad works, or the wrong type of works. Great works from the past continue to be great works today. It is not the art that changes, but the societies who *interpret* them. Art is almost always open for interpretation by those experiencing them since the creator has his or her own personal intent while those using the art come from diverse backgrounds bringing with them diverse personal histories. Students should appreciate that since the created art represents only one viewpoint, it should not be applied to a group as a whole. Only by understanding the expectations of a current society can that society fully understand how far or how slight that society has come over the years. One should not be fooled, though, into believing that societies with advanced educational knowledge or possessing a great number of educational institutions are more advanced in its thinking, ideologies, or treatments of others. The true demonstration of advancement is the ability to critically analyze the complexities of all social levels, to be open to new ideas, and to have a firm grip on reality (Cash 97).

In 1901, French poet, novelist, and influential critic Remy de Gourmont published *La Culture des idées*, which included an essay titled “Dissociation de idées” (1899). In this essay, Gourmont wrote:

There are two ways of thinking. One can either accept current ideas and associations of ideas, just as they are, or else undertake, on his own account, new associations or, what is rarer, original disassociations. (3)

Man associates ideas, not at all in accordance with verifiable exactitude, but with his pleasure and his interest. That is why most truths are merely prejudices. (11)

Gourmont’s words, although written at the turn of the 20th century, still resonate today. People *must* start thinking for themselves to discover the “current” reality, for reality is ever changing depending on perspective and social norms. As was apparently true in Gourmont’s day, so it is true today, that ideas of unknown peoples is not based on facts, but on myths, stories, and even past realities from a time no longer relevant. By not questioning what is heard second hand, old ideas and old images tend to become tradition (stereotypes). Only those curious enough and brave enough to question the traditions are able to begin “arrang[ing] an infinite number of new [ideas and images] which a fresh operation will disunite once more, and so on till new ties, always fragile and doubtful, are formed” (Gourmont 3). Those willing to push the boundaries of tradition and form new ideas and images based on current perceived reality (but informed by past perceived realities) offer the best chance of changing stereotypes and passing new views onto others.

Authors such as Zora Neale Hurston, Delores Phillips, and Dorothy Allison challenge the views the common American has on Southern African-Americans and underprivileged Southern whites. Music artists such as Mary J. Blige and Shania Twain, use their talent to sing about

strong Southern women. Graphic novels, movies, and television programs, too, are attempting to undermine long held stereotypical beliefs of the South and her people. These authors, artists, and works strive to subvert denigrating attitudes toward these, the most looked down upon of all of American society.

Study groups should take into account factors such as the time period and region these stereotypical works were created. In this way, works can be studied in context alongside modern day works, critically analyzing old and new with open minds. Educators should encourage students to leave sentiment at the door for “it is sentiment which always triumphs over reason” (Gourmont 35). Encouraging students to put away the old, which becomes an everyday commonplace way of thinking, gives them the tools necessary to draw courage and strengthen their curiosity needed to bring forth new ideas and images. Educators and students who become proficient in critical literacy by learning and continuously practicing critical analysis ensure the social changes necessary for a more equal and just society, one without negative stereotypes, prejudices, or discriminations.

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