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Black Creoles in New Orleans (1700-1971): the life of the educated, talented, and civilized black Creoles

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> "There is no State in the Union, hardly any spot of like size on the globe where the man of color has lived so intensely, made so much progress, been of such historical importance [as in Louisiana] and yet about whom so comparatively little is known."
>
> —Alice Dunbar-Nelson 1916

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By

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Dedication

For my family, for my friends, for me,
And for the Free People of Color about whom so comparatively little is known.

Acknowledgements

It would have been beyond my imagination to attend Bard College in my halcyon years of youth, let alone do a senior project of a hundred and thirty pages. The phrase is clique, but I could not read until I was fortune. However, I defied the odds of a dream deferred; I surmounted obstacles that no African-American kid like me should have to surmount; I have proven not only to myself, but also to every kid around the world that hard work can be compensated for lost time, that intelligence, leadership, and creativity are not determined by zip code but perseverance and dedication. Writing my senior project has been rewarding but yet difficult. I took pleasure in my struggle because I know without struggle there is no progress and no greatness.

I would like to thank my father and my mother for embedding in me what it means to be a leader and a man of God. My parents pushed me in spite of my failures and our shortcomings, and they have made me the scholar I am today. Without them being present in my life, I would have never gone to college and to Yale University for grad school. So I thank them for teaching me and pushing me. I am thankful and blessed that they were in my life through thick and thin.

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Black Creoles in New Orleans (1700-1965)

"Antebellum New Orleans was home to thousands of urbane, educated and well to do free blacks. The French called them *les gens de couleur libre*, the Free People of Color. After the Civil War they were known as the Creoles of color, shortened today to simply Creoles. Theirs was an ambiguous status, sharing the French language, Catholic religion and European education of the elite whites, who were often blood relatives, but keeping African and indigenous American influences from their early heritage. This is their story, rarely mentioned in conventional histories, and often misunderstood today, even by some of their descendants."

The Free People Of Color Of New Orleans
By Mary Gehman

I was dead set on doing my senior project on William Faulkner, until I did a tutorial with Professor Karen Sullivan on New Orleans black Creoles. The black Creoles interest me when I began to read the works of Lafcadio Hearn, Robert Tallant, George W. Cable, Alice Dunbar-Nelson, and Ernest J. Gaines. By reading these authors, I learned about the black Creoles' culture, traditions, everyday lifestyles, and how the French arrived in New Orleans in the late seventeenth century before the Spanish. I learned about the word "Creole" and how it came from the Spanish, which most claimed that it derived from the Portuguese. The first name came from the Spanish, which was *Criollo*. The

second name came from the Portuguese, which was *crioulo*. The French eventually changed it to *Creole.*

When I returned back to New Orleans, I began to tour the streets of the French Quarter and nose my way into shopping stores, where I would thumb through books on New Orleans' black Creoles. Black Creoles were not talked about in the city anymore, except in the pages of books and in museums. Their existence seemed to have faded. Also, French laws have been removed from the Louisiana legislature. For example, the "One Drop" rule was removed. If any white Creole was found to have a drop of *café au lait* in their blood, they were considered black. The "One Drop" rule was based on social classifications that associated with "invisible blackness," which simply meant that mother and father had children of a mixed union.

Today, the "One Drop" rule no longer exist, and no one refers to a New Orleanian as Creole or asks if he or she has any family members who are *passnt blanc.* Several communities do not identify as Creole anymore. There are hardly any New Orleans French speakers in the city who are Creole and Catholic. As I continued to learn about the Creoles of New Orleans, my curiosity grew. I talked to my grandmother's sister about the city of New Orleans to see if she knew anything about the Creole society and where I could find one in the city. "Your great-grandmother and your great-great-grandmother was Creole," my grandmother's sister told me. I did not believe her when she told me this. She assured me that it was true by showing me pictures of them both. She even showed me a picture of my great-grandfather and great-great-grandfather.

Looking through old family photos, she began to explain to me that my great-great-grandmother spoke the Creole language—broken French. She told me that her

name was Iola Johnson and that she used to spend most of her time picking flowers from her garden. “She used to speak to your great-grandmother, whose name was also Iola Johnson, in French sometimes. She had a sister name Earnsetine and a brother name Edward.” I asked my grandmother’s sister if she spoke French, too, but she said no. She never learned. The language was complicated to learn because it was not a written language at all. “If anyone wants to learn it, they would have to study the words.”

My great-great-grandfather did not speak Creole, either, but he could “pass” as white. My grandmother’s sister handed me a picture of him. He wore a tailored black suit, and his slick hair was parted. I cracked my neck when I saw the picture, and I began wondering about my African American identity. In my halcyon years of youth, I was never told that my great-great-grandmother and grandfather were able to “pass” as white. After meeting with my grandmother’s sister, I began to observe the different shades of color in my family.

I notice that my grandmother was light-skinned and the rest of her daughters, except one, were brown-skinned. I could see the same pattern in my cousins, their light complexion. All of my siblings and I have the same father. My father and mother look African American. However, one of my siblings has a light complexion. The pattern continues with my sister’s sons. Over summer break, I constantly wondered about my ancestral past and how some of my relatives’ skin color were different shades.

Thus, I did some research on Facebook and discovered that I had family in California who could “pass” as white. They are much lighter than my sister and my cousins, and their eyes are a greenish brown like my mother’s and my aunt’s eyes. I have never met any of them. I reached out to them on Facebook and asked questions about

their great-great-grandfather and great-great-grandmother. “Yes, my great-great-grandmother and great-grandmother was Creole. But they did not speak French. Her sisters did.” My cousins did not go into detail about the family history. So I continued to ask questions, but while doing so, I realized that was all she knew.

Upon returning back to Bard, I was blown away when I heard that my family was Creole. I decided to do my senior project on Creoles with Professor Karen and do a close exegesis of three authors from Louisiana from three different time periods, starting from the late nineteenth century and ending at the mid twentieth century. The authors I focused on were George Washington Cable, Alice Dunbar-Nelson, and Ernest James Gaines. They focus on the black Creoles of New Orleans and how they are able to “pass” as white. They also go into depth about what it means to “pass” and how “passing” as white gave the black Creoles privileges. They go into depth about how “passing” separates the black Creoles from the white and black communities.

The black Creoles have their own culture, language, and traditions. The black Creoles marginalized themselves from other communities because they were not welcomed. The blacks and whites saw them as “other,” foreigners. Black Creoles could decide whether they wanted to be a part of the white society or the black society. The black Creoles were not limited to one race as individuals. Their individuality set them apart from others. They were not confined as individuals, but free to be who every they wanted to be. Their identity was always changing.

Their plurality of vision allowed them to understand the white and the black race. It gave them the potential to have several perspectives as opposed to one perspective. Their vision gave them a double-consciousness that was similar to W.E.B. Du Bois’

double-consciousness in *Souls of Black Folk* (1903). Du Bois states that the educated Negroes are "always looking at one's self through the eyes of others, of measuring one's soul by the tape of a world that looks on in amused contempt and pity. One ever feels his two-ness, an American, a Negro; two souls, two thoughts, two unreconciled strivings; two warring ideals in one dark body, whose dogged strength alone keeps it from being torn asunder." (2-3) Du Bois' double-consciousness focuses on the twoness of the Negro.

The double-consciousness that the black Creoles have reflected Du Bois' idea. The black Creoles feel as if they do not belong to two societies, but three societies: the black, white, and Creole society. The black Creoles in the 1700s were always measuring and seeing themselves in the eyes of the other. They were constantly struggling within and challenging their existence in a world where they believed they did not belong. They were always shapeshifting and could not find their own identity.

Delving into the history of New Orleans, I learned that it was founded in 1699 by Sieur de Bienville, a French Canadian. Bienville was named by John Law, a Scottish economist, to be director general of the colony. Bienville took the offer and set out to establish a town on the lower part of the Mississippi where the grounds were large crescent shape and would make a great place to set the city of *Nouvelle Orleans*. The name *Orleans* was in honor of the city in France to the Duke of Orleans, who was a great friend of John Law. The high grounds of *Nouvelle Orleans* was also chosen by Bienville because it was a hundred miles from the Gulf of Mexico and a good trading post for various indigenous people such as Choctaws, Colapissa, Houmas, and Tunicas.

In the 1700s, the building of New Orleans began, and the men Bienville had with him along with hundreds of Africans brought in 1719 on cargo ships from West Africa

and the Senegal, helped him make the swampy area of New Orleans into a habitable settlement. Slaves were imported by the French and English colonies on trading ships during this time, and the majority of African slaves—2,083 and counting—arrived in the New World after 1716. The slaves from 1719-1723 adjusted to hard labor to build levees, to dig drainage ditches, to clear swampland, and to construct rudimentary huts and storage facilities. African slaves were the backbone of New Orleans. Most of the African slaves, and their children, were responsible for the making of the colony. They were hard working and accustomed to the humid climate. They also had a natural immunity from the worst fevers that claimed the lives of Europeans and the natives. Their ability to withstand the conditions allowed them to survive the first years in Louisiana. The slaves worked on forts and supplied most of the meat and fish for the city by fishing, hunting, and trapping in the outlying swamps.

The African slaves build and repaired ships, sailing, cutting and laying stone, ironworking, woodworking, and the cultivation of crop and cattle. Enslaved Indian men were responsible as well. However, their enslavement did not last as long as African slaves because the French thought they were not beneficial and precarious for the labor they required of them. For that reason, Bienville decided to exchange Negroes for Indian slaves with the French West Indian islands. He states: "We shall give three Indians for two Negroes. The Indians, when in the islands, will not be able to run away, the country being unknown to them, and the Negroes will not dare to become fugitives in Louisiana, because the Indians would kill them." (4, *People Of Color In Louisiana*)

Thus, the French considered capturing the African slaves and have them work for grueling years. Many of the colony's slaves were priced by the numbers the prince or

private merchants sold them for, the number of buyers, and the need of them. The slaves were brought with iron bars, guns, powder, shot, fabric, paper, and light cloth. They were also brought with gold, elephants' teeth called morphy, wax, hides, gum, and *la maiguette*, which was a type of paper. The slaves were very expensive. They were also brought with parrots, monkeys, clothes or grass skirts.

As the years went by, the French and the African slaves were so comfortable amongst one another that they could bear firearms. Slaves were given military training in which they served as guards for the French forts and fought with the French against the Indians. Other African slaves were *courreurs de bois*, informal messengers who went out on dangerous trips throughout the vast Louisiana Territory to deliver messages to various tribes and French outposts. They trade in valuable goods such as pelts, tobacco, and herbs, and brought back to New Orleans knowledge of cultivating and preparing native foods that they had learned from the tribes. All slaves had respect for their elders, too, and they never called them by their names without adding, "Father." Although the elders were not their parents, they obeyed them and took care of them. The slaves even counted the house cook as one of their mothers, and they called her "mother" as well.

Although New Orleans was starting to develop and make enormous progress, the French struggled to survive under trying conditions, and the slaves went without proper clothes, shelter, and food. The conditions were so unbearable for the French and slaves that they had spent long periods receiving help from the Indians. The Indians gave the French and slaves food, clothes, and sheltered them. They even allowed them to be with their Indian women whom they had sexual relations with and brought back to New Orleans to keep house for them and bear children.

Many who are not a native of New Orleans would assume that its history was the same as every other country in North America that owned slaves. However, New Orleans' history was not the same. Instead, it was different in terms of its rules and regulations and how blacks were treated. There were free blacks that appeared in the 1700s, whom came from the Caribbean or via France. The first free man of color was Laroze, who was found guilty of stealing. He spent six years in prison in New Orleans. After serving his sentence, he was not re-enslaved. Once he was a free man, he could not be taken away. Another man of color was free during Laroze's time. His name was Raphael Bernard. He sued against a white person, Paulin Cadot, for money that he owed but refused to pay. Bernard won the case, but there was no record showing Cadot paid him back. Blacks were not only Free People of Color in the 1700s, but also Free People of Color who could have access to the justice of the colonial court, hold professional positions, and own property.

There were several people of color who were wealthy but not well off. The majority of freed blacks earned their income from trade, work as artisans, vending routes, small shops, and investment for inheritance. Others worked alongside slaves or employed them. They lived together and were devout Catholics who rarely appeared in police records. They dominated the leather-working trade in the city. They harnessed valises, shoes, suspenders, and belts. The Free People of Color were so good at what they did that they were sought out by rich Creole and American clients. The Free People of Color were cigar-makers, woodworkers, ironworkers, marble sculptors, builders, and stonecutters. They did much of the labor and supplied much of the materials for mansions, public buildings, and monumental tombs, which still attract tourists to New Orleans today.

Most of the hand wrought-iron in the New Orleans French Quarter for lamp braces, hinges, locks, balcony railings, fences, and gates were produced by black slaves and Free Men of Color. The Free People of Color in New Orleans were licensed as draymen and liverymen. They could also operate horse stables, carts, and carriages. Freed blacks were shop owners of carpenters, coopers, wigmakers, and laundresses. They were inventors and peddled vegetables, candies, fruits, and cakes throughout the city. Freed black women were private hairdressers, seamstresses for wealthy ladies, and they operated eating shops, housing to travelers and businessmen and businesswomen traveling to the city.

Many that lived in the New Orleans colony had few slaves; others hired poor immigrant workers who traveled to the colony from France, Germany or Spain. When freed blacks appeared in the colony, the term *les gens de couleur libre* was first used. The term means Free People of Color, which was different from the term free black. Free blacks were used to identify a person of African descent recently freed, whereas Free People of Color meant those persons who were born into freedom, either as the second generation of free blacks in Louisiana or having entered the colony from the Caribbean as already freed people. The Free People of Color who were born into slavery received their freedom by buying it, fighting in the military, or they had won it as a favor from a master or mistress.

Also, many may not know that New Orleans early settlers were French convicts who were given their freedom when they sailed to the new colony. The first travelers were criminals to arrive who deserved death or some other punishment. The second were prisoners of war who fought against their neighbors or kidnapped persons. The third

travelers to arrive were slaves of the prince. The fourth were those who were taken by order or by princely consent or by thieves who stole men, women, and children. New Orleans was the obverse of France. It was a place that was not as organized and elegant as France; therefore, attracting people to the colony was not easy. As the colony progressed, more French immigrants arrived with Germans from France. The immigrants opted for the colony because they were promised a new life in Louisiana. The Louisiana Territory started to take shape in 1722 as people came to the colony.

As this began to happen in the early 1720s, the free blacks and slaves rights were spelled out when the *code noir* (Black Code) was introduced in 1724, which was one of the many laws inspired by Jean-Baptiste Colbert, who began to prepare the first version of the *code noir* in 1685 in France. The c*ode noir* consisted of several laws that outlined how masters should treat their slaves. Slave masters could not inflict mayhem, torture, or bring death to their slaves. Slave masters and their slaves were told under what conditions freedom should be granted, and the rights and obligations of them once the slaves were freed. Although the French code restricted some Free People of Color's rights, it allowed the Louisiana slaves the right to a religious (Catholic) education, redress in the colonial court for mistreatment by masters, and opportunities to be hired out by a master or to hire themselves out for wages. Also, slaves could marry in a church, and slave children were baptized and not to be separated from their families through sale.

Slaves who were freed in Louisiana were given full citizenship, but they were not able to vote, hold public office, or marry a white person. The Free People of Color life did not become easier after the *code noir* was passed by the colony. The Free People of Color had to carry proof of ownership by a master or proof of being freed. They had to

identify their status as free or slave wherever they traveled in the colony. More rules were added to the *code noir* as the years progressed. The other laws that the *code noir* consisted of were curfew at 9:00P.M. for free blacks; they could not mask for ball; and they could not place wagers nor bets of any form; they had to gain permission to travel outside the city; they were prohibited from gathering in public; all slaves had to be baptized and instructed in the Catholic, Apostolic, and Roman religion; the public exercise of religion other than the Catholic, Apostolic, and Roman church would have the freed slaves and slaves punished. It was ordered that everyone to observe Sundays and holidays. Free People of Color were not to work or to make slaves work on special days from the hour of midnight.

Any free man of color who had one or several children from their concubinage with their slaves were fined two thousand pounds of sugar and condemned. If they were the master's children, the master would be separated from the slave mother and his children. This would only happen if the master were married. Any master that was not married would be able to marry his concubine in the church. The slave and her children would be manumitted later on. Marriage for slaves had to be permitted by the slave master as opposed to the mother and the father of the slave. Slave masters could constrain slaves to marry against their will.

The laws of the *code noir* permitted a slave husband to marry a free woman. If they had children, they would be free like their mothers in spite of the servitude of their father. When slaves did not comply with the *code noir*, they were whipped or branded with the *Fleur De Lis* symbol of the kings of France. Neither free-born blacks nor slaves were allowed to receive gifts from whites. Sometimes they did receive gifts because some

whites broke the law. Slaves appointed by their masters as tutors to their children were set free. When slaves were freed from their masters, the law mandated that they retain respect for their former masters. However, slaves were also granted the same rights, privileges, and liberties enjoyed by persons born free, too.

The *code noir* allowed slaves to get hire out of slavery by their masters to perform all sorts of work in the city or in outlying settlement. The slaves were paid for their work. However, most of their salary went to their slave owners, and they kept a portion of the money their slaves made. Many may see the *code noir* system as a bad system. However, compared to the rest of the thirteen American colonies outside of Louisiana, the *code noir* was lenient and accepting toward free blacks and slaves. The *code noir* allowed the free blacks to conduct all sorts of business, invest and lend out money, purchase and own slaves, and attend French social institutions such as the church, the theater, and the opera. They could live and build houses anywhere they chose, open schools to educate their children and conduct their own dances, cotillions, and social gatherings. There were efforts to keep the family of slaves together because slaves were considered human under the *code noir*. The African slaves were prosperous people once they were freed.

In 1725, the first free blacks were married, Jean B. Raphael and Marie Gaspar in the parish church in New Orleans. Within the same year of 1725, Louis Congo, a free man of color, was appointed executioner for the colony of New Orleans. No white man wanted to be an executioner because several times the life of the executioner was threatened. In 1726, Congo was listed as the High Road along Bayou St. John, which was the gateway leading into New Orleans. Congo and his wife lived along the bayou, and they had jobs that required them to collect tolls from boats that passed into the city.

By 1730, the colony of New Orleans numbered in thousands, and streets were laid out, the capital of Louisiana was in New Orleans, and ships arrived with new slaves who were sought for their skills in cultivating rice and indigo. Also, during this time, several African slave men fought in the Natchez war of 1730-1762. Some African slaves did not take advantage of this opportunity to fight in the war to free themselves. A number of slaves continued to ally themselves with the Indians, and they lived with tribes who plotted against the Europeans. Sometimes they escaped slavery. Most of the slaves separated themselves from other slaves by fighting in the war alongside the French troops in the Natchez massacre. They proved themselves useful by fighting in the war against Choctaw and received recognition for their services. Several free men of New Orleans where military officers that fought alongside Bienville near Mobile, which we call Alabama today. Bienville fought against the indigenous Chickasaws with the help of Choctaw, two hundred and seventy black soldiers, and fifty Free Men of Color, and slaves. The men who fought with Bienville received honor and privileges.

In the 1730s, black slave women were given their freedom in exchange for their affection and services to their masters or because they were recognized as the daughters of French masters and slave mothers. It was custom for French and Spanish men to take as their concubines indigenous and African women. White men took as their mistresses young black girls—ages twelve to fifteen—to have children and support them, regardless of their marriage to a white woman and his family with her. The black and white couples only developed a mutual relationship with one another for affection, which was different from other parts of the country where black women were rapped by their slave masters.

The earliest record of slaves' manumission by their slave masters was in 1733, when Bienville freed his slaves Jorge and Marie who had served him for twenty-six years. Bienville's slaves lived with him before the founding of New Orleans. The manumission of freed slaves happened in their old age when they served their master well and no longer could work. The freed slaves were allowed to live out their last years of freedom.

During the 1730s and 1740s, Africans were given support to start their own gardens once they were freed. They were also encouraged to hunt and fish for their daily meals. They had opened markets beyond Rampart Street where they gathered at the *Place des Negres*. The Africans, slaves, and freed people of color gathered there on Sundays during their days off. They socialized, danced, and sold various goods such as fruits, vegetables, and meats. *Place des Negres* were considered a private income for slaves and Free People of Color, and it was also considered a place where tribal dancers, musicians, and singers began competing in-group performances. In the 1760s, their market place was renamed Congo Square and drew spectators every Sunday from across the city. No other place in North America provided such a cultural haven for Africans in their early years of slavery or gave them the opportunity to practice and preserve their native languages and customs. The African slaves continued to face mistreatment, although they were able to gather in Congo Square.

The economy of the New Orleans colony flourished because of Congo Square, Free People of Color, and slaves. However, it underwent a collapse after the Free People of Color and the slaves had trouble with entrepreneurial culture at Congo Square. Thus, more slaves were brought to Louisiana from Africa. The shipment of slaves soon stopped

because the West Indies, today called Haiti, commanded high prices from the New Orleans colony for more imported slaves. The colony did not have the money to import slaves, so the rest of their slaves came from high births amongst slave women who were already in the colony; therefore, white men were outnumbered by slaves in New Orleans, and the city had Free People of Color who were in the middle class stratum that were the city's artisans and tradesmen whom the city depended on.

What was interesting about the New Orleans slaves were their sense of education, frugality, and diligence. They knew that these things were important if they wanted to have a successful life. Gwendolyn Midlo Hall explains in her book *Africans in Colonial Louisiana,* that the Free People of Color and slaves were bright and well-educated people. She states that the "Africans were not savages or barbaric, but competent, desperately needed, and far from powerless." (25) She also goes on to say that "there is no evidence of the racial exclusiveness and contempt that characterizes more recent times...no evidence that white settlers and French officials considered the Africans and their descendants uncivilized people." (25) The Africans were an educated race of people who were marginalized and despised because of the color of their skin.

Once the collapse of the New Orleans colony happened in 1754-1763, after the Seven Years' War of France against England, trade with France and England and other parts of Europe were cut off, and Spain purchased Louisiana in 1763. The Peace of Pairs signed and gave Louisiana away to Spain and opened a new period for New Orleans. Problems ensued because of the ambiguity of the Spanish laws and how they would differ from that of France's *code noir*. There were resistance toward the Spanish and open rebellion. The rebellions in 1763 was so problematic that it caused the Spanish rulers to

stop the importation of slaves from St. Domingue, cut off trade, and communication with family and friends. The governor of the New Orleans colony during the time was General Alejandro O'Reilly, who was ordered by Spain to establish new laws in the city. First Governor O'Reilly tracked down French leaders, who resisted against Spanish rule and executed them, and he put in place the O'Reilly Code, in which several new rules for slaves and Free People of Color were incorporated. The Spanish were more lenient and liberal toward Africans as opposed to French families who had returned to France or moved to the Caribbean.

The French families that left the colony started new lives without freeing their slaves, which allowed for slaves to free themselves from slavery by petitioning for their freedom after living independently without their master for more than ten years. Slaves could not only petition for their freedom, but also become a priest or perform in the military and other integral services for the Spanish Crown. The right of *coartacion* was introduced, which meant that a slave could buy freedom, even though his master strenuously opposed the manumission. There were also rules forbidding mistreatment of slaves, even a law that afforded freedom to female slaves whom masters had hired them out as prostitutes. The new laws that the Spanish established in the colony gave Africans more freedom. It also protected them and forced others to treat them as human. When the slaves were under the Spanish rule, there were instances in which masters or mistress upon his or her deathbed granted freedom to the family's slaves and sometimes the whole household or beloved ones. The number of household increased from the time the Spanish rules were established in 1769. There were 99 people of color who were the head of their household out of 3,190 people in New Orleans.

The rules of the Spanish gave slaves and Free People of Color more rights to when they were under other regimes. Free blacks were given the opportunity to serve in the Spanish militia, and they were able to communicate with slaves, buy, and sale them. The slaves in colonial New Orleans did not depend on their slave master because they supported themselves. The slaves who were frugal could buy their way out of slavery by earning the price estimate that amounted for his freedom. Few slaves accomplished this in their French period, but the custom became fairly common during the Spanish reign. Slaves who received their freedom had children who did not experience slavery. As a result, they were able to assimilate themselves into the French and Spanish culture.

In 1778, majority of slaves were owned by Free People of Color, and at least one third of Free People of Color owned at least one slave. Blacks owned more slaves than whites. However, their treatment of slaves was no different from that of whites who beat them and used them for their pleasures. Slave masters had one or two slaves to help with the housekeeping and care for their children. Under the O'Reilly law, blacks had more rights, and they were secured from ill treatment of the police. The only opposition the law had toward Free People of Color was the interracial marriages. They despised mix relationships because they thought that it was not right for blacks and whites to marry. Although the law did prohibit blacks and whites from getting married, it allowed whites to marry blacks who were considered *mulattoes* and could "pass" for white. A *mulatto(es)* was considered half white and half black Free People of Color. The term *mulatto* came about in Latin America. A *mulatto* was a person who was no threat to the social equilibrium. They were persons of African descent who rose in the hierarchy,

which determined birth and achievement and created a caste system in which blacks and whites distinguished themselves in New Orleans. (269, *Codifying Caste*)

Race was socially defined in Louisiana. When it was under the Spanish and French rule in the eighteenth century, free *mulattoes* held distinct intermediate positions between black slaves and whites. There were patterns of race classifications. Many *mulattoes* were wealthy planters and merchants, extensive slaveholders. However, although they "passed" as white and were Free People of Color, they did not vote as a group. (270, *Codifying Caste*)

The caste system of the whites, blacks, and black Creoles was in existence from the first introduction of slaves. To white men in the 1800s, all Africans who were not pure blood were considered people of color. The black Creoles and blacks thought the same. Amongst themselves they were jealous and fierce, calling each other names: *griffes*, *briques*, *mulattoes*, *quadroons*, and *octoroons*. Each term that the black Creoles and the blacks used was a further transfiguration toward the white standard of physical perfection. Most of the New Orleans population was light in color. (*Free People of Color*, Alice Dunbar-Nelson)

In addition, black women in New Orleans under the French and Spanish protection were considered concubines or *placee*, which was the French word for placer, which means to place. Black women were placed as the wives of white men. The social system became a law that was known as the *plaçage*; a women of color placed with a white man was expected to be faithful to him until he died or decided to end their relationship. *Plaçage* was the law that gave women of color power and independence. The plaçage was the system that brought the Free Women of Color into being. It was a

system that had laws written against it. However, the passing of those laws failed. Some black and black Creole women chose to have sexual relations with white men over their own kind and sometimes they were forced. Some black Creole women who "passed" as white were considered a part of the elitist group in which they were granted privileges and denied their own darker brothers and sisters. (*Free People of Color*, Alice Dunbar-Nelson)

Several Free Women of Color who had sexual relations with white men were given property in the 1760s through the 1800s. They acquired a prime real estate in their names. They also had houses built and passed their estate down to their children. Also, children of color were given an inheritance from their white fathers. If a woman of color were to marry a free man of color, she would not receive the same financial security or the privileges that her lighter skinned Caucasian features would have her to enjoy. If this was not the case, many free black children whose father's were white would taken on their first names as surnames to separate themselves from blacks: Baptiste, Marie, Antoine, Pierre, Mathieu, Celestin(e), Francois, etc.

Under the Spanish regime, the declared language was Spanish, but mostly everyone spoke French; therefore, the standard language continued to be French as the businesses, laws, and journalism were bilingual. The colony did not change much, only a few things changed in the colony, but mostly everything remained the same. Slaves were not growing or hunting to supply food. They were not often running households and entire estates like they were under the French law. Customs and traditions changed over forty years while under the Spanish influence. However, the Free People of Color population boomed, and decades of the 1760s through the 1790s saw many of them

acquiring property, establishing businesses, and becoming leaders in their social circles. During the end of the Spanish rule in 1802, there was a rise in households owned: 1,355 out of a total of 8,050 of which there were many free blacks, or *mulattoes* whose features and skin tones may have put them in the category of whites.

When Louisiana was purchased for fifteen million by U.S. President Thomas Jefferson in 1803, the majority of the population in New Orleans were African or of African descent. The other halves were slaves. The Free People of Color were 1,333 in total. Majority of the freed blacks changed their identities to white Creole, which allowed them to "pass" as white and associate with the white community because America was changing. The first governor of Louisiana was Virginian W.C.C. Claiborne, who was not prepared for Free People of Color who owned slaves and never knew slavery. The Free People of Color were armed, and claimed French parentage. Most of the property belonged to free blacks who owned more than a quarter of houses and estates; the majority of the owners were single women. Thus, the rules of Louisiana were changed since it was no longer under the French. The new rulers saw whites, slaves, and free slaves as uncivilized because there was no control of slaves, lack of manners, and dancing and socializing in the streets. The Americans disapproved of the race mixing and miscegenation.

Things began to change when British laws and religious ideals viewed slaves as chattel and restricted the freeing of Africans. Freed blacks were not allowed to own or operate establishments where alcohol was sold. It was as if the Americans were trying to keep the Africans and slaves sober for spiritual reasons. Little was said about the prohibition of alcohol in African communities. The transition of New Orleans from a

French-Spanish colony to an American state became difficult for New Orleanians. Free People of Color were too wealthy and too well connected with whites to be driven to subservient positions. Instead, many chose to leave New Orleans while others chose to stay and assert their rights. Claiborne could not do much about immigration of free blacks to and from Louisiana; therefore, he restricted the movement of people of color. He also mandated that Free People of Color carry proof of their freedom, which when their name appeared in public record, it was followed by the notation f.m.c. or f.w.c. (free man or woman of color). This was set in place to distinguish free blacks from whites. When the French ruled, the notation was h.c.l. or f.c.l. (*homme or femme de couleur libre*).

Blacks needed permission to leave the city, visit family member, and travel for business in other parts of the state. If a slave wanted to be free, he could not buy his freedom. He or she had to be thirty years or older and have served their master faithfully for four years. These similar attempts were made with the Spanish, but they were unsuccessful because the slaves revolted in ongoing threats. Throughout the 1830s, there were a lot of forms of rebellions resulting in the hanging of leaders of free blacks and slaves. Slaves and free blacks protested against issues like this, and they also protested against issues that refused to give them transportation by streetcars to the lake. Free blacks were not able to buy stocks from banks in 1833 because Americans feared that the Free People of Color had enough wealth to take over the banks. The financial panic of 1837 pressured blacks to sell large pieces of their property that had been in their generations for years.

The financial panic was such a disaster that free blacks migrated to find more work opportunities needed on plantations upriver rural Louisiana. This left a large group

of unmarried Free Women of Color in the city with few Free Men of Color to marry and have children. If a free black woman married a slave man, it could have endangered the free woman's freedom. So marriages between free black women and black slaves were not common in Louisiana; as a result, Free Women of Color and white men developed relationships, which led to the *quadroon* balls.

The *quadroon* ball was where young white men were introduced to black Creole woman in 1805. The black Creoles' mother attended the balls with them, in which they supported their daughter if they entered into elaborate contracts with white men. White men had to prove to black Creole mothers if they could support and take care of their young daughters who were ages fourteen and sixteen. Free Men of Color and white women could not attend the balls. Black Creole men were hired to play music, but could not participate in the dances. White women who were fiancés or a mother of the white man surreptitiously attended the ball to experience it and see who was in attendance. Not all black women who attended the black Creole balls were considered a *quadroon* (white grandfather and white father) who had one-fourth black blood. Some were one-eighth black and called *octoroons* (white great-grandfather, grandfather, and father). At the *quadroon* balls, young women of color were lavishly attired and good dancers. White men flirted with these beautiful young women who possessed a lick of *café au lait* in their blood.

The balls were conducted with dignity. A city of fifteen hundred unmarried women of color attended the balls in which they had the privilege of attending. The fairest of the black Creole women were trained and educated by their mothers and presented at the ball. They were ladylike, "passed" as white, had blond hair, and blue

eyes. Young white men had to prove that he could support the black Creole and owned a small home that was established in the *Vieux Carré* section of the Quarter. Most times, the father paid the bill for the upkeep of his mistress. In addition, the gatherings at the balls were considered soirée where white and black Creole women of color would socialize before having sexual relations with their white male counterparts.

As time moved forward in New Orleans, the Americans continued to pass more laws to control the influence and population of the free blacks in the 1830s of New Orleans. The Americans were concerned with the number of Free People of Color flooding the city. There were a hundred and thirty five Free People of Color in New Orleans who owned 2,351 slaves, most of which they freed. So the Americans implemented laws that were designed to discourage emancipation of slaves. If any black slave owner manumitted a slave, he had to pay a one thousand dollar bond and guarantee that the slave would leave the state within thirty days. The laws also prohibited free blacks from entering the state unless they came to visit for exceptional reasons. Visitors had to leave within sixty days if they traveled to Louisiana. The second law that the American's enforced was prohibiting the press from printing articles favorable to slaves and free blacks. The rights for the slaves and free blacks to assemble were curtailed, and free blacks could not testify against whites in court, and slaves could not be educated since they were not under the French and Spanish law. Also, black Creoles were ostracized by white women, and they could not ride in carriages within the city limits, nor to remain seated in the presence of a white woman. The law allowed it for white woman to flog *quadroon* girls and women like slaves at any time in public.

When the Americans purchased Louisiana in 1803, New Orleans gradually became two cities. Canal Street split them apart and divided the old Creole city from the uptown section where the Americans resided. Across the Canal was where black Creoles resided. The separation and the difference of the city could be noticed today. The black Creoles refused to be a part of the American culture. They refused to speak English, and the American refused to speak French. Mostly all Creole children received a French education: their young men were sent to Paris while their young women were instructed in local convents guided by French nuns.

Freed blacks owned 2.5 million in property in New Orleans as opposed to Americans in the 1830s. They ran their own schools, which were private institutions. Some of their young men and women went off to study in northern United States to be educated; they even set up their own churches. They were an interesting race of people that believed in religion and attending mass at the St. Louis Cathedral church. They always kept a busy schedule in which they would go to balls, parties, and attend meetings.

The laws were disregarded by most of the blacks and whites until there was a law passed in 1842 that forced freed blacks out of Louisiana. Most of the freed blacks sold their properties and immigrated to Paris where they had relatives and investments. The people who stayed were forced to cut off contact with the West Indies. The discrimination against blacks grew, but segregation in New Orleans was impossible because blacks and whites were connected. There were close blood ties and intimate living arrangements. The French and white Creoles had little respect for the Americans who did not take part in the cultural traditions of the French operas and theater in New

Orleans. The black Creoles separated themselves from the Americans, so the Americans set up their own city hall, police force, businesses, and Protestant churches up the river in Lafayette and on the other side of Canal Street.

Later in 1832, Jim Crow was founded, followed the *code noir*, although it was a law that treated blacks and Free People of Color like citizens. Jim Crow was a white man named Thomas D. Rice, who performer in a blackface and was in a popular minstrel show of the time. Jim Crow became the new symbol of blacks and segregation to radicals fighting for racial discrimination in the 1890s. The phrase "Jim Crow" was originated from a song and dance called "Jump Jim Crow." It ruled that the state had the right to separate races as long as they were equal. It was the law that institutionalized a number of economic, educational, and social disadvantages. The law mainly applied to the Southern states as opposed to Northern states. This resulted in black groups associations and legal staffs coming to New Orleans who were Free People of Color who had been free for generations. They were educated and politically active in their communities. The conditions for blacks were inferior and underfunded compared to white Americans. African-Americans could not play in Major League Baseball, which lead to the development of the Negro League. Jim Crow was the period when lynching was prevalent in the South, and it led to the Great Migration, which forced African-Americans from the South to the northern cities to find jobs and seek better opportunities.

There was segregation in private covenants, bank lending practices, and job discrimination. Schools were segregated, public places, transportation, restrooms, restaurants, drinking fountains, and the U.S. military. It underfunded public libraries, and black schools were often funded with secondhand books and other resources. Also, the

libraries were available sporadically. The federal workplace was segregated in 1913 by President Woodrow Wilson. He required his candidates to practice discrimination when hiring people of color. As a resulted, black, colored, and white citizens in New Orleans formed an association dedicated to reject the law, The Citizens Committee, which they used Homer Plessy, an *octoroon*, to initiate it. Plessy brought a first class ticket for the north from New Orleans. When he boarded the train, he took a seat in the white-only section where he was directed to leave his seat and sit in the colored only section. When Plessy refused, he was arrested, and the black, colored, and white citizens of New Orleans fought the case to the Supreme Court. They lost the case *Plessy v. Ferguson* in 1896 because "separate but equal" was ruled to be constitutional in America.

African-Americans constant rejection led to civil unrest and disobedience in New Orleans and throughout America. Thus, the Civil Rights Movement formed in the 1954. It gained popularity and was used to fight against federal courts to attack Jim Crow statutes. Many whites were challenged throughout the south, and this led them to threaten the lives of African Americans who exercised their rights. The Civil Rights Movement began to move in 1955 when Rosa Parks refused to give up her seat on a city bus to a white man in Montgomery, Alabama. Josephine Decuir, an elegant, light skinned Creole woman from New Orleans, was the precursor to Alabama's Rosa Parks of the 1960s. Decuir was refused entrance into the ladies' cabin due to the color of her skin. Parks and Decuir experiences were similar.

Black Creoles in downtown New Orleans formed with uptown blacks whom believe that working together was significant to fight against radicals who were races, and there was a committee of five hundred black women who were involved and

supporting black men in their dangerous protests. They fought against Jim Crow together and formed intimate relationships with whites. They met in each other's homes or at the YWCA, one of the integrated public spots during the 1950s. The group formed to help prevent riots and bring about peaceful integration of the streetcars, busses, and schools in the 1960s. Black Creoles were supported by liberal whites, Flint-Goodrich Hospital and Nursing School, Xavier University, Dillard University, and Pontchartrain Park Housing Development. The development and unions attracted Martin Luther King, Jr., who visit the city and supported in finding the Southern Christian Leadership Conference at New Zion Baptist Church in 1957.

The National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP) formed a Legal Defense Committee to fight against unconstitutional laws. They used *Brown v. Board of Segregation*, which overturned most of the segregation laws in the South, although it was specifically for the field of education. Although this happened, segregation continued to persist and the denial of voting rights for African Americans, too. Thus, on March 7, 1965, troopers and marchers in Alabama marched crossed the Edmund Pettus Bridge en route from Selma to the state capital of Montgomery. Their mission was to persuade the president and Congress to overcome legislators' resistance to voting rights in legislation. This resulted in a voting rights law that was passed and became the Voting Rights Act of 1965, which ruled that segregation was unconstitutional.

The Free People of Color were able to accomplish a lot during their time, although they were suppressed in the 1800s and 1900s. They continued working as masons, builders, and leather workers; they set up shops and clientele in the old parts of

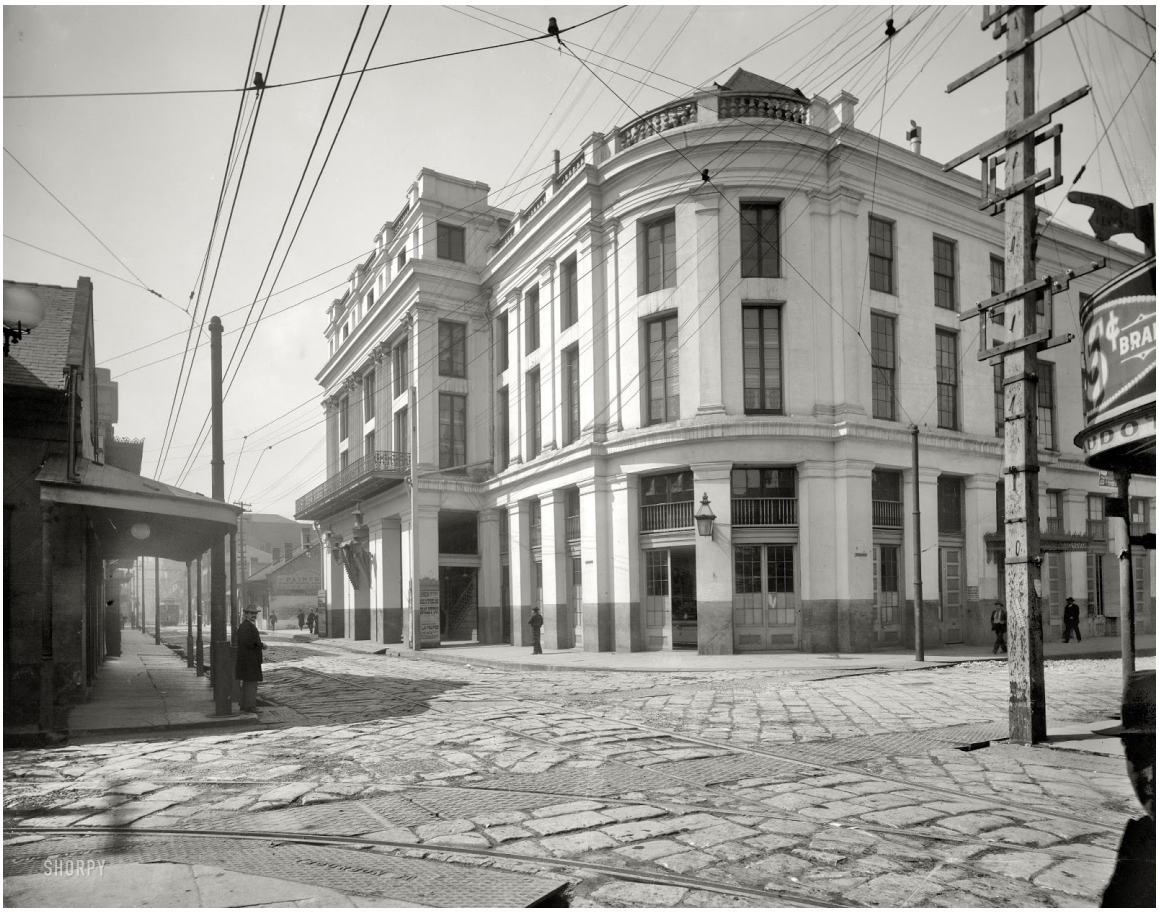
the city and sent their children to schools in New Orleans, Paris, and North America where most of them were educated. They were publishing and writing their own literature and wrote poems about love, death, and religion. Their cultural and social life were busy, and many of them attend college and graduated in 1915 from Straight University in New Orleans, which many refer to as Dillard University today. They formed clubs and socialized like normal people during the building and chaotic moments of New Orleans. The Free People of Color did not settle for less, but continued to make progress in spite of their marginalization and mistreatment from the French, Spanish, and the Americans.

In chapter I, II, and III of my senior project, I focus on the idea of the black Creole and how they are viewed as individuals. In these texts, I explain how it is better to be an individual because one is not a part of a group of people. The Free People of Color are free to live their lives as opposed to following traditions and cultural norms. I focus on the black Creoles as individuals because I believe that it is what makes them interesting. As individuals, they are recalcitrant to authority and have a sense of dignity as educated people of color.

Code Noir (Black Code):

- Masters had to give food and clothes to their slaves, even to those who were sick and old.
- A slave who struck his or her master, his wife, mistress or children would be executed.
- A slave husband and wife under the same master were not to be sold separately.
- Slaves could not sell sugar can, even with permission of their masters; slaves could not sell other commodities without permission of their masters.
- Slaves belonging to different masters must not gather at any time under any circumstances.
- Slaves could not carry weapons except under the permission of their masters for hunting purposes.
- Fugitive slaves absent for a month would have their ears cut off and be branded with the *Fluer De Lis*. If they were absent for two months, their hamstring would be cut and they would be branded again. If they were absent for three months, they would be executed.
- Free slaves that helped or sheltered fugitive slaves would be beaten by the slave owner and find 300 pounds of sugar per day.
- A master who falsely accused a slave of a crime and had the slave put to death would be fined; also, masters who killed their slaves would be punished.
- Masters could chain and beat slaves but could not torture or mutilate them.
- Freed slaves had the same rights as French colonial subjects.

"Canal Street in 1910."



“French Opera House, 1900s.”

"Negroes' house in New Orleans, 1936."

"French Courtyard, 1906."

“Madame John's Legacy Building, 1930.”

George Washington Cable's *Old Creole Days*: vulnerable, needy, and fatherless black Creoles in Nineteenth Century New Orleans

Chapter I

George Washington Cable, born in the mid-nineteenth century, is known as the first southern American novelist who portrays black Creole life in New Orleans. His collection of short stories lie between the pages of one of his successful works called *Old Creole Days,* written in 1879. Although Cable was not born a Creole, he has family roots in New Orleans. He worked for the New Orleans *Picayune* and on a regular column called "Drop Shot." His journalistic writing career did not live long. However, he started writing about the quotidian lives of black Creole women and how they lived in black, white, and Creole societies. In most of his short stories, he shows us how black Creole women have a plurality of perspectives. Cable's idea of double-consciousness is similar to W.E.B. Du Bois meaning of double-consciousness in his *Souls of Black Folk*. The meaning of Du Bois' double-consciousness is "always looking at one's self through the eyes of others, of measuring one's soul by the tape of a world that looks on in amused contempt and pity. One ever feels his two-ness, an American, a Negro; two souls, two

thoughts, two unreconciled strivings; two warring ideals in one dark body, whose dogged strength alone keeps it from being torn asunder." (2-3, *Souls of Black Folk*)

Cable's idea of double-consciousness is similar to Du Bois, but yet different. Cable believes, as well as Alice Dunbar-Nelson and Ernest James Gaines, that the black Creole women and men are always seeing themselves in the eyes of others, feeling that they belong to three groups of people as opposed to two or one. They constantly struggle with the idea of having three souls, three perspectives, and three quarrels within one black Creole body. The black Creole possesses three-split personalities within their own consciousness, and they work hard to assimilate themselves from or in a society to keep their identity hidden.

In Cable's short story "Madame Delphine," he describes the black Creole women as needy. He also underscores that they live their lives within the shadows of their white families as oppressed to people of color. *Old Creole Days* has been one of Cables great works during his time. Two of his short stories: *Madame Delphine* and *'Tite Poulette*, go deep into the meaning of the black Creole women and give us a snap-shot of their fatherless childhood and their struggles with being accepted into a white and black society.

Old Creole Days explains the meaning of a black Creole woman and *quadroon* in nineteenth century New Orleans. A black Creole woman is a mistress who is sometimes identified as a *quadroon*, which is a person who has one-quarter black ancestry. The *quadroon* is fatherless and sometimes "passes" as white. In George Washington Cable's *Madame Delphine*, he clearly reveals the struggles of a *quadroon* and her mother, Madame Delphine. The *quadroon* is without a father and does not grow up with her

biological mother. Instead, she is raised by a white family. Madame Delphine knows that her daughter is different and can "pass" as white. For that reason, she tries to find her daughter a white man whom she can marry and live a successful life.

In *Madame Delphine,* Cable depicts the neighborhoods of New Orleans after the Civil War and shows his readers how it has changed over the years. He reveals the schism between the rich and the poor. The rich Americans reside in the French Quarter while the poor black Creoles reside in poverty-stricken neighborhoods in downtown New Orleans. The protagonist captures Canal Street and its richness. Cable writes, "the flower-women sit at the inner and outer edges of the arcaded sidewalk and make the air sweet with their fragrant merchandise. The crowd—and if it is near the time of the carnival it will be great—will follow Canal."[1] (1, *Old Creole Days*) Canal is the rich part of New Orleans that is progressive as opposed to the poor vicinity of the city. The black Creoles' community changed when the Civil War ended, bringing in industrialized workers from different parts of the country and changing its milieu. The "arcaded sidewalk", "fragrant merchandise", and "carnival" are the things that changed the city.

Near the French Quarter, the houses and environment are different in terms of setting and liveliness. When the protagonist turns the corner and walks outside the Quarter, he realizes that he is in a different part of the city. He acknowledges that he is no longer part of the industrial world. Nonetheless, he enters into the past of the Quarter and the way it used to be before the war. Cable describes the setting. He writes: "...into the quiet, narrow way which a lover of Creole antiquity, in fondness for a romantic past, is

[1] (All references in Chapter I are from George W. Cable's *Old Creole Days*) Cable, George Washington. *Old Creole Days*. S.l.: Nabu, 2009. Print.

still prone to call the Rue Royal. You will pass a few restaurants, a few auction-rooms, a few furniture warehouses, and will hardly realize that you have left behind you the activity and clatter of a city of merchants before you find yourself in a region of architectural decrepitude." (1) The seismic shift happens when the protagonist travels into another area of the Quarter. The protagonist begins to see the difference in "activity and the clatter of a city of merchants." (1) He discovers that one part of the city is developed while the other region is undeveloped. Cable brings to light the paucity of buildings to show how black Creoles do not reside in the area anymore. Also, he talks about the buildings to reveal that they are dilapidated homes jettisoned by people of color who once resided there.

The region of the city is as disconnected as the black Creoles to the French Quarter. Their disconnection speaks volumes, and it also explains how they see themselves as different from others. Their homes are overlooked because they are dilapidated. Before the Civil War, the black Creoles prospered. Cable highlights, "...where an ancient and foreign-seeming domestic life, in second stories, overhangs the ruins of a former commercial prosperity." (1) Black Creoles prevailed in the past, and they owned their land. Since the Civil War, they have lost majority of their wealth and moved out of their homes to find a better living. Cable incorporates that black Creoles lives have changed, but their perspectives on coexisting with other groups of people have not changed. The black Creoles believed that they are individuals who are different from other societies, mainly because they are Catholic, speak French, and bi-racial.

As the narrator continues to explore the Quarter, he realizes the more abandoned the region becomes. There are few cars, stores that have shrunk in sizes, and rust-eaten

balconies. The protagonist recognizes that there is still a trace of value that exists in the city. Cable goes into detail: “Yet beauty lingers here. To say nothing of the picturesque, sometimes you get sight of comfort, sometimes of opulence, through the unlatched wicket in some porte-cochere—red-painted brick pavement, foliage of dark palm or pale banana, marble or granite masonry and blooming parterres.” (2) The region where the black Creoles reside has been overlooked and forgotten, although a trace of “beauty” continues to attract foreigners to the area. The “beauty” that Cable writes about is the richness of the region's culture, architecture, and infrastructure. What has been left in the poorer part of the city is the value of its history as opposed to its decrepit homes. The “comfort” that one gets when coasting through the empty streets is something unique that cannot be gained in the other half of the city where things are changing. The atmosphere of the area has a calmness to it that gives others peace and freedom.

Also, the region’s “opulence” and “porte-cochere” adds to its long history of black Creole elegance. Cable begins his short story by describing the neighborhood of the black Creoles to show us how their ghost town is in keeping with their characters and their existence. The black Creoles are a forgotten people who continue to remain in the shadows of the past. Black Creoles are alienated from the rest of the world. Black Creoles are like “ghost” because they are not of interest to the white and black communities, and their past lives have withered. Cable focuses on the poorer region of the city to shed light on its people as well as its houses, which are personified as dying Creole houses. Cable gives a description of the homes, “...a small, low brick house of a story and a half, set out upon the sidewalk, as weather-beaten and mute as an aged beggar fallen asleep...You would say the house has the lockjaw. There are two doors, and to each a single chipped

and battered marble step." (2-3) The homes are personified as if they are alive. Cable focuses on the homes of the black Creoles to point out that their residence are as broken as they are. He captures the homes various changes to show how they are obsolete but still holds much value. The "battered marble step" is what Cable admires, although it is broken. Its brokenness sheds light on how its value has withered after the Civil War. However, the "marble step" is still important. It is not important because it is "marble steps," but it is important because it is eroding and distressed.

Cable describes the homes of the black Creoles and underscores their language. When the protagonist goes through the vicinity of the black Creoles' neighborhood, he comes across the gardens, three-story homes, and an informant who explains that the homes are inhabited by black Creole women. The informant states: "Yass, de'ouse is in'abit; 'tis live in...Deys quadroons." (3-4) Cable writes this scene to introduce his readers to the black Creole language and to show how it plays a part in the black Creoles way of communicating with the rest of the world. Cable portrays the Creole as incompetent people of color. Alice Dunbar-Nelson and Ernest Gaines portray the black Creoles as competent people of color. As an outsider, Cable sees the black Creoles' language as beautiful because it is different.

The way Cable breaks down the language of the black Creoles is interesting. He shows us that, although the black Creoles have been manumitted from slavery, the barrier of communication keeps them from being a part of the industrialized world. Their language is atrocious, but Cable thinks otherwise. He thinks that it is attractive language, although it is broken and is not correct English. Its attractiveness goes hand and hand

with the black Creoles. The black Creoles are broken people of color with a broken language, but they have dignity and are modest.

Cable writes about the challenges black Creole women face when they are born without a father. When the protagonist runs into Delphine Carrase's home, who is Madame Delphine, he marvels at her status. He explains the scenery of the houses in New Orleans, he runs into the home that had been passed down to Madame Delphine when she had been a white man's mistress. Cable writes, "She owned her home, and that it had been given her by the then deceased companion of her days of beauty, were facts so generally admitted as to be, even as far back as that sixty years ago, no longer a subject of gossip. She was never pointed out by the denizens of the quarter as a character, nor her house as a 'feature'." (4, *Old Creole Days*) Madame Delphine lived as if she were a white woman. It is common for white men to give homes to black Creole women, although they did not agree to be in a monogamous relationship with them. Some black Creole women owned homes or possessed a parcel of land from their white partners. If they did, they not only received a home, but also received a financial settlement.

Delphine's home and status has allowed her to be separate from that of the black community. Her socioeconomic background has allowed her to reside with whites who are similar to her but yet different due to their color and their being able to marry white men. Delphine is separate from blacks and whites because of her identity as a black Creole woman. However, her complexion allows her to be a part of both the white and black society.

The protagonist sees that Delphine has class and that she is no longer considered a vulnerable black Creole woman. She is independent and does not depend on any man for

support and protection. The protagonist understands Delphine's status and acknowledges that she is privileged, but continues to live her life on the margins of the white society. It is as if she is invisible to both the blacks and whites. Her invisibility plays a major role in how she is received by the communities, as a woman who is inhuman and not important. Black Creole women are viewed as the minority in the black and white society because they are fewer in number and are a different race of people. Their religious beliefs, language, and socioeconomic status set them apart from others.

Cable states that Madame Delphine's home is given "by the then deceased companion of her days of beauty," which indicates that her features attracted a white man who left his land to her. The black Creole women are as beautiful as any white woman. They are also attractive and are able to "pass" because of the complexion of their skin. Their whiteness is a token that allows them to "pass". Thier whiteness gives them a new life and changes their status. If Delphine did not have a light complexion, white men would have not been attracted to her because they would not be able to see themselves in her. Their double-consciousness only happens when one looks as white and attractive as them. White men cannot see themselves in women of color because they are not a representation of antebellum America, but a representation of Africa and their past ancestors. White men only have sexual relations with black Creole mistresses with fair skin because they looked as if they were white.

Delphine's beauty grants her a home, but it does not grant her the merit she deserves as a black Creole woman. Most whites see Delphine as a "character". The word "character" is derived from the Greek word *kharakter*, which simply means "engraved mark." It seems as if Delphine is the center of gossip as a black Creole woman. She is a

pariah. The pariah that Delphine becomes classifies her as "other" or a "foreigner" who does not belong amongst a particular group of people. The mark of gossip that Delphine has been branded with labels her as someone who is different in form and appearance. Many view Delphine as someone who is not important. She is silenced due to her lack of communication with others. She does not fit.

Cable explains that black Creole women who have sexual relations with white men benefit them and their children. The black Creole woman benefits because she receives land, money, and slaves. The black Creole children benefit because their skin allows them to "pass". Their bodies are not taint because it has been replaced by whiteness. Cable states that their beauty and their survival comes from their white pigment. He highlights the first quarter of the nineteenth century and how it had been in its golden age with a free caste of New Orleans *quadroon* women. He makes clear white men relationships with black Creole women and how their impregnating them allowed for their survival. He states: "...to result from a survival of the fairest through seventy-five years devoted to the elimination of the black pigment and the cultivation of hyperian excellence and nymphean grace and beauty." (5) Cable explains that the elimination of blackness has given black women a chance to live a better life, receiving the opportunity to "pass" and assimilate themselves with white women who have privileges and reside in an environment that is of a higher socioeconomic class.

Although the lives of black Creole women changes when they are able to "pass" as white, they continue to struggle because of their differences. Black Creole women are different from white women due to a lick of *café au lait* in their blood. Also, their African lineage continues to place them on the same level as the black community who cannot

"pass" for white. Cable states that whiteness changes the lives of black Creole women and makes them become flawlessness as if they were white. Black Creole women are popular and very interesting to foreigners. Foreigners travel across the world to see them. Cable writes: "...their faultlessness of feature, their perfection of form, their varied styles of beauty—for there were even pure Caucasian blondes among them—their fascinating manners, their sparkling vivacity, their chaste and pretty wit, their grace in the dance, their modest propriety, their taste and elegance in dress." (5) White men are gods to black Creole women. They bestow beauty upon the black Creole women and give them a chance to be a part of the white society. It is as if the white man transforms the way in which black Creoles are perceived by white communities. The white man chooses whether they belong or remain outcast to the white society.

Black Creoles are not a part of the black community due to their "perfection of form." Black Creoles are made perfect because their fair skin reflects that of their oppressors. Cable highlights that whiteness is the only "perfection of form" that can exist on this earth; therefore, his idea of blackness is imperfection. The perfection that comes along with whiteness enhances a black woman's intelligence, her ability to dance, and the way in which she is perceived by the public.

A black woman to Cable is a klutz, incompetent, and tainted without the transformation of whiteness. The black Creole women change in color give them the potential to become a better and well-rounded person. Their color affects their lifestyle, their classification in society, and even their level of education. It is interesting how black Creole women are acknowledged once their pigment is white. Anything that is the obverse of whiteness is unacceptable to the white community.

The "beauty" that Cable admires within the black Creole women is the whiteness that they have been marked with by white men. He states, "...for their were even pure Caucasian blonde among them." (5) The idea of "faultlessness of feature" to Cable is whiteness because it purifies the lives of those who are considered "other" to the white society. If any black Creole women were dark skinned, Cable would have not acknowledged them as beautiful. The whiteness of black Creole women breaks the barrier of how white men see them. It also breaks the barrier of communication with blacks and the white society. They can have relations with white men and receive praise for their beauty, but cannot enjoy who they are as black Creole women. White men associate with black Creole women because they share the same skin color as opposed to similar perspectives, ideologies, and cultural values.

There were cotillions prepared for black Creole women by white men during the nineteenth century. The cotillions are popular soirées in New Orleans. The black Creole cotillion is where white men met with black Creole women. White women and Negro men were not allowed to be a part of the black Creole cotillions. The cotillions only consisted of government officials, those of the army, and professionals. Cable writes, "Tickets were high-priced to insure the exclusion of the vulgar. No distinguished stranger was allowed to miss them. They were beautiful! They were clad in silken extenuations from the throat to the feet, and wore, withal, a pathos in their charm that gave them a family likeness to innocence." (6) Black Creole women dressed with class and attracted white men to their cotillions. White men formed sexual relationships with black Creole women to take advantage of them. White men had sexual relations with black Creole women who did not have a father to protect them. White Creole women, on the other

hand, received attention from their fathers who ensured that their daughters did not have sexual relations until marriage and knew that their white partner did not have a lick of *café au lait* in his blood. White men could not misuse white Creole women because their fathers protected them as opposed to black Creole women.

Black Creole women are vulnerable individuals who are innocent. Their vulnerability attracts much attention throughout their lives. Cable describes black Creole women as vulnerable when he uses the word "pathos." "Pathos" is a Greek word that means "the quality that arouses pity or sorrow." It is associated with black Creole women who do not have anyone to protect and guard them from white men. Although black Creole women are beautiful, underneath their layer of beauty is sorrow. The whiteness that white men pass down to their black Creole mistresses does not heal black Creole women. It does not save them from marginalization. Black Creole women are still overlooked in society and continue to face challenges. For that reason, it is easy for white men to talk to black Creole women.

Most white men believe black Creoles are not as complicated as white Creole women. White men are able to have sexual relations with black Creole women without committing to marriage. Unlike most white Creole women, black Creole women are open to several possibilities. They are not restricted to date one partner. Black Creole women are able to be free and do not have to be celibate until marriage. They do not have to obey men and live under their tutelage. The benefit that black Creole women have allows them to have free will and agency over their lives.

In *Madame Delphine* black Creoles are in relationships with white men. Although black Creole women can date white men, they cannot marry and appear in public places

with them. Society do not allow their association in public, for it is custom for white men to be in a relationship with white women because of their privilege and status. Many black Creole women are despised and commodified by white men for their own pleasures. When Madame Delphine is talking with Pere Jerome, who is a black Creole pastor and a member of the New Orleans city's leading families, she explains that she has fallen in love at age nineteen with a white man and committed sin. Pere Jerome answers Madame Delphine and makes it clear that she is not the blame for her sin because she is without a father. Pere Jerome explains: "'I think God may have said 'She is a *quadroone*; all the rights of her womanhood trampled in the mire, sin made easy to her—almost compulsory,—charge it to account of whom it may concern.'" (26) Here, Madame Delphine believes that she has sinned as a black Creole woman. However, she has not sinned because her "womanhood" has been taken by white men and "trampled in the mire." Cable highlights that sin to a black Creole woman is not possible due to her fatherless status and disadvantages as a women of color. She is not entirely responsible for her actions. White men are held accountable for taking advantage of the black Creole woman. White men in society are the ones to blame for the black Creoles actions. Delphine's lifestyle bears reference to the way in which black Creoles are ostracized.

Delphine and her daughter are not identical. Delphine's daughter is a black Creole with a light complexion. Her daughter is considered white, because of her upbringing by white women in the Quarter. Though Madame Delphine does not raise her daughter, she acknowledges that her daughter is still identified as a black Creole woman and is still vulnerable to white men. Delphine understands that her daugher is most likely to experience marginalization from the white and black community. When Madame

Delphine is talking with Peter Jerome, he asks her questions about her daughter. Madame Delphine makes it clear that her daughter looks white and is beautiful. Jerome states that her daughter does not belong because she is a black Creole who looks white. Her individuality forces her to live on the outskirts of the black and white society. Cable asserts: "Does she look like you, Madame Delphine?/ You thank God for that which is your main difficulty, Madame Delphine….Which gives us the dilemma in its fullest force. She has no more place than if she had dropped upon a strange planet." (29-28) Delphine's daughter lived a different life from that of her mother. White Creoles raised her since birth. She learned the ways of the white Creole women as opposed to the black Creole women. She is accepted by the white Creole society and does not experience rejection like her mother; therefore, she has an advantage as a black Creole.

However, as she grows older, her lifestyle begins to change. She lives in solitude like her mother and does not understand as to what community she belongs: to the white women or to the black Creole women. Although Madame Delphine's daughter does not know who she belongs to, she continues to "pass" as a white Creole woman and a black Creole woman. Delphine does not claim her daughter. Thus, she abandons her so she can have a better future and "pass" as a white Creole.

Madame Delphine knows that most men would desire her daughter and take advantage of her because she does not have a father; therefore, she tries to find her a young white man of her caliber who would honor and treat her fairly. Delphine does not want any white man to be in a relationship her daughter. She thinks that the white pirate, Miche Vignevielle, would be a good match. When she tells Pere Jerome, he agrees that the pirate would be a good fit for Madame Delphine's daughter. Madame Delphine

agrees because she believes that the pirate and her daughter are similar. They do not have a father; they are outlaws in society; and they are constantly struggling with their identities. Madame Delphine explains: "I dreamed that I made that pirate the guardian of my daughter." (29) Although the pirate is considered a culprit in the white society, Delphine sees him as a match for her daughter. Their similarities would make it easy for Delphine's daughter and the pirate to marry. Cable continues to write: "To you, Madame Delphine, as you are placed, every white man in this country, on land or on water, is a pirate, and of all pirates, I think that one is, without doubt, the best." (29) Jerome believes that the pirate is the best fit because of the way in which he is viewed in the white society and the black community. The pirate is considered a pariah, and he does not have a family.

Also, Pere Jerome states to Delphine that Vignevielle would not refuse her if she asked him to marry her daughter and be her guardian. Jerome explains: "Make him your daughter's guardian; for myself being a priest, it would not be best; but ask him; I believe he will not refuse you." (34) Here, Jerome understands that the pirate is a righteous man who is separated from society because of his defiance to do good on earth. When Jerome gives his sermon, he talks about a the pirate who is defiant and distant from smuggling. He states:

> I once knew a man...who was carefully taught, from infancy to manhood, this single only principle of life: defiance. Not justice, not righteousness, not even gain; but defiance: defiance to God, defiance to man, defiance to nature, defiance to reason; defiance and defiance and defiance...But a strange thing followed. Being in command of men of a sort that to control required to be kept at the austerest distance; he now found himself separated from the human world and thrown into the solemn companionship with the sea, with the air, with the storm, the calm, the heavens by day, the heavens by night." (21-22)

Vignevielle is one of the only pirates that have disconnect himself from man. Cable writes this scene to show how parallel Vignevielle is to the black Creole women. The black Creole women are distant from humanity. As a white man, Vignevielle is an individual and does not assimilate with the white community. Vignevielle, like the black Creole, is not reduced to a society. However, he has a plurality of vision and does not have any restraints. Like the black Creole women, Vignevielle sees the white and black community as a foreign land where he does not belong.

When Delphine goes to the office behind Monsieur Vignevielle, who is a white man, a banker, and an outcast whose language is broken like the black Creoles. She asked Vignevielle if he could take care of her daughter if she dies. Cable writes: "'Miche Vigneveille'—here she choked, and began her peculiar motion of laying folds in the skirt of her dress, with trembling fingers. She lifted her eyes, and as they met the look of deep and placid kindness that was in his face, some courage returned, and she said…'if it arrive to me to die...I wand you teg kyah my lil' girl." (35) Delphine is the only one that can protect her daughter from white men who want to take advantage of her. She knows that Vigneveille would do the same. Cable explains here how the black Creole vulnerability forces her to bridge relationships with white men to protect their children, although they have money and own land. Having a white man to protect the black Creole would give her a sense of merit, and others would not take advantage of her. The presence of a white man in a black Creole's life is mandatory for their survival in the world. Without a white man, black Creoles do not have any power to guide themselves.

Cable ends the short story *Madame Delphine* with a sad ending. Delphine does not change throughout the story, and her sin continues to follow her. When Delphine and

Jerome are talking, she confesses that Olive is her *quadroon* daughter. She also states that she has committed sin. She degrades herself for being black and struggles with accepting herself as a woman of color. Delphine expresses: "I confess to Almighty God, to the blessed Mary, even Virgin, to blessed Michael the Archangel, to blessed John the Baptist, to the holy Apostles Peter, to Paul, and to all the saints, that I have sinned exceedingly in thought, word, and deed, through my fault, through my fault, through my most grievous fault." (30) As a black Creole, Delphine believes that she has committed transgressions against God. Black Creole women do not have a voice. They are silenced due to their ostracism. Cable reveals to us that black Creoles struggles all the days of their lives. He shows us that their lives are almost always troublesome. Delphine believes that her sin derives from having sexual relations with a white man and conceiving a daughter. The ending of the short story is complicated. It highlights that black Creole women are used as scapegoats to take the blame for others' faults.

Similar to *Madame Delphine*, Cable talks about the black Creole women and how they are attractive and reside in a poor area in his short story *'Tite Poulette*. Cable gives an introduction that introduces the houses and the black Creole women. When the protagonist is telling the story, he goes on to explain how New Orleans has changed, yet continues to remain a rich culture. Cable first talks about the home of Kristian Kopping, a young Dutchman and how it stands opposite a building that is similar to the century old streets. Cable writes: "...Flush with the street, a century old, its big, round-arched windows in a long, second-story row, are walled up, and two or three from time to time have had smaller windows let into them again, with odd little latticed peep-holes in their batten shutters." (213) The house of the black Creoles are as old as the history of New

Orleans. Although they are old, Cable continues to see them as homes with value. He admires the home's "big, round-arched windows". It is a home that is not modernize like the rest of New Orleans. The home of the black Creole is special due to its old-fashion look, and the historical connection it has to the black Creole city.

When Kopping views the home through his window, he acknowledges that a black Creole woman resides in it who looks "colored." Madame John, the black Creole woman that the narrator describes, has an attractive countenance and straight hair, though she lives in the dilapidated home that no one seems to reside in. Cable portrays Madame John as being beautiful: "You would hardly have thought of her being "colored." Though fading, she was still of very attractive countenance, fine, rather sever features, nearly straight hair carefully kept." (214) Cable highlights the black Creoles because he shows us how they are poor women who continue to "pass" as color and remain beautiful, although their beauty does not align with their status. The "attractive countenance" that Cable explains is something that comes with class. However, the black Creole's attractiveness does not come with class. It is beauty that does not change with wealth either, but it is natural beauty. The black Creole's "natural" beauty shapes them into women who are unchanging. What makes black Creoles interesting women are their glamorous lifestyle in a poverty stricken area of New Orleans.

The black Creole women are vulnerable and poor people but prideful. They are intelligent and jubilant women who "passes" as white and do not let their poverty stop them. They are articulate and well-mannered women of color. The difference between the blacks and black Creoles are their elegance in style. Cable makes clear their way of living and appearing in public spaces. He writes about Madame John: "Her smile, which came

and went with her talk, was sweet and exceedingly intelligent; and something told you, as you looked at her, that she was one who had had to learn a great deal in this troublesome life." (214) The black Creole women are women of great dignity who hold themselves to a high standard. Their high standards protect them from the "troublesome life" Cable points out. Black Creole women have a troubled life due to their absent fathers who do not protect them from white men. Black Creoles attractive appearance hid their troubles. It is as if their attractiveness is a mask that shields them from a life of calamity. The shield is their light complexion.

Madame John's daughter is white and looks like a white woman to most white men. When the narrator states that Madame John is one who has beauty, he goes on to say that her daughter is far more beautiful than her mother. Madame John's daughter, 'Tite Poulette, has fair skin. Kopping is informed by others in the neighborhood who describes the black Creole women as being attractive in appearance. Cable writes: "But her daughter...So beautiful, beautiful, beautiful! White?—white like a water lily! White—like a magnolia!" (214) 'Tite Poulette is more beautiful because of her whiteness as opposed to Madame John. 'Tite Poulette's beauty does not come from her elegance in style, but her color. Being able to "pass" for white makes 'Tite Poulette perfected in a sense that she does not have to live a troublesome life. Her life is different from that of her mother's life. Cable believes that a black Creole woman life is not great until her color has changed to whiteness. Here, Cable focuses on whiteness to underscore how 'Tite Poulette is given a "pass" and is looked at differently from her mother.

'Tite Poulette "passes" as white, but she cannot travel outside alone. Her disadvantage as a black Creole woman who looks white makes her vulnerable to white

men. The narrator says that ‘Tite Poulette and her mother sings, which their voices are similar to nature’s “mockingbird”. He also explains how they are able to communicate in French. The only difference between ‘Tite Poulette and her mother is that ‘Tite Poulette does not have agency over her life. Cable explains: “The neighbors could hear them call each other pet names, and see them sitting together, sewing, talking happily to each other in the unceasing French way, and see them go together on their little tasks and errands. “‘Tite Poulette,” the daughter was called; she never went out alone.” (215) Here, Cable reveals how black Creole women have to protect their daughters. They remain under their parent’s tutelage until a man can take care of them. Black Creole women are different from that of white women because they carry themselves in a fine manner that is respectable. They do not let their daughters date any man or go outside by themselves due to their lack of protection.

Cable explains how black Creole women inherit the homes of white men. Madam John’s house had been giving to her by her lover. Once Madame John’s partner leaves New Orleans, he tells her goodbye and gives the land to her. The narrator states: “An hour after, amid the sobs of Madame John, she and the “little one” inherited the house, such as it was.” (216) Most black Creole women inherit the homes of their white partners. Black Creoles benefited from white men more than white men benefited from them. The only disadvantage the black Creole has is assimilating with blacks and whites and living their lives as outcast.

White men protect black Creole women from others who try to mistreat them. The narrator goes on and describes how black Creole balls are gay. The black Creole balls are where white men meet, flirt, and dance with black Creole women. At the ball, Madame

John met her husband there. Cable writes: "Yes, it was gay, gay!—but sometimes dangerous. Ha! More times than a few had Monsieur John knocked down some long-haired and long-knifed rowdy, and kicked the breath out of him for looking saucity at her; but that was like him, he was so brave and kind." (217-218) White men cared for their black Creole women as much as they cared for their wife. Here, we see that Monsieur John protects Madame John because of his connection to her. White men connection to black Creole women breaks down the barrier of racism and classism. It shows us how the color of one's skin and background does not determine a person's interest and love for others.

Like Olive and Vigneveille, 'Tite Poulette is lonely and ostracized from the white and black community. When 'Tite Poulette is talking to her mother, her mother tells her that she is not like others. Her mother explains that she has "no fortune, no pleasure, no friend." (220) Most of all, she goes deep into detail about how 'Tite Poulette life is going to be lonely because of her black Creole identity. Madame John states: "No, not;—I thank God for it; I am glad you are not; but you will be lonely, lonely, all your poor life long. There is no place in this world for us poor women. I wish that we were either white or black!" (221) Here, Cable sheds light on how black Creole women are pariahs and are forever outsiders to the world. Their lonely lives are considered problematic because there is no one who thinks that black Creoles are made from God. Madame John states: "Sin made me, yes." (221) The conception that sin made black Creoles has been embedded in Madame John as a black Creole woman. The thought does not derive from her, but whites and blacks who believe that black Creoles are not good enough to be amongst them.

The black Creole women try to hide their identity to be accepted by white men. Any white man's acceptance gives them a life of privilege and benefits them to be a part of the white community. When 'Tite Poulette goes home and kisses Zalli, a white man who is Monsieur John's son, she is stopped by Madame John who tells her not to tell a white man that she is not white. Madame John explains: "If any gentleman should ever love you and ask you to marry,—not knowing, you know,—promise me you will not tell him you are not white." (223) Once black Creole children are born, they are not a part of a particular culture, until they make a decision to choose whether they want to be a part of a race or not. The fear of not being white continues to hunt the black Creoles. They desire to be white and not black. Blackness is someone who struggles with disadvantages and cannot be white. Whiteness is someone who enjoys life as opposed to those who are black. Madame John tells 'Tite Poulette not to say she is black because she knows the power and agency she will have as a "white Creole woman."

White men give black Creole women power. Black Creole women are powerless as white men's mistresses. When Zalli explains that 'Tite Poulette is beautiful, she silently listens. He states that he wants to be her prisoner. Zalli explains: "But I tell thee nay. I have struggled hard, even to this hour, against Love, but I yield me now; I yield; I am his unconditioned prisoner forever. God forbid that I ask but that you will be my wife." (242) Here, Cable sheds light on the white man's ability to give the black Creole women power. Zalli goes on to tell 'Tite Poulette that he is her "prisoner forever" to express his love. The imprisonment of Zalli subjects him to Tite Poulette's will and allows her to control his fate as opposed to letting him control her fate as a black Creole woman.

Alice Dunbar-Nelson's "The Stones of the Village" and "Brass Ankles Speaks": the benefits and disadvantages of the black Creole

Chapter II

In her short story "The Stones of the Village", Alice Dunbar-Nelson articulates the historical meaning of the black Creoles. She interweaves herself in and out of her literary fiction. She uses conventional concepts of form and genre throughout her prose, explaining and confronting the meaning of social conditions and prejudices of her time. She writes the complexities of the black Creole woman and man in the late nineteenth century and early twentieth century in New Orleans. Explaining how the black Creoles are privileged to "pass" as white, she underscores the privileges that give them an advantage and a disadvantage. She also points out how the black Creoles are able to assimilate themselves into a white or black society. They can either choose to be a part of one society or to remain on the margins of both for claiming to be a black Creole.

Black Creoles have a hard time discovering themselves and where they fit in society. Although they do struggle integrating into other communities, they are given better insight into humanity as an pariah. They can understand the plurality of two

cultures and two races. Their ostracism grant them a life that helps them understand two worlds. Their marginalization does not reduce them, but enlarge their potential and understanding of two societies. The black Creole is constantly evolving and developing into a complex person. Their lives are not given a surprising order that is similar to blacks and whites.

As a black Creole, born Alice Ruth Moore on July 19, 1875, in New Orleans, Louisiana, Dunbar-Nelson had European, African, and Indian blood. Her Creole strain endowed her with reddish-blond curly hair and a complexion that almost allowed her to "pass" for white. She could enter into the high culture of privileged society and connect with whites. For instance, she attended operas, bathing spas, and art museums. Free blacks attended events, but they were not able to sit in the lower parts of the operas if they were not white or did not "pass" as white.

"The Stones of the Village," written in 1910, by Dunbar-Nelson, goes into depth and examines the advantages and disadvantages the black Creole face during the early twentieth century. Dunbar-Nelson originally wrote "The Stones of the Village" as a female protagonist. However, she opposed the idea that she could not write under a pseudonym. Dunbar-Nelson changed the protagonist of "The Stones of the village" and gave it a male protagonist. She later published. Her reason for changing the character was to avoid receiving any threats from white and black communities. She removes herself from her work completely.

The option of not publishing under her own name made it easier for her to live in a world estranged from black Creoles. However, the short story aligns with Dunbar-Nelson's life and gives her readers a snapshot of her dealings with race in early

twentieth-century New Orleans. In "The Stones of the Village," Dunbar-Nelson receives the opportunity to talk about her racial status as a black Creole woman in New Orleans.

The disadvantages Dunbar-Nelson encounters throughout her life span are several. In her essay "Brass Ankles Speaks," she sheds light on the ways in which her childhood friends reject and mistreat her. She also touches upon her tumultuous experiences as a woman in her twenty odd years in New Orleans. Dunbar-Nelson explains what it means to be prejudiced against one's own race for being too white. She highlights the many disadvantages of being born with reddish-blond hair and a white complexion that allows her to "pass" occasionally as white. In both "The Stones of the Village" and "Brass Ankles Speakers," we can closely underscore and analyze both pieces with a critical eye and learn what it means to be a black Creole and an outcast from society.

In Alice Dunbar-Nelson's "The Stones of the Village," Victor Grabért frequently suffers from his childhood taunts and has a tough time being accepted by black and white boys. He struggles with the idea of not being accepted and acknowledges that it has become second nature to him: "This full, sullen resentment, flaming out now and then into almost murderous vindictiveness."[2] (3, *The Stones of the Village*) As Victor hurries home, we evaluate the "derisive laughs and shouts" and how the children belittle him. Dunbar-Nelson refers to the children from down the streets as "little brutes, boys of his own age." Victor has been taunted by the boys more than once. His Grandmére dislikes the fact that he continues to play with the black boys. She furiously states: "Dose

[2] All references *The Stones of the Village* are from Dunbar-Nelson's volume 3 collection "The Stones of the Village." *The Works of Alice Dunbar-Nelson*. Ed. Cloria Hull. Vol. 3. New York City: Oxford UP, 1988. 1-285. Print.

boys...Dey fools." (4) Here, it seems as if Victor's Grandmére thinks that Victor is too privileged to interact with black boys.

The black boys and Victor do not get along. Victor's Grandmére degrades the fact that he tries to socialize with them. Victor's Grandmére refuses to let him mingle with the black boys; therefore, Victor tries to establish a friendship with white boys. Victor bridges a relationship with the "little boys, whose faces were white like his own." (5) Victor's skin complexion does not prevent the boys from mistreating him for having a lick of *café au lait* in his bloodstream. The children's remarks "ran him away with derisive hoots of 'Nigger! Nigger!'" (5). Victor's identity gets challenged, and we learn that Victor resides on the precipice of two worlds. His conflicted character kick-starts the story and is used as a springboard to advance the plot.

What is means to be a black Creole is to have a touch of *café noir* in one's blood and to be alienated from society. Dunbar-Nelson shows us through Victor how the black Creole family's bloodline systematically determines if he or she is alienated from the white community or the black community. If black Creoles try to "pass" as white, they would struggle with identifying their background. Victor wrestles with the concept of not having a mother and a father, let alone a role model to teach him the ways in which he must survive in a hostile society dominated by blacks and whites. Victor struggles due to a lack of guidance from his black Creole grandmother. His fair skin and youthful mind give him the assumption that he is equal to the little brutes he tries to befriend down the streets. His innocence makes it easier for him to try and forge a relationship with the white boys. However, his efforts to build a relationship fails when he discovers how the black and white boys do not want to befriend him.

As readers, we witness the layer of Victor's double-ness as a black Creole. The question that lingers is whether Victor acknowledges his double-ness, or the black and white boys, or both. The double-ness, which Dunbar-Nelson interweaves throughout "The Stones of the Village," elaborates on why Victor has trouble with understanding himself and the boys who rejected him. The double-ness shows two sides of Victor. One side gives him the benefit to "pass" as a white Creole, and the other side gives him the disadvantage to not assimilate with his own kind. Victor struggles between two worlds and resides on the margins of both as an outsider. The confrontation Victor faces with blacks and whites leaves him to fend for himself. He is constantly waltzing between two racial groups.

Like Victor, Dunbar-Nelson speaks of similar disadvantages as a black Creole girl in an essay called "Brass Ankles Speaks." Blacks and whites reject her with negative comments and do not want to befriend her due to her light complexion. Although Dunbar-Nelson has been treated unfairly by both blacks and whites, she highlights the troubling experiences she receives from her own kind. She writes, "On the other hand, there is an increasing interest and sentimentality concerning the poor, pitiful black girl, whose life is a torment among her own people, because of their 'blue vein' proclivities." (311, *Brass Ankles Speaks*)[3] Dunbar-Nelson writes how blacks devalued her as a black Creole. The mistreatment Dunbar-Nelson receives brings to light how blacks thought of black Creoles. Dunbar-Nelson peppers her readers with interesting ideas that speak

[3] (All references from *Brass Ankles Speaks* are from Dunbar-Nelson's volume 2 collection) "Brass Ankles Speaks." *The Works of Alice Dunbar-Nelson*. Ed. Cloria Hull. Vol. 2. New York City: Oxford UP, 1988. 1-321. Print.

volumes about blacks during the late twentieth century and how they would shun their own kind if they were privileged enough to "pass" as white.

Dunbar-Nelson refers to herself as a "pitiful black girl, whose life is a torment among her own people". She did not have an easy childhood, but a difficult one. Her life is similar to that of Victor's life. Dunbar-Nelson's double-ness rarely gives her an advantage as a black Creole. She could not "pass" as white most of the time. Most people knew her in New Orleans as a black Creole; she is isolated and persecuted by the black community. She does not assimilate with them because of the way in which they treat her.

Dunbar-Nelson explains in her "Brass Ankles Speaks," why she does not identify her light complexion with power. As a little girl, Dunbar-Nelson's classmates believed her complexion gave her a sense of power over them. The black children shunned her for being placed on the patel stool by the teacher. The children in her class do not think Dunbar-Nelson deserved to be placed on a patel stool because of the color of her skin. Thus, they ostracized her and called her a "teacher's pet" and "light nigger, with straight hair." (312) The term "nigga" scarred Dunbar-Nelson for the rest of her life and forced her to live in sadness. Her ties to her own people were marred. The term "nigger" dehumanized Dunbar-Nelson. It also made her feel as if she is less than the Negro. Here, the degrading of the black Creoles also explains a great deal about the system, how it turns blacks against their own kind for being too light skinned and having straight hair. The children refer to Dunbar-Nelson's "straight hair," it shows that they viewed her as "other".

The persecution Victor receives from his own kind reflects that he is different. The blacks did not only call Victor "nigger," but also called him "White Nigger!" The concept of being called "nigger" leaves Victor with the impression that everyone in society is better than him. Dunbar-Nelson chooses to allow the children to call Victor "nigger" to express how they viewed the black Creole, as the lowest of all humanity. The black children are not referred to as "niggers" in "The Stones of the Village." Dunbar-Nelson does this to highlight how blacks believed that they are better than the black Creoles.

Victor's Grandmére knows the struggle Victor goes through to bridge a relationship with the children and how he tries to fit into their society. She advises him to stop speaking his native Creole tongue. Victor's Grandmére presents the idea to him to make it easier for him to be a part of a society. She educates him so that he could become well versed in the English language. The benefit that Victor would receive for transforming would allow him to easily connect with the black and white boys. The disadvantages of Victor changing his native language would distance him from his Creole culture, giving him a choice to integrate himself with another society. Dunbar-Nelson writes with a wry touch of humor: "The result was a confused jumble which was no language at all; that when he spoke it in the streets or in the school, all the boys, white and black and yellow hooted at him and called him "White nigger! White nigger!" (5) When Victor takes on the task to change his language, he is confused by the concept and thinks that it is a foolish one, stating to himself that it was "no language at all." It bothered Victor to communicate differently. He learns english, but continues to struggle.

The idea makes Victor thinks that he cannot be a part of a culture that does not truly fits with his identity.

One would bring into question Dunbar-Nelson's choice to point out how the "white and black and yellow" children discrimination against Victor. As a reader of Dunbar-Nelson's prose, we can fathom Victor's ability to "pass" as white. However, although we know that Victor can "pass," he continues to get rejected. Considering the ways in which Dunbar-Nelson writes her short story, she consciously shows the disadvantages that come with being a black Creole. Victor has no friends, and no matter what he does, he constantly continues to change. The hate that Victor and Dunbar-Nelson receive outlines the travesty of injustice they received in the South. It also shows how the laws discriminated against black Creoles during the early eighteenth century and late nineteenth century against black Creoles.

Dunbar-Nelson and Victor cannot do anything about their circumstances, but accept the taunts that are thrown their way by the white and black society. There is no escape from the mistreatment they receive from the children in their schools and neighborhood. The experiences that Dunbar-Nelson and Victor encounter illustrates to us what it is like for a black Creole to be born in the South. It also goes deeper into the psychological aspect of racism and how blacks and whites can be racist. Whites utilize racism as a means to completely ostracize one from their society to enslave them. Blacks utilize racism as a means to discriminate against their own kind to form a social ladder. For instance, the blacks marginalize the black Creoles to feel as if they are superior to another race. Discriminating against the black Creoles creates a racial system that categorizes a race or a group of people.

When Dunbar-Nelson befriends a Negro girl, she is criticized and marginalized. She recollects the memory of the girl, Esther, her friend. She tries to forge a relationship with her. Although Esther's complexion does not mirror the color of Dunbar-Nelson's complexion, she becomes Dunbar-Nelson's friend. Everything turns out well in the beginning of their friendship, but changes when Esther marginalizes her. Dunbar-Nelson writes, "But she repulsed me with ribald laughter—'Half white nigger!' Go on wid ya kind!'" (312) Esther rejects Dunbar-Nelson with derogatory language. She does not apologize but walks away. Dunbar-Nelson writes: "...and drew up a solid phalanx of little dark girls, who thumbed noses at me and chased me away from their ring game on the school playground." (312) Dunbar-Nelson does not move to a new location to develop a relationship with new people. However, Victor does move to a new location and keeps his distance from those that rejected him. The reason why Dunbar-Nelson writes the scene with Esther is to show how there is a racial system that allows Negroes to feel "uppity" and more important than the black Creoles.

Victor's separation from the white and black community peels back a layer of difficulty Victor faces: "He fell into a troubled sleep wherein he sobbed over some dreamland miseries." (6) Victor is troubled and continues to live as if he is in a "dreamland" where no one accepts him except his Grandmére. He is on his cot sobbing because what the black and white boys called him: "White nigger." Dunbar-Nelson's recollection connects with Victor's. She recounts: "Thus, at once was I initiated into the class of the disgrace, which has haunted and tormented my whole life—'Light nigger, with straight hair!' (312). The disadvantages that Victor and Dunbar-Nelson face haunts them and gives them a sense of hopelessness. Victor and Dunbar-Nelson are young when

they experience hate from their childhood friends. They have not yet reach an age of adulthood and are already resented due to the color of their skin. The "dreamland miseries" that Dunbar-Nelson writes about gives us a sense of the unfortunate lifestyle of the black Creoles. They are placed in a world in which they are treated like foreigners.

When Dunbar-Nelson moves to the North, many consider her as "passing" and privileged. The white church welcomes her with opened arms as well as the black church. When Dunbar-Nelson chooses to attend the white church instead of the black church, her name is marked in the town: "I saw a flier for the first time on the day of affair, with my name down for a recitation. Naturally, I did not go on such slight notice, and forever afterwards was branded among the colored townspeople as a 'half white strainer, with no love for the Race.'" (317) Here, Dunbar-Nelson is not able to escape her problems, although she "passes" for white. The black community shuns her when she takes the opportunity to be a part of another culture. They no longer see her as their own, but as an outcast who does not support the black community or cares about it. Dunbar-Nelson shows us here how blacks agreed with separating themselves from the white community. She highlights how they participated in racism and believed that it is against the law for them to associate themselves with whites.

The experience that Dunbar-Nelson undertakes says a great deal about her lifestyle and why she does not want to be a part of a black church. It also capitalizes on the way in which she sees the world, a place where she is considered a foreigner. There have been several instances in which Dunbar-Nelson tries to bridge a relationship with her "race," but failed because of the barrier that stands between them: "They may like me personally; they may even become very good friends; but there is always a barrier, a

veil—nay, rather a vitrified glass wall, which I can neither break down, batter down, nor pierce." (317) The "barrier" that Dunbar-Nelson describes highlights the disconnect she has with the darker girls. The barrier, which is simply the barrier of their skin, separates them from understanding one another. Their differences prevent them from seeing eye to eye.

The darker girls laugh at Dunbar-Nelson because they have never experience the torment Dunbar-Nelson received from the black race. Dunbar-Nelson continues to talk about the "barrier," but goes deeper into what she means and how the barrier drives a wedge between her and her friends. She replaces the word "barrier" with "veil," which indicates that there is a possible understanding between Dunbar-Nelson and the girls because the veil is permeable. The permeable veil speaks to the ways in which Dunbar-Nelson's friends can relate to her on certain issues except for the one that deals with her skin complexion.

Dunbar-Nelson goes even further with the veil and calls it a "vitrified glass wall." The wall symbolizes how Dunbar-Nelson's friends cannot view or interfere with her life through the wall. It is a transparent connection that provides insight, but no connection to the world that Dunbar-Nelson lives in. She states: "I have to see dear friends turn from a talk with me, to exchange a glance of comprehension and understanding one with another which I, nor anyone of my complexion, can ever hope to share." (317) The interesting point that Dunbar-Nelson makes here is how the relationship her friends share with one another is quite different from the one they share with her. The difference in their relationship is that Dunbar-Nelson's friends can intimately relate to one another as opposed to Dunbar-Nelson.

The privilege of "passing" as a white Creole can be a good thing. However, there are still some disadvantages. Victor does not want to attend Tulane College, but Mr. Buckley, Victor's lawyer, says otherwise. Victor is silenced when people choose for him. There are several scenes in "The Stones of the Village," where someone chooses for Victor and silence him. For example, his Grandmére, the little black and yellow boys, and Mr. Buckley.

It seems as if Victor's silence breaks when he talks to Elise Vannier. Between a reality and a dream, Victor stands on the edges of two worlds, two cultures that he is a part of, but finds himself afraid to join, either. He is stuck between the limbo of choosing because of his past and background: "Sometimes, when he held her hand a bit longer than necessary, he could feel it flutter in his own, and she would sigh a quick little gasp that made his heart leap and choked his utterance." (14) The dream that Victor tries to live in does not work for him. It only happens when he is silenced and not completely aware of Elise's complexion. However, he comes back to reality when Elise makes the slightest movement that forces him to question himself.

The difference between Dunbar-Nelson and Victor is that Dunbar-Nelson has a family. Victor does not, which makes it much harder for him to fit in society. He talks to Elise, but is cognizant of his family background and tradition. He knows that it separates them completely: "They had money; so had he. They had education, polite training, culture, social position; so had he. But they had family traditions, and he had none. Most of them could point to a long line of family portraits with justifiable pride." (16) Dunbar-Nelson reveals that Victor has an advantage to "pass" as a Creole, but cannot deny his linage or point to family portraits like Elise. Dunbar-Nelson explains that it is impossible

for Victor to continue to hide his background. She explains that Victor cannot escape his past no matter what he does on this earth. The evidence of a family lineage is very important to Elise and her family. However, family lineage is not as important to Victor. It does not give him the advantage to "pass" for white or benefits him.

When Victor leaves his hometown, he is placed on "the other side of the racial fence...to live in terror..." all the days of his life (311). Victor new life provided him with a plethora of opportunities. The life that Victor is given moves him down the Mississippi River and changes him forever. With elation and a touch of admiration, Victor looks out of his office window and contemplates: "Within, was warmth and light and cheer" (10). The scene sets the temperature of the inside of Victor's office, but also captures him at his happiest moment in life. The "warmth" is felt through him as a black Creole who has been given the advantage to "pass" as white in a white society. However, although Victor new life has given him a sense of belonging and happiness, sorrow continues to linger inside him. Victor recounts: "Without, the wind howled and gusty rains beat against the window pane." (10) Victor lives a life of happiness within himself, but his problems continue to reside in his present life, although he has moved up the socioeconomic ladder. The "wind" that blows outside the window foreshadows Victor's life and how devastating Victor's life is going to become. By doing a close reading of the text, we can easily highlight the patterns of Victor and Dunbar-Nelson and how they continue to struggle with their ability to "pass" as white.

Furthermore, in order for Victor and Dunbar-Nelson to change their unfortunate "dreamland miseries," they have to migrate to another town where no one knows their origins. Victor chooses to not stay in his hometown, but leaves to reside with his

Grandmére's friend, Madame Guichard. What we acknowledge as readers is Victor's exposure to new people. They accepted him as opposed to the children that he grew up with down the streets. Dunbar-Nelson writes: "Never in all his life had he seen so many people before, and in all the busy streets there was not one eye which would light up with recognition when it met his own." (6) Victor's life changes when he leaves his hometown. He even experiences the difference in the way people look at him. They do not see that he is a "nigger" or a "white nigger." The advantage Victor has in this scene sheds light on his privileges. Victor blends in the environment quite well. It is as if he is two sides of a coin that can slyly change his physical appearance. He shape shifts to hide his identity as a black Creole.

The complexion of Victor's skin has opened up several doors of opportunity for him and has given him the chance to go to school, become a successful lawyer, gain a fortune, and make new friends. Victor's failure does not determine his future, but grants him a better one instead. The privileges that Victor received, makes him forget about who he is and where he came from. It changes the way he looks at life, his hometown, and the people who loved him most: "'Poor Grandmére,' sighed Victor, 'She did care for me after her fashion. I'll go take a look at her grave when I go back.' But he did not go, for when he returned to Louisiana, he was too busy, then he decided that it would be useless, sentimental folly. Moreover, he had no love for the old village." (12) The more the black Creole moves up in life, the more he or she thinks they are not connected to their past. They fully assimilate themselves with another culture that accepts them.

Dunbar-Nelson also shows us how the privileged black Creoles move up the economic ladder. Although Victor goes through a stage of traumatic stress and believes

that his world has "tumbled down," life grants him an award for working at the bookstore and "passing" as a white Creole. Mr. Buckley tells Victor that the book-seller left him a parcel of currency. The book-seller had been Victor's manager before he passed. Dunbar-Nelson writes: "He dried his tears however, the next day when a grave faced lawyer came to the little house on Hospital Street, and informed him that he had been left a sum of money by the book-seller." (9) The advantage of "passing" as a white Creole pushes Victor up the economic totem pole. Although Dunbar-Nelson does not go into much detail about the privileges the black Creole is granted, we can see that they are given endless possibilities by those who are white. Some black Creoles do not inherit money because white men choose not to give them anything because they have a lick of *café au lait* in their blood.

Victor grows up poor without a father and a mother, but his complexion provides him with a better and wealthier life. Dunbar-Nelson writes: "The interest of the money...is sufficient to keep you very handsomely without touching the principal. It was my client's wish that you should enter Tulane College, and there fit yourself for your profession. He had great confidence in your ability." (9) The book-seller does not mention anything about Victor's "confidence" and his "ability" to go to school. We can easily connect the reason why the book-seller gives Victor a parcel of his currency. He does it because he believes that Victor is white. The excuse of giving Victor the money does not go hand and hand with the book-seller's experience with Victor.

One cannot point to the book-seller's interactions with Victor and say that he gave Victor the money due to his relationship with him or because of Victor's financial status. Therefore, we know that the book-seller gave Victor the money so that he can move up

the financial ladder. One of the reasons the book-seller allows Victor to inherit the money is to go to school. Victor's financial status changes, but he remains a black Creole. The money that the book-seller gave Victor changed his lifestyle and allowed him to be surrounded by people who are different from black Creoles. Victor knows if he is given the money to go to Tulane College that his life can change forever; therefore, he declines the offer. Dunbar-Nelson continues to write: "Why—why—I should have to study in order to enter there." (9) Although Victor comes up with an excuse to not go to school, Mr. Buckley, still chooses for him: "'and as I have, in a way, been appointed your guardian, I will see to that'...Victor found himself murmuring confused thanks and good-byes to Mr. Buckley." (9-10)

Similar to Victor, Dunbar-Nelson experiences are similar. She goes through a period of rejection as a black Creole. She does not choose her fate, but people around her chooses it for her. She recounts: "There were not enough seats for all the squirming mass of little ones, so the harassed young teacher...put me on the platform at her feet. I was so little and scared and homesick that it made no impression on me at the time. But at the luncheon hour I was assailed with shouts of derision—'Yah! Teacher's pet! Yah! Just cause she's yaller!'" (312) The young teacher places Dunbar-Nelson on a petal stool for being lighter than the darker children in the classroom. Here, we can identify Dunbar-Nelson's light skin complexion with privilege. Dunbar-Nelson does not know she is privileged and is placed above the other students in the classroom, but as she grows older, she acknowledges her skin color as "passing". She sadly discovers that her complexion has placed her above black students and separated her from them.

Dunbar-Nelson does not think highly of herself when she is on a platform. She is not aware of her privileges. As readers, we can see that the appearance of her fair skin speaks volumes of superiority. Dunbar-Nelson's fair skin makes the darker children feel as if they are inferior to her. The children recognize the color of Dunbar-Nelson and the way in which the teacher treats her. Although the school that Dunbar-Nelson attends is filled with "all shades and tints and degrees of complexions from velvet black to blonde white," the darker children draw the line on what students are accepted and what students are not accepted: "And the line of demarcation was rigidly drawn—not by the fairer children, but by the darker ones." (312) Before Dunbar-Nelson can prove herself to the children that she comes from a black family, the children shun her from their circles because they believe that they are better than Dunbar-Nelson.

Like Victor, Dunbar-Nelson's destiny is not chosen by her teacher and the little girls and boys that attend her school. Instead, she chooses her own destiny. The benefit of being a black Creole can help one in several ways. It allows one to gain wealth, education, and be accepted by the world. When a "passing" black Creole is no longer a part of their own race, their people despise them. Dunbar-Nelson chooses to be a black Creole all the days of her life. She states: "This was the beginning of what was for nearly six years a life of terror, horror and torment." (312) Dunbar-Nelson's bravery continues, as she grows older. She does not refuse to leave her public school, but stays there "from six to twelve years of age." (314) Different from Dunbar-Nelson, Victor does not accept his childhood fate. Instead, he continues to play with the black and white boys until his Grandmére advises him to move down the Mississippi River with "old Madame Guichard." (6)

Victor is accepted by whites, and his acceptances makes him feel "warmth" and in touch with the world. Victor never wants to be disturbed or awakened by his past. He ignores it and persuades himself to think that "it would be useless" to return back home to his Grandmére. In order for Victor to enjoy himself, he eliminates others from his life to fit in with the white society. No matter how much Victor tries to remove others from his current life and his environment, he is still haunted by his past experiences and the mistreatment of black Creoles. When Victor sees the Recorder, the judge who mistreats Wilson as a black Creole, he sees himself being mistreated, too. The judge states in the courtroom:

> 'You niggers are putting yourselves up too much for me.' At the forbidden word, the blood rushed to Grabért's face, and he started from his seat angrily. The next instant, he had recovered himself and buried his face in a paper. After Wilson had paid his fine, Grabért looked at him furtively as he passed out. His face was perfectly impassive, but his eyes flashed defiantly. The lawyer was tingling with rage and indignation, although the affront had not been given him. (13)

Victor makes a connection here when he sees Wilson, who is a prisoner. The Recorder treats Wilson with no respect and calls him a "nigger," though Wilson is educated and well-dressed. Victor tingles with "rage and indignation" when the lawyer aggressively calls Wilson a "nigger." Victor does not know Wilson, but "furtively" observes him to see how he reacts to the Recorder. Wilson does not act out any aberrant behavior. Dunbar-Nelson tries to illustrate to us how Wilson mirrors Victor. She shows us how they share an understanding of what it means to be called a "nigger" as a black Creole.

Victor continues to feel a part of the black Creole society, although he is considered as "passing" in a white society. Wilson reminds Victor who he is and how the children down the street called him a nigger, too. Dunbar-Nelson continues to write:

> If Recorder Grant had any reason to think that I was in any way like Wilson, I would stand no better show,' he mused bitterly. However, as he thought it over to-night, he decided that he was a sentimental fool. 'What have I to do with them?' he asked himself, 'I must be careful'....The next week, he discharged the man who cared for his office. He was a Negro, and Grabért had no fault to find with him generally, but he found himself with a growing sympathy toward the man. (13)

Once Victor experiences the Wilson is mistreated, it reminds him that he has to keep a low profile on his identity. Victor does not want to be scene or work with any blacks he has sympathy toward. He believes that it would not allow him to assimilate with the white community. The "dreamland" Victor desires to be a part of excludes those who are black. When Victor is surrounded by Elisa Vannier, she makes him feel equal to her. Victor explains: "That Elise was not indifferent to him he could easily see. She had not learned yet how to veil her eyes and mask her face under a cool assumption of superiority. She would give him her hand when they met with a girlish impulsiveness…" (14) Elise's presence gives Victor a sense of belonging and does not make him feel different from her. Her presence makes him feel as if he is white and does not have a black Creole background. Victor's connection only goes so far when he holds Elise's hand. Victor knows that their family history separates him from Elise: "and her color came and went under his gaze." (14) No matter how much Victor tries to ignore who he is, the color of Elise's white complexion still reminds him of himself and his past life as a black Creole.

Dunbar-Nelson does not experience what Victor goes through, but continues to live in torment and mistreatment by blacks and whites. Her life differs from Victor's in terms of escaping her past and being granted another chance to live as a white Creole. Dunbar-Nelson metaphorically refers to herself as an unsocial "golden butterfly," which is an abnormal and isolated insect that goes against nature. Although Dunbar-Nelson

"passes" as a white Creole occasionally, she does not embrace the white Creole lifestyle like Victor does. Thus, her experience with Negroes is devastating: "Bitter recollections of hair ribbons jerked off and trampled in the mud. Painful memories of curls yanked back into the ink bottle of the desk behind me, and dripping ink down my carefully washed print frocks. That alone was a tragedy, for clothes came hard, and a dress ruined by ink-dripping curls meant privation for the mother at home." (313) Dunbar-Nelson does not get a chance to be herself in the black community. She is constantly hectored by the black children at her school.

When Dunbar-Nelson grows older, she receives the same mistreatment. She cannot understand why she is hated. When she tries to bridge a relationship with a black student named Eddie, who is in the college department and has won prizes in oratory and debate, he turns her down. Dunbar-Nelson writes: "I loved Eddie...but Eddie was of a deep darkness, and refused to allow me to love him. With stern dignity he checked my fluttering advances. He would not demean himself by walking with a mere golden butterfly; far rather would he walk alone, he told me." (315) Dunbar-Nelson comes to the actualization that dark skinned children think that it is disrespectful to have relations outside their race. They believe that it would only hurt them to be seen with someone who is not a part of their culture and society. Dunbar-Nelson believes that Eddie does not want to be in a relationship with her because she is "a mere golden butterfly."

The phrase that Dunbar-Nelson uses—"a mere golden butterfly"—points out that "yeller niggers" are considered plain and simple. They are one-dimensional people that do not belong in a world where class, culture, and race determine one's place in society. Although golden butterflies are rare, they are abnormal insects that go against the norm

of society. The backlash Dunbar-Nelson receives highlights her inability to be herself in a world that blacks and whites dominate.

The "barrier" Dunbar-Nelson talks about connects to Victor and Elise's relationship. They would never understand one another due to their differences. Dunbar-Nelson further explains: "While if he had had a picture of Grandmére Grabért, he would have destroyed it fearfully, lest it fall into the hands of some too curious person. This was the subtle barrier that separated them." (16) Victor's and Dunbar-Nelson's experience with the "barrier" go hand and hand and speak volumes of their existence in a world that is separated by race. Victor does not get a chance to forget his past as he assimilates himself with the black Creole community, for he is forever left on the outside of the community because of his family lineage. It is interesting how Victor is never shunned from the white and black community. It is as if Victor does not belong to any community, but forever lives on the borders of what Dunbar-Nelson calls "the racial fence" (311). He continues to hover between both races.

When Victor goes to a bar, the bartender tells him the story of the "darky" who wanted service. The "darky" did not receive any service; therefore, he complains about it because he is discriminated against due to the color of his skin. There are several interesting points Dunbar-Nelson makes here. She illustrates how the "darky" is well-dressed, quiet, and polite. Dunbar-Nelson tries to explain that the "darky" should not be discriminated against due to the color of his skin if presented respectfully in public. She also explains that the "darky" is a man with money. The example that Dunbar-Nelson emphasizes shows us that men who are of a dark complexion can be just as wealthy and respectful as normal white men. She even goes on to say if a man has full control over the

things that matter—money and manners—they should not be mistreated for the color of their skin, which is something that they cannot change on this earth. Dunbar-Nelson writes: "Why—a fellow came in here, nice sort of fellow, apparently, and wanted to have supper. Well, would you believe it, when they wouldn't serve him, he wanted to fight everything in sight. It was positively exciting for a time." (19) The discrimination that the "darky" receives reveals that no matter how respectable black Creoles are, they are still ostracized from society due to the color of their skin. Dunbar-Nelson makes it clear that black Creoles are considered inhuman and unequal to the white race, that they are considered objects that hold little to no value. The way a black Creole is mistreated says a great deal about their humanity and their existence in the world. Humans are respected and have a right to democracy, to live their lives with a sense of equality. However, the right to a democracy is not true for black Creoles who are not allowed to "pass" as white.

The "vitrified wall" that Dunbar-Nelson explains in her personal essay, comes about in "The Stones of the Village." It points out how two men—the "darky" and Victor—are similar, but are treated differently. The vitrified wall appears again in the short story when Victor does a case in the courtroom against Pavageau, a black lawyer who is determined to fight for a man who wants to leave his property to educational institutions: "'Fools', he said between his teeth to himself, when they were crowding about him with congratulations, 'Fools, can't they see who is the abler man of the two?' He wanted to go up to Pavageau and give him his hand; to tell him that he was proud of him and that he had really won the case, but public opinion was against him; but he dared not. Another one of his colleagues might; but he was afraid. Pavageau and the world might understand, or would it be understanding?" (24) The connection that Victor wants

to make with Pavageau is impossible. He could not explain to Pavageau that he won the case, but lost for being black. Victor benefits in the court case simply because he "passes" as white. The disadvantage that Victor experience is not being able to connect with Pavageau because of the complexion of his skin. Both men are equally talented and knowledgeable, but the wall that separates them makes one superior than the other; therefore, Victor applauds Pavageau for fighting against public opinion when everyone did not agree with him.

Within the "vitrified wall" we can also see that there is a veil that allows Victor to see the white and black race. When Victor secret is unearthed by Pavageau, he comes to the realization that he could live in both worlds, the black and the white world without anyone knowing. Dunbar-Nelson writes: "He threw back his head and laughed. Oh, what a glorious revenge he had on those little white boys! How he had made a race atone for Wilson's insult in the courtroom; for the man in the restaurant at whom Ward had laughed so uproariously; for all the affronts seen and unseen given these people of his own whom he had denied." (30) Victor's veil allows him to move in and out of the black and white world whenever he pleases. The veil gives him the advantages that Dunbar-Nelson does not have. The veil gives him the opportunity to go to a prestigious school and receive one of the highest possible positions in society. Dunbar-Nelson continues to write: "He had taken the highest possible position among them; and aping their own ways, had shown them that he too, could despise this inferior race they despised. Nay, he had taken for his wife the best woman among them all, and she had borne him a son…" (30-31) Here, Victor thinks that he has deceived the white society and muses on the idea for his own self-pleasure. He takes joy in his laughter and how he has disproved the

concept of blacks being inferior to whites. Victor shows us that black Creole men are not inferior to whites, but are given limited opportunities to succeed and flourish academically.

Victor contemplates how far he has come since he has moved down the Mississippi River. He realizes that he has gained his own agency while living his life as a "white man". The idea of Victor thinking of the events that took place, makes him takes pride in who he is as a black Creole. This is the only scene in which Victor rejoices and boasts about his revenge on the white boys in the village. This scene is significant because of Victor's change in character. It is as if he accepts himself and takes ownership of his own fate. He is no longer silenced. Victor has the choice to decide whether he wants to be black or not. The self-agency that Dunbar-Nelson gives him is the agency he has throughout the entirety of the story.

When Victor is on stage at the banquet giving his speech in front of judges, lawyers, and whites, he continues to think about his choice and whether he should mention to the white Creoles his black lineage. Once Victor decides that he should speak about his black background, he chokes and mistakes the chairman for his Grandmére. Victor is silenced by this. Dunbar-Nelson writes:

> 'Grandmére,' he said softly, 'you don't understand—'and then he was sitting down in his seat pointing one finger angrily at her because the other words would not come. They stuck in his throat, and he choked and beat the air with his hands. When the men crowded around him with water and hastily improvised fans, he fought them away wildly and desperately with furious curses that came from his blackened lips. For were they not all boys with stones to pelt him because he wanted to play with them? He would run way to Gradmére who would sooth him and comfort him. (32)

Victor tries to fight his way through his silence but loses himself in the midst of his actions. Dunbar-Nelson writes and reveals the scene to us to make a point about

Victor and how he struggled to live in both worlds. Victor has two lifestyles, in which he is given the opportunity to assimilate himself in two different societies. Understanding the black and white culture gives Victor an advantage to understand both races and to see how they are both similar in their own different ways. The similarities of both races are their drive for knowledge, dominance, and power. These concepts are continuously revealed within and outside of Victor as a black Creole.

Similar to Victor, Dunbar-Nelson expresses the same idea in her essay, "Brass Ankles Speaks." She makes clear her point about how "passing" for white has given her the potential to be a highfalutin writer of prose. It has also provided her with the writing skills that many blacks did not have during her time, to write eloquently with beautiful language and a touch of wry humor. When Dunbar-Nelson is not able to "pass" as white in other parts of the country, her skills as a black Creole is praised. She is able to take what she has learned from the whites and give it to the blacks. She understands what it means to be black and what it means to be white. Her familiarity of both worlds opens her up to a great understanding of both cultures, which she is able to write complex stories. She has the advantage to write a piece that no black or white can write. Although her privileges are short lived in both the black and white societies, her ideas and individuality is not reduced to one group of people.

Dunbar-Nelson lived beyond her time to write a piece that captures the lives of blacks and whites working together. The benefit of being an outsider and not being connected to one group of people gives one a better understanding of humanity and how he or she is different, but in their own ways. Dunbar-Nelson explains through her prose that black Creoles face hatred from their own race and prejudice and racism from whites.

Dunbar-Nelson states: “If they choose not to go over to the other side….then they are forced to draw together in a common cause against their blood brothers who visit upon them hatred and persecution.” (321) Being ousted from the black and white society has given Dunbar-Nelson a broader view of who she is and where she stands in society. The disadvantages and advantages as an individual benefit Dunbar-Nelson to awaken her “blood brothers” and to write a piece that could open their parochial vision to see the good in all humanity, whether black, white, and Creole.

Ernest James Gaines's *The Autobiography of Miss Jane Pittman*: love versus power, privilege, and racism

Chapter III

Ernest James Gaines explains in his book *The Autobiography of Miss Jane Pittman,* the meaning of the half-white Negro, the black Creole, and how they are similar. He begins Miss Pittman's story at the beginning of the Emancipation Proclamation in 1863 and ends it at the beginning of the Civil Rights Movement in 1954. He writes with gritty prose about racism and how it affected blacks and whites. Gaines uses conventional concepts of American literature from southern Mississippi writer William Faulkner, who articulates in *Requiem for a Nun* that: "The past is never dead. It's not even past." Gaines mirrors Faulkner's idea in *The Autobiography of Miss Jane Pittman* to highlight the complexities of American history and its continual challenges with racism.

Gaines interprets the meaning of love and how it overpowers the concept of racism in the twentieth century. He writes about the love relationship between blacks and whites to shed light on the idea that love has no boundaries and is not limited by the color of a person's skin. He explains that love does not pivot around racism but overshadows it. For instance, when Robert Samson, a Louisiana plantation owner, has sexual relations

with a black woman named Verda, she conceives a son for him. Mr. Samson's half-white son name is Timmy. Mr. Samson treats Timmy as if he is not black but a white child.

Gaines continues to articulate the meaning of love with Mr. Samson's white son Tee Bob, who falls in love with Mary Agnes LeFabre, who is a high class educated black Creole. Tee Bob tries to elope with Agnes to New Orleans, and he treats her as if she is his equal. Gaines shows us that love dismisses the principles of racism. He explains that it is the driving force that breaks down barriers between two races that are different but yet similar. He demonstrates through Tee Bob and Agnes how Louisiana's "One Drop" rule does not determine the way in which Tee Bob feels about Agnes. The "One Drop" rule is a law that determines a person's social status and color. For instance, though Agnes is a half-white Negro, the "One Drop" rule would consider her a black Negro because her ancestors are from Sub-Saharan Africa.

Nevertheless, although Agnes is a half-white Negro, she is privileged and treated as if she is a white woman. Gaines furthers his argument by highlighting Timmy's and Agnes' color and how it gives them power and privilege. Gaines explains that they are more privileged than the Negro and have advantages over them. For example, Timmy does not have to work in the fields, but saddles and rides horses with his brother Tee Bob. Timmy's privilege separates him from the Negroes. Timmy benefits as Mr. Samson's son. Similar to Timmy, Agnes has the same benefits as a half-white Negro, too. Her privilege allows her to be called "Miss" and treated equally as a "passing" white woman. Gaines makes it clear that power and privilege goes hand and hand for the half-white Negro because of the white man's love relations with Negro women.

The half-white Negroes are as privileged as whites and have more power than the ordinary Negroes. The half-white Negroes color, education, background, and connection to whites make it difficult for them to be part of the Negro society. Although the half-white Negroes have privilege and power, they are limited to how much privilege and power they can use. They can only use their privilege and power to be a part of the white community, but they are still viewed as Negroes. Thus, they remain on the margins of the black and white society. Their ancestral past continues to overshadow their privileges and light complexions. However, when love is taken into consideration, white men do not question the half-white Negroes' background, but accepts the Negroes for their ability to "pass" as white. Love plays a major role in sexual relations between blacks and whites. It removes the "racist mask" white men fear they cannot live without. Their "racist mask" allows them to hide their identity and to be men they are not.

Gaines, an African American writer and professor at University of Louisiana at Lafayette, lived in Louisiana on River Lake Plantation near New Roads. There, Gaines' ancestors tilled the land as slaves and sharecroppers. His immediate family lived in quarter houses that once served as slave homes. Gaines did not grow up with his parents but was separated from them at age eight. However, his great aunt, Augustine Jerfferson, crippled from birth, took care of him along with the rest of his six siblings. School was conducted in a single room in a church and opened for less than half a year. After six months, Gaines, along with several other children, helped his aunt labor in the fields.

During Gaines' later years, Pointe Coupee Parish offered no public high school for Negro children. Thus, Gaines had to attend St. Augustine Catholic school in the parish at New Roads, Louisiana, where he reunited with his parents after world War II

and moved to Vallejo, California. In Vallejo, he found himself searching through books in the public library. He soon became enthralled with nineteenth century Russian writers—Anton Chekhov, Leo Tolstoy, and Ivan Turgenev—who reminded him of his own experiences on the Louisiana plantation.

Gaines loved Chekhov, Tolstoy, and Turgenev because they wrote about their land and peasant life. Gaines was a voracious reader, and he read mostly in the library. The works he most enjoyed were African American stories, which kick-started his love for reading and writing stories of his own, recreating a world of his childhood past. He published short stories and came out with his first novel *Catherine Carmier,* which was published in 1964. It was accepted by critics but sold poorly. Although Gaines' first novel did not do well, he continued writing and published two other novels—*Of Love and Dust (*1967*)* and *Bloodline (*1968*)*—which attracted greater attention than his first novel.

Gaines did not become well known in America and beyond his country until he completed *The Autobiography of Miss Jane Pittman* in 1971, a first person narrative of a one hundred and ten-year old Negro woman named Miss Jane Pittman, who is the protagonist in Gaines' novel. In the story, Miss Pittman was born in slavery and freed during the Emancipation Proclamation. Gaines welcomes us into the world of Miss Jane Pittman and weaves together her memories of childhood experiences on a plantation. He writes from the perspective of a Negro woman who tells her story about racism and freedom. Gaines reveals her heroism as a freed woman of color and a legendary figure of African American history.

Miss Pittman's story leads readers through the African American past, their way of life during slavery, and post-slavery. Her story brings to life what it was like to be

black during her time and how racism affected the lives of all people. Miss Pittman explains the tragedies of racism and how half-white Negroes were impacted by it. She also explains how it tore relationships apart and brought harm to black Creoles who possessed a lick of *café au lait* in their blood.

Miss Pittman tells the story of Timmy and Tee Bob. She articulates that they are blood brothers, but color separates them from one another. Both Timmy and Tee Bob are the sons of Mr. Samson. The county knows that Timmy is Mr. Samson's son. Timmy is Mr. Samson's son due to the way in which Timmy behaves. Miss Pittman states, "Timmy was more like him than poor Tee Bob ever would be. When he was nothing but a child Timmy liked to ride and hunt just like Mr. Samson always did. Had all of Robert's mischief ways. You stayed on your guard 'round either one of them."[4] (145, *The Autobiography of Miss Jane Pittman*) Timmy's life reflects that of Mr. Samson. Gaines writes about their similarities to prove that color is not a determining factor of how one behaves, but how one is perceived in public and in social circles. Although Timmy is considered a half-white Negro, he does not behave as if he is a Negro or is a descendent of a Negro family.

Timmy's and Mr. Samson's relationship is compared to reveal that their blood is the same, but their color separates them from having the same privileges. Timmy inherits his father's behavior. They both mistreat black men and women for their pleasure. Miss Pittman explains, "Robert didn't care what he did to white or black. Timmy didn't care what he did to men or women long as they was black." (145) Timmy and Mr. Samson

[4] (All references in Chapter III are from Earnest J. Gaines' *The Autobiography of Miss Jane Pittman)* Gaines, Ernest James., Mr. *The Autobiography of Miss Jane Pittman*. New York: Dial, 1971. Print

differ in behavior when mistreating whites. Mr. Samson can mistreat whites and not be executed or thrown in jail. Timmy cannot mistreat whites unless he would be executed or punished. Timmy only misuses his own kind. Thus, Timmy is privileged like his father, but his privileges are limited.

Timmy's privilege segregates him from Negroes. It gives him the advantage to ride horses and not labour in the fields. When Tee Bob is at school, Timmy looks after the horses and rides them with Tee Bob. Miss Pittman states: "Timmy came up to the front to work. He was about twelve then, because he was six or seven years old than Tee Bob. When Tee Bob was at school, Timmy looked after the horses. When Tee Bob came home, Timmy saddled up the horses and they rode out in the field together." (146) Timmy job is not painful and tedious as opposed to other Negroes. He does not have to pick cotton or cut sugar canes in the field but live a normal life like any other white man. Timmy's behavior and biological connection to the Samson family gives him the privilege and the status to ride horses. It allows him to behave like a white man as opposed to a Negro.

As a black child who is a descendant from Mr. Samson, Timmy does not submit to authority. He feels as if he does not have to submit because he believes he is as privileged as any white man. No white man has authority over Timmy. The way in which Timmy behaves toward Tom Joe, who is a white worker on Mr. Samson's plantation, sheds light on the way in which Timmy is different from the other Negroes. For instance, when Timmy is sitting on his horse, Miss Pittman states, "He was sitting in that saddle, not slumped over like a nigger ought to be, but with them shoulders up, with that straw hat cocked a little over his eyes. He was telling us Robert wasn't go'n do him a thing."

(151) Timmy knows that his privilege allows him to be unsubmissive to authority. He also knows he is Mr. Samson's son and that he would not get in trouble for misbehaving. He deceives Miss Pittman and makes her fall off a horse. What makes Timmy rejects authority is the way in which his father treats him, as if he is privileged. Timmy's fearless attitude toward his father reveals how disconnected he is from the Negro race.

Timmy behaves different from a Negro. Timmy's shoulders not being "slumped over" reveals that he is different from the Negro because of the way in which he carries himself, as if he is a white man who has authority; therefore, there is power and freedom in the way Timmy hold his shoulders up. The meaning of his shoulders is symbolic and represents power, freedom, and authority, as well as dignity. Gaines does not focus on Timmy as a Negro in this scene, but his posture and how it signifies who Timmy is as a half-white Negro. Timmy has agency over his body, and his composure gives us a snapshot of his character, especially when he states that "Robert wasn't go'n do him a thing." Miss Pittman recounts, "But he didn't have to tell it to me. I knowed all the time Robert wouldn't do him nothing. But Miss Amma Dean still didn't know. Had been married to Robert ten, twelve years, and still didn't know what he would do." (151) Miss Pittman makes it clear that Mr. Samson does not punish Timmy for mistreating a Negro. Mr. Samson never flogs Timmy for his mischievous behavior. We can surmise that Mr. Samson does not want to chastise Timmy because he cares and sees himself in Timmy.

Miss Pittman explains that Timmy and his father are similar. Nevertheless, race separates them when it is taken into consideration. Mr. Samson would treat women and men, white or black, how Timmy would treat men and women of color. Miss Pittman reveals how parallel Timmy and Mr. Samson are, although they do not share similar

privileges due to the rules and regulations racism has enforced on them. When Mr. Samson goes home and hears the story of Timmy and how he almost made Miss Pittman fall off a horse, he laughs and does nothing to Timmy. Miss Pittman states: "He didn't say a word to Timmy. He knowed Timmy respected Miss Amma Dean. He knowed Timmy had to respect Miss Amma Dean just like he had to respect every white lady or white man. The other thing didn't matter." (152) Mr. Samson does not do anything to Timmy when he deceives Miss Pittman. Instead, Timmy gets away with his behavior because Miss Pittman is not a white woman. Thus, Mr. Samson knows that Timmy is not a part of the white society. He thinks of Timmy as a Negro, although Timmy is his biological son and behaves like him. If Timmy had deceived a white woman as opposed to Miss Pittman, Mr. Samson would have reacted differently toward Timmy, despising him for his behavior. He would have punished Timmy. When we do a close exegesis of the text, we can see that Mr. Samson does not treat Timmy as his own son because of racism. Racism not only affects Negroes, but also affects whites. It tears apart family bonds and breaks bridges between relationships blacks have with whites.

For example, when Joe sees Timmy, he stares at him with hate and disgust. Joe does it because he knows that Timmy is not a pure white child. Miss Pittman recounts: "He hated Timmy with all his might. Timmy got away with too much from that house up there. He knowed that Timmy was Mr. Samson's boy, and he hated the Samson in Timmy much as he hated the nigger in him." (152) Here, Timmy benefits from his father's blood and is protected whenever he does wrong. The "Samson" that Joe hates in Timmy is a reflection of how he cannot accept white and black blood mingled together. Joe cannot accept Timmy's privilege and how he is able to "pass" as a Negro. Also, Joe

hates the fact that Timmy misbehaves as a Negro. The "nigger" that Joe hates in Timmy is as equal as a white man and does not have to obey him like most Negroes. When Tee Bob falls off his horse, Timmy carries him to the house. After Joe sees what happens, he hits Timmy. He does it because he knows that no white man would tell him otherwise. Miss Pittman continues to explain: "More, because it was the Samson blood in Timmy that made him so uppity. No, he didn't hit Timmy for what had happened to Tee Bob. He hated Tee Bob much as he hated the rest of the Samsons. He knocked Timmy down because he knowed no white man in his right mind would 'a' said he had done the wrong thing." (152) As Joe chastises Timmy, he reveals that Timmy is still considered a Negro, although he has white blood in him. He shows us that a Negro who is not pure white is not apart of the white community, though he or she comes from a white family.

Joe thinks that Timmy is "uppity" because he is connected with the Samson's family. The Samson's family gives Timmy the power to believe that he is superior or above Negroes who look like him. Timmy is not poor but is of a higher socioeconomic class. Other Negroes on Mr. Samson's plantation cannot do what Timmy does. They cannot emulate his behavior or get into mischief. Joe hates Timmy for being a Negro and receiving the same privileges as a white man. When Joe tries to get Timmy to obey him, Timmy does not listen and talks back to him in a violent manner. Timmy disobeys because he knows that he is privileged. Miss Pittman asserts, "...When Timmy got up he said, 'That's enough, Tom Joe.' Tom said, 'Call me Mister, nigger.' Timmy said, 'I wouldn't call white trash Mister if I was dying.'" (152) The way Timmy treats Joe highlights the ways in which he has the privilege to talk to white men. It is as if Timmy does not belong to the blacks nor the whites since he is a half-white Negro. He does not

obey and respects neither community. He refuses to call Joe Mister because he believes that his status and color as a half-white Negro makes him as equal as a white man.

Timmy struggles with his identity and the way in which he sees himself in the world. Timmy's difference separates him from the Samson family. However, Miss Amma Dean still treats Timmy as if he belongs to the family, although he is a Negro. Joe flogs Timmy and Miss Amma Dean defends him. Miss Pittman argues: "'Wahs?' Miss Amma Dean said, still looking at me with the spy glasses in her hand. Then she looked at Timmy. At first she was mad enough to hit him with the spy glasses, but the longer she looked at him the more she saw Robert." (150) When Timmy misbehaves, his white mother tries to chastise him as a Negro, but she cannot because of the connection that he has to the family. She refuses to mistreat Timmy as a Negro because she can see the white man in Timmy. Here, it seems as if there is a permeable wall between whites and half-white Negroes. They can see each other through one another's eyes. It is as if Timmy and Miss Amma Dean communicate on a deeper level. Miss Amma Dean not only sees Mr. Samson in Timmy, but also sees herself—and her whiteness—in Timmy.

Timmy switches back and forth between whiteness and blackness. The switch only happens when others are reminded that Timmy is somehow connected to the Samson's family. When Joe finish beating Timmy, Miss Pittman watches and states that Timmy has to remember that he is not white. Miss Pittman explains: "Timmy wasn't Robert, even if he was Robert's son. He had to remember he was still a nigger." (151) The idea of Timmy not remembering his boundaries as a Negro sheds light on the ways in which he forgets his blackness because of the privileges he has received from his white family. When Joe flogs Timmy, it reminds him that he is as inferior as any Negro.

Timmy's punishment gives the readers an idea of how limited his power is compared to a white man's power. Timmy's limitations as a half-white Negro divested him of power to identify himself. Although it does, he becomes an individual. Similar to Alice Dunbar-Nelson in her essay "Brass Ankles Speaks". Timmy's individuality allows him to tap into his full potential. It does not reduce him to a society but makes him better.

Timmy cannot behave as if he is white. A half-white Negro is considered inferior. For instance, when Joe beats Timmy, it explains that Timmy's color determines his place in the world, and it highlights how different he is from the white community. Miss Pittman recollects how Miss Amma Dean screams at Joe out in the yard when he starts beating Timmy with an iron pole. Joe continues to beat Timmy when Miss Amma Dean calls his name. He keeps beating Timmy because he knows that it is custom for a white man to beat a Negro. Miss Pittman explains: "She would have him run off the place, she would have him put in jail, put in the pen even. But her screaming at Tom Joe, threatening Tom Joe meant no more than threatening a fence post. That hatred for Timmy was too deep in him to stop now. And what white man would put him in jail or keep him in jail after what Timmy had let happen to Tee Bob?" (153) Joe knows that he is a white man; therefore, he utilizes his power to mistreat Timmy. The question of humanity comes about here when Joe chastises Timmy for something as simple as not listening to him; a Negro to Joe is not considered apart of humanity but separate from it. Joe objectifies the Negro and thinks of the Negro as property. Gaines highlights Miss Amma Dean and how she tries to stop Joe. Her effort to do so does not work because Negroes are considered a piece of property without value.

Gaines explains the scene after the incident and how Mr. Samson does not help his son Timmy when Joe beats him. He asserts that Timmy is a half-white Negro and has no connection to the Samson family. Miss Amma Dean tells Mr. Samson what happened to Timmy. She tells Mr. Samson that she wants Joe to leave the plantation, but Mr. Samson refuses to tell Joe to leave. Miss Pittman states, "...Miss Amma Dean told him what had happened. Joe ought to be run off the place; no, put in jail. Robert told her he wasn't go'n do either. You pinned medals on a white man when he beat a nigger for drawing back his hand. 'Even a half nigger?' Miss Amma Dean said. 'There ain't no such thing as a half nigger,' Robert said." (153) The idea of Joe being kicked off the plantation and put in jail is something that would have not happened, for whatever a white man does to a Negro, it is accepted. Mr. Samson makes this clear when he says that "there ain't no such thing as a half nigger." The words "half-nigger" simply implies that anything that has white in it is valued, no matter what background a white person has. If Mr. Samson would have acknowledged Timmy as a "half-nigger," he would have to punish Joe for flogging Timmy. Mr. Samson denies his son to justify his reasons for not protecting him. Thus, Mr. Samson abandons Timmy and does not supports him for disobeying a white man.

Timmy is not valued by the white and black community. Although Timmy ostracizes Negroes and mistreats them, he is not accepted by his white family. He does not belong to anyone. Because he does not belong, Mr. Samson forces him off of the land. Miss Pittman explains: "...Robert called Timmy to the house to give him some money and send him away. Timmy wanted to see Tee Bob before he left. Robert said Tee Bob was asleep. Timmy asked could he come back when he wake up. Robert told him

no." (153) Timmy is told to leave because he refuses to be chastised by a white man. Mr. Samson has no remorse for forcing his son to leave the land. Here, it is as if Timmy is a shadow baby of the Samson's family. As a half-white Negro, Timmy benefits and receives the chance to start a new life and live as a liberated man.

Timmy is able to communicate with the white and black race as a half-white Negro. Throughout the story, Timmy lives two lives: one as a white man's son and as a Negro who is fatherless. Here, Timmy is compared to Victor. Timmy's father is present in his life, but his father does not care for him as much as he cares for Tee Bob. Timmy is able to "pass" and assimilate with two cultures, two worlds, and two races simultaneously. When Miss Pittman tries to explain to Tee Bob why Timmy had to leave the land, he does not understand her. Miss Pittman asserts: "But he didn't understand what I was saying. I told Miss Amma Dean to try to explain it to him. Then his uncle Clarence tried. After Clarence, his parrain, Jules Raynard, in Bayonne, tried to explain it to him. All of us tried except Robert. Robert thought he didn't have to tell Tee Bob about these things. They was part of life, like the sound and the rain was part of life." (154) It is as if Timmy's destiny is chosen. Racism affects his life and his brother Tee Bob's life, too. Racism is internecine, and everyone is affected and oppressed by it.

The only person that accepts Timmy is his half-brother, Tee Bob, who sees him as a member of the family. Miss Pittman continues: "When Tee Bob was able to ride again they got Claudee Ferdinand to ride with him. But it wasn't the same. Tee Bob wanted Timmy. Timmy was his brother, and he wanted his brother there with him." (154) Although racism makes a white man superior, Tee Bob continues to see his brother as his equal. Tee Bob chooses to love half-white Negroes and dismiss the idea of racism.

Similar to Timmy, Tee Bob is able to communicate with both races and understand blacks and whites for who they are as humans.

Racism for Tee Bob does not change the way in which he thinks about his brother. He knows that his brother Timmy has to saddle his horse and ride behind him whenever they go out into the field, but he does not understand the reason for Timmy leaving the plantation. When Miss Pittman tells Tee Bob why his brother Timmy left the plantation, Tee Bob does not understand and refuses to listen. Miss Pittman explains: "But he couldn't understand why Timmy had to leave home after Tom Joe beats him with a stick. I told him Timmy had to leave for his own safety. But he didn't understand what I was saying." (154) Tee Bob is not like the common white man. He believes in accepting people in spite of their color. Tee Bob is the only white man who chooses his own fate. He does not accept the ways in which his father and the world tells him to live his life. He knows that he is not fit for a racist world that limits the opportunities of others.

When Tee Bob meets Mary Agnes LeFabre and learns that she is a descendent of a long line of black Creoles in New Orleans, he pursues her, although he knows that white men cannot love black Creole women who have one drop of color in their blood. Agnes goes to the house to ask Mr. Samson a question while Tee Bob stands in the kitchen drinking coffee. Miss Pittman answers her question and tells her that Mr. Samson is not home. Tee Bob asks Miss Pittman who is at the door. When Miss Pittman answers and says that it is the teacher, Tee Bob walks to the door and stops. Miss Pittman states, "When he saw the girl he almost dropped the cup on the floor. His face got so red I thought he was go'n faint right there in the kitchen...That evening when I got ready to go home he said, 'That girl almost white, ain't she?'" (172) Tee Bob knows that Agnes is a

half-white Negro, but sees that she almost "passed" for white. Here, Tee Bob sees no color and thinks that Agnes is equal to him. Tee Bob shows us that love and race has no boundaries if one desires to be with someone of color. When Tee Bob states, "'That girl almost white, ain't she?'", he sees his whiteness in Agnes. It is a reflection of himself. Tee Bob would have not fallen in love with Agnes if she had not been white. Tee Bob never gives black women attention on the plantation except for Agnes because of her color and her statue as a half-white Negro.

The words "almost white" paints a picture of one that is in a process of purification or coming into their full potential. The word "white" indicates that one is almost made perfect or whole. It is evident that Tee Bob's meaning of "almost white" is one that is "almost" complete in character. Color plays a major role in Tee Bob's thinking, although he is not cognizant of it. What separates Tee Bob from other white men and women is his inability to see himself as a privileged white man.

To be racist and white is to hate blackness. If a white man does not hate blackness, he is not considered an adult, but a child by the black and white community. For example, when Tee Bob arrives in Agnes' classroom, Agnes calls him "Mister" like white people say "Mister." Ethel is scared and confused. She asks to excuse herself from the room, but Agnes pretends to not hear her because she does not want to be left alone with Tee Bob. Miss Pittman recounts, "Not like she felt she ought to call somebody like Tee Bob Mister...Now he just stood there looking at Mary Agnes like some little boy, Ethel said. She said at first she was scared to be in there, but now she felt like laughing at Tee Bob. If he was a man she would 'a' knowed this was no place for her and she would 'a' begged Miss LeFabre to let her be excused." (174) The way in which Tee Bob treats

blacks makes him less of a man in Ethel's and Agnes' eyes. It is as if Tee Bob is powerless because he is not a racist and does not despise Agnes as a half-white Negro. What is interesting about this scene is Ethel's reaction to Tee Bob and how he looks at Agnes, standing before her "like some little boy." The phrase captures how the black and white community sees Tee Bob. They do not take him seriously as a young white man. Since Tee Bob does not utilize and exercise his white power as often as Mr. Samson and Joe, he does not receive the proper respect he deserves from Negroes. Ethel and Agnes belittle him and treat him as if he is less of an authority figure.

As Ethel tells the story of Tee Bob, Miss Pittman listens and adds, "Tee Bob was not a man. His mouth was too red and soft, his eyes was too big and sorrowful. His skin wasn't rough enough. He didn't have a mustache. He had never shaved in his life, and he never would shave." (174-75) Miss Pittman knows that Tee Bob is not a man because "...his eyes was too big and sorrowful." Tee Bob has sympathy for half-white Negroes like Agnes. The word "sorrowful" points to the ways in which Tee Bob feels about blacks. He feels as if they are people that should be valued and respected. Also, the "sorrow" that Tee Bob feels underscores that he is lonely. Miss Pittman also states that Tee Bob "...wasn't rough enough," which means that he cannot handle tough circumstances as a white man. The way in which Tee Bob is described paints a picture of Gaines' meaning of what it means to be a racist in a white and black man's eyes, to misuse blacks in spite of the way in which one feels.

Agnes tells Miss Pittman that she is not interested in any man—white or black, especially Tee Bob. She calls Tee Bob "a child" and "a lonely boy." (177) Agnes makes it clear that she is privileged and does not pay any attention to a child like Tee Bob.

Agnes knows that her status gives her the power to call Tee Bob by his first name. Agnes comes from a family that is free people of color. They owned slaves and a parcel of land. Agnes is wise beyond her years because of her lineage. Miss Pittman explains: "Mary Agnes LeFabre comes from a long line of Creoles back there in New Orleans. Her grandmother was one drop from being white herself. Her grandmother had been one of those ladies for white men. They used to give these great balls before the war, and the white men used to go there to choose their colored women." (166) Agnes' history marks her as a woman who comes from a family line that knows the rules of a white man and his black mistress. Her past speaks volumes about her dealings with Tee Bob. Miss Pittman continues to explain, "They didn't marry these women, but sometimes they kept them the rest of their life. The one who took this girl's grandmother was called LeFabre." (166) Agnes' last name is the name of a white man, a wealthy white man who favored her grandmother and gave her his name, although they were not married. His name gives Agnes the privilege to "pass" as a colored woman with a high status. Mary Agnes LeFabre, which is a French name, allows her to be separate from the Negroes.

Miss Pittman tires to tell Agnes that she should not have any relations with Tee Bob, and she also questions the way in which she addresses him by name, using his first name, "Robert." Agnes states: "'I can handle Robert,' she said. 'That's what you call him? Robert?' 'Yes, ma'am.' 'And he don't say nothing?' 'He want me to call him Robert,' she said. 'I never thought about calling him nothing else.'" (178) Agnes surprises Miss Pittman when she says that she calls Tee Bob by his first name. Here, Miss Pittman can see the division between her and Agnes. They are not respected and given the same opportunity to call Tee Bob by his first name. Tee Bob is not a man who

exercises his white privilege. Instead, he lets his guard down. It happens when Tee Bob allows himself to be vulnerable to a half-white Negro. It is as if Tee Bob loses his right to be superior over Negroes because he opens himself up to them without placing over his face a racist persona. Tee Bob hands his power over to Agnes and lets her treat him as if she is white.

Tee Bob gives his power to Agnes when he looks at her like a white woman as opposed to a Negro. When Miss Amma Dean orders Miss Pittman to tell Tee Bob that Judy Major, a wealthy white woman Tee Bob does not want to marry, is in the house, Tee Bob does not listen. Instead, he ignores Miss Pittman and stares at Agnes as she makes her way into her house. Miss Pittman explains: "He watched her till she had gone in that house, and he didn't look at her the way you think a white man look at a nigger woman, either. He looked at her with love, and I mean the kind that's way deep inside of you. I have not seen too many men, of any color, look at women that way." (180) It is clear that Tee Bob falls in love with Agnes. He does not care who sees that he loves her. The word "love" is interesting here, and Gaines writes it beautifully. The word "love" for Tee Bob goes against the way in which a white man supposed to feel. It unfolds and exposes his "mouth" "eyes" and "skin" and brings to light his inner-self. It is as if Tee Bob's persona is removed and his identity as a white man is exposed. Miss Pittman continues, "After she had closed the door he looked down at me again. His face scared me. I saw in his face he was ready to go against his family, this whole world, for Mary Agnes." (180-81) Similar to his brother Timmy, Tee Bob does not belong to either race and does not have a racial identity.

Tee Bob explains to his friend Jimmy Caya that he loves a Negro woman "more than he loved his own life." (181) Tee Bob values Agnes more than he values himself. The change in power surprises Tee Bob's friend. It angers him because it seems as if Tee Bob refuses to follow the status quo. Instead, Tee Bob follows his heart. Tee Bob's friend reminds him of who he truly is as a white man. Miss Pittman states: "Jimmy Caya said he couldn't control himself no longer, and he grabbed Tee Bob's coat and started shaking him. 'Robert, Robert, Robert...Don't you know who you are? Don't you know what she is? Don't you know these things yet? At the university, and you don't know these things yet?" (182) Jimmy makes it clear that Tee Bob is forgetting who he is. Tee Bob has closed himself off from the rest of the world to escape the pressures of racism. It is as if he does not see color as opposed to Caya. Caya states, "Don't you know what she is?" (182) The word "what" objectifies Agnes and explains that she has no value or place in Tee Bob's social circle. Caya continues, "That woman is a nigger, Robert. A nigger. She just look white. But Africa is in her veins, and that make her nigger, Robert." (182) The fear that Caya expresses points out the way in which he fears the Negro race and their existence. It is as if Caya thinks that everything that is Negro is tainted. Although Caya does not say that Agnes is tainted, he says that she "look white" and has "Africa...in her veins," which indicates that there is something forbidden or morally wrong with who she is as a half-white Negro. When Caya says to Tee Bob that Agnes "is a nigger," it seems as if he is trying to say that Agnes is considered "other" and does not fit within the white society.

Tee Bob sees Agnes differently from the way in which Caya sees her. Tee Bob does not think Agnes is tainted but a woman who can "pass" as white in a white society.

He thinks highly of her, and he sees the inner qualities within her as opposed to the whiteness of her skin. Tee Bob does not think that a half-white Negro like Agnes should be objectified and used as a sex doll. Caya thinks otherwise and expresses himself to Tee Bob. Caya states: "'If you want her at that school, make them children go out in the yard and wait. Take her in that ditch if you can't wait to get her home. But she's there for that and nothing else.'" (183) Caya believes that black women should be used as sex objects and looked over as if they are rag dolls. The idea of a Negro woman is to sexually exploit her and have no connection to her blackness. White men do not have a connection with Negro woman. Their relationships with Negro women are insincere. The Negro woman's body is commodified for white men. It is used to serve them and to fulfill their sexual needs. The Negro and half-white Negro women do not have a choice because their fates are in the hands of their oppressors. White men like Caya, who gives them a reason to live, control their narratives. Their reasons are to obey orders and remain powerless.

Tee Bob rejects Caya's opinion about Agnes. He expresses the way in which he feels about whites who do not accept half-white Negroes. Tee Bob cares about half-white Negroes—and Negroes—like his father cares about his half-white brother, Timmy. For example, when Mr. Samson has sexual relations with Verda, he has a son and treats him as his own. Miss Pittman explains: "Robert came in the quarters and told Verda he wanted Timmy to ride with him." (146) The idea of Timmy riding with Mr. Samson is possible because he is his son. Mr. Samson's sexual relationship with Verda draws him closer to Verda and Timmy as if they are his family. Tee Bob feels the same way toward Agnes. Tee Bob watches Agnes as she packs her things. He tells her that he does not want her to leave for New Orleans. Agnes ignores Tee Bob, but he stands in her way as

she stands before the door. When Agnes rejects Tee Bob, he reacts with anger and knocks her to the floor. He stands over Agnes as she watches him. Miss Pittman recounts:

> 'Something happened to her.' 'The past and the present got all mixed up. That stiff proudness left. Making up for the past left. She was the *past* now. She was grandma now, and he was that Creole gentleman. She was verda now, and he was Robert. It showed in her face. It showed in the way she laid down there on the floor. Helpless; waiting. She knowed how she looked to him, but she couldn't do nothing about it. But when he saw it he ran away from there. Because now he thought maybe the white man was God—like Jimmy Caya had said. Maybe the white man did have power that he, himself, didn't know before now. He ran and ran, stumbling and falling: like a hurt animal. Then he was home. Home. Home. Home.' (206)

Tee Bob's experience with Agnes frightens him and gives him a revelation that a "white man was God." When he sees Agnes lying on the floor, he sees Verda and acknowledges the power he has over half-white Negroes. Gaines writes that white men constantly relive their ancestors' wrong doings whenever they repeat their violent behaviors. Miss Pittman explains: "'He was bound to kill himself anyhow?' 'One day. He had to. For our sins.'" (206) Gaines explains here that white men's experiences with Negro women continue to haunt them and their children. Tee Bob runs when he begins to relive the past of his father. The "power" that Gaines points out is what white men used to conquer others. When Tee Bob utilizes his power, he sees the true meaning of what it means to be a white man: a rapist and a misogynist during the twentieth century.

What Gaines is trying to show us is that black Creoles live within a world of their own and believe that they are not apart of the Negro community, until they are mistreated like Negroes. Agnes has three personalities, which give her the ability to communicate with whites and Negroes, as well as Creoles. Her three split personalities give her an advantage to alter her identity and reside within any community: the Negro, white, or Creole. However, when Tee Bob uses his authority, Agnes' personalities shatter, and she no longer has the ability to "pass" as a white individual. She becomes a Negro. Agnes'

change reflects Victor Grabért's identity crisis in Alice Dunbar-Nelson's short story "The Stones of the Village." When Victor changes his identity, he becomes white and no longer can be a Negro. Victor's chooses who he wants to be as an individual as opposed to Agnes. Once a white man treats her as a Negro, she cannot be white anymore. Her status and her educational background do not give her any authority or power. What determine her fate is the white man and the way in which he treats her as a half-white Negro. Tee Bob's authority makes him a man and places him above Agnes. Agnes' power as a half-white woman shifts. She becomes the child, and Tee Bob becomes the adult.

Not only does Agnes' status changes, but also Tee Bob's status changes, too. He switches from a "decent white man" to a savage (187). Miss Pittman recollects: "Now he thought the white man was God—like Jimmy Caya had said." (206) It is only when Tee Bob becomes cognizant of his full power that he becomes a man. Gaines underscores that white men have no power, except when they mistreat Negroes who are "helpless". Gaines explains through Agnes and Tee Bob how white men only step into manhood when they take advantage of others and their bodies.

Tee Bob does not believe that a white man's power is revealed when he mistreats Negroes; therefore, he musters the courage and takes flight to his house where he hides in the library. He does not rape Agnes. He knows that he would never become a man and fit in a society that gains power through the mistreatment of others. Miss Pittman states:

> Now he tried to forget what he had seen on the floor back there. But nothing in that library was go'n let him forget. Too many books on slavery in that room; too many books on history in there. The sound of his grandfather talking to his daddy and his uncle come out every wall; the sound of all of them talking to him come from everywhere at once. Then there was Jimmy Caya's voice still fresh in his ear. (206)

When Tee Bob tries to escape Agnes, he goes to the library where books talk about slavery. Tee Bob's escapism does not saves him. Instead, it allows him to realize that there is nowhere he can go to forget about his whiteness, for he is marked with the past of slavery, racism, and white superiority. Gaines makes it clear that the past is something that one cannot forget as long as whites and Negroes continue to coexist. He explains that the past hunts whites because it is the only way in which they can live and identify themselves. For example, it seems as if Tee Bob's life pivots around Negroes and half-white Negroes. Without the Negroes, Mr. Samson has no one to work on his plantation, to clean his house, and to look after his cattle. Without the Negroes, white men cannot gain wealth. When Miss Pittman leaves her Master's plantation, he tries to make a plea to her and his freed slaves. The Master explains: "'All right, I got news for y'all...Y'all free. Proclamation papers just come to me and they say y'all free as I am. Y'all can stay and work on shares—because I can't pay you nothing, because I ain't got nothing myself since them Yankees went by here last time. Y'all can stay or y'all can go. If ya'll stay I promise I'll be fair as I always been with y'all." (11) The Master of Miss Pittman tells the freed Negroes to stay because he knows without them, he cannot survive or manage. It is as if the slave Master needs Negroes more than the Negroes need him.

Tee Bob saves Agnes when he writes a letter in the library. He state that Agnes is innocent before committing suicide. When Sam Guidry, the town's sheriff, comes into the house, he asks the Samson family questions and talks to Caya about Tee Bob's death. After hearing from them, he goes to Agnes and tries to force her to talk. Guidry smacks Agnes, and Jules Reynard intervenes, Tee Bob's parrain—his godfather. Reynard talks with Agnes as if she is his own daughter. Miss Pittman explains: "Then Jules Reynard's

voice, gentle, like a father talking to his child. He told the girl about the letter and she wasn't accused of nothing. Tee Bob had said over and over she was innocent of everything." (202) Guidry accuses Agnes for Tee Bob's death because she is a half-white Negro. However, what saves Agnes from the hand of the town's sheriff is Tee Bob. Agnes is not proven guilty because of Tee Bob's letter. One can see here that Tee Bob's powers—God like powers—manages to free Agnes.

Even when Agnes has Tee Bob's support, her innocence still relies on how she speaks of Tee Bob's actions. Guidry states: "'I want to know one thing—and this better be the true. Did he rape you?'" (203) Although Guidry knows that Agnes is innocent, he wants Agnes to speak well of white men. Also, he questions her to ensure that she did not encourage Tee Bob's actions. Miss Pittman states, "'Then what he had to go and do a fool thing like that for?' Ida said it was quiet in there a moment." (203) Agnes does not explain that Tee Bob wanted to live in a world in which he had to choose racism over love; therefore, Guidry tells Agnes to keep her mouth closed about the incident. Agnes' silence points out what it means to be a Negro, powerless.

Agnes' silence gives white oppressors' power. Mr. Reynard makes it clear that Agnes would have been "put in jail for the rest of her life" if Tee Bob never had written in his letter that she is "innocent." Miss Pittman asserts: "She led him on for just a second. And maybe not that long. And even then she didn't have control over herself...if she had said it, Guidry would 'a' put her in jail for the rest of her life. If Tee Bob had put it in that letter, Robert wouldn't 'a' wait for Guidry to put her in jail; he would 'a' broke her neck with his bare hands." (205) A white man is innocent if he rapes a Negro woman. Although Agnes is a half-white Negro, everyone is against her because she is not a pure

white woman. The blame is always placed on the Negro, especially the Negro woman because it is purported that they lead white men on. Whiteness in Gaines' eyes is to be pure and blameless.

Although Gaines writes that whiteness is similar to purity, he states that it is destruction and death. Miss Pittman states: "'Jimmy was right...We all killed him. We tried to make him follow a set of rules our people gived us long ago. But there rules just ain't old enough, Jane." (204) Reynard exposes himself here as a white man, making it clear that it is not Agnes' fault for Tee Bob's death but theirs. Tee Bob's death and loneliness is derived from racism. Whites have imposed rules and regulations on their children that they do not understand. Gaines writes that the whites have placed destruction upon themselves and others for imposing racist policies. He highlights how they do not want to accept the harm they have done to themselves and to others. When Reynard and Guidry tells Agnes to leave the plantation, it is as if they are trying to forget about their wrongdoings.

Tee Bob's family explains that he is not the one to blame for his suicide and confusion at the Samson's home. However, Agnes is the blame for everything. Reynard explains: "She was a nigger, he was white, and they couldn't have nothing together. He couldn't understand that, he thought love was much stronger than that one drop of African blood. But she knowed better. She knowed that ruled. She was just a few years older than him in age, but hundreds of years wiser." (205) Reynard believes that Agnes is the blame for Tee Bob's death and the interruption of the party because she is wise beyond her years and knows that white men and Negro women cannot be together. When Reynard says that Agnes knows the rules, it is as if he assumes that Agnes is completely

aware of her duties as a half-white Negro, which is to serve white men without complaint.

Agnes comes from a privileged family. Her grandmother had been a mistress to a white man who had given her property and money. Also, her grandmother's partner had given Agnes her last name, LeFabre. Miss Pittman states: "And for the rest of her life, Mary Agnes was trying to make up for this: for what her own people had done her own people. Trying to make up for the past—and that you cannot do." (166) Agnes comes from a past in which "her grandmother had been one of those ladies for white men." (166) The evidence is here, that Agnes understood the rules of the Negro women and white men as much as Mr. Samson and Reynard understood the rules. Agnes is familiar with the quadroon balls and plaçage system of Louisiana. The quadroon balls were places where Negro women met white men, and the plaçage is a system that was set up for white men to be in a relationship with half-white Negro women.

Agnes is addressed differently from other Negroes in the Samson community. The Negroes and whites call her "Miss LeFabre." The way in which she is addressed shows that she is given an advantage over Negroes and is placed on a pedestal as a "passing" Negro woman. Miss Pittman states: "Strut Hawkins's gal, Ethel, said Miss LeFabre had kept her inside to put some 'rithmetic problems on the board, and both of them was standing at the blackboard when Tee Bob came in. She said at first it scared her to see him in there because she had never seen a white man at the school before. So she asked Miss LeFabre could she be excused." (174) Agnes' color not only allows her to "pass," but also allows her to have authority over other Negroes. The word "Miss" qualifies her

as a superior over Ethel. It also reflects that she holds a status that singles her out as an educated Negro woman.

The racial barrier between Ethel and Agnes explains their differences in how white men treat them. The barrier is Agnes surname that separates her from Negroes. No one addresses Ethel as "Miss", and Ethel does not come from a family who has money and property. Ethel is identified as a Negro, "Strut Hawkins's gal." (173) Ethel's status places a wedge between her and Agnes and the way in which they communicate with one another. Agnes' name does not do the same for her and Tee Bob but her color. Her color brings a barrier between her and Tee Bob as opposed to her status. When Tee Bob first sees Agnes, he asks Miss Pittman who she is because she is almost as white. Miss Pittman tells him, but makes it clear that Agnes is different. Miss Pittman explains that she is white, "but not quite.'" (172) Although Agnes and Tee Bob have similar backgrounds, color separates them from one another. Gaines shows us here that a half-white Negro woman can be as wealthy as a white man. However, if a half-white Negro woman is not born white, she is not as equal as her white superiors.

Agnes sees Tee Bob as an immature "boy" who does not know anything about himself nor the Negro race. Tee Bob constantly shows Agnes that he cares about Negroes as much as he cares about his own people. He goes into Agnes' classroom looking through books and asks her a question about why the pages are missing. Miss Pittman recounts: "Ethel said he picked up one of the books and went through it till he came to a place where a page was missing. He asked Miss Agnes if many of the books was like that. She told him yes, but she always made the children read out somebody else's book. Ethel said after Tee Bob had put the book down he looked at the hats and coats hanging

on the spools against the wall." (174) As a white man, Tee Bob cares about Negro children and their schools. He is concerned about the Negro children pages being torn out of the school's textbooks. His knowledge of what to expect from Negro woman is limited. His immaturity shows Agnes and Ethel that he is no threat, but a young man who does not know anything about the world in which he lives.

Conclusion: Where Do We Go From Here?

Writing about the Free People of Color has been an exhilarating experience. I have lived in New Orleans all my life and have not learned or heard much about the Free People of Color in my elementary school, high school, or in my community. Taking my time to read about New Orleans has given me more insight about the city and why people love it so much. Of course, people love New Orleans for its food and Jazz music, but also for its diversity and history. The diversity in New Orleans varied in different shades from the *quadroon*, *octoroon,* and the *mulatto*, some of whom were considered the Free People of Color. They were a group of individual people who constructed the infrastructure of New Orleans with slaves, whites, and the natives. They worked cordially together in businesses and formed groups in which they helped each other throughout the city.

However, the Free People of Color, to whom little credit was given for their contribution and building of New Orleans, has been a forgotten people because of racism and Jim Crow in the 1890s. When New Orleans was purchased in 1803 by the Americans, the laws changed and people began to revolt against Governor Virginian W.C.C. Claiborne, who could not control the black and white population because of blood ties; thus, he implemented laws to separate slaves and the Free People of Color from whites. Furthermore, other laws were established, several of which were different and harsher than the French *code noir*. Slaves could not be educated, manumitted from slavery, or married. The seismic shift in New Orleans history happens in the 1830s when

most blacks moved to the West Indies and went to Paris where they had relatives and owned land.

Jim Crow was the law that changed the Free People of Color and made it difficult for them to receive an education. It brought poverty to black neighborhoods and isolated them from whites in the city. It also changed the way in which Creoles identified themselves as individuals. Black Creoles no longer separated themselves from Americans. Some of them decided to "pass" as white for better opportunities. They understood that they would not be given access to resources because of their ethnicity. It was easy for them to assimilate themselves into other communities in New Orleans because of their fair complexion, as well as their ability to understand whites and blacks.

As I learned about the Free People of Color, I pondered how things would have been if New Orleans had continued to be the free city it was before the twenty-first century. Would majority of blacks populate the city? Would Free People of Color own almost half of the businesses, and would New Orleans' education system be the lighthouse of America today? Would blacks still be able to "pass" as white and live their lives in a white society without the judgment of others? Several black Creoles in New Orleans have changed their names and lived under an alias because they wanted to be different and be a part of the white society. They have slipped underneath the gaze of whiteness and lived their lives without anyone knowing that they were black Creoles. The term "transracial" describes it best. It means to cross-racial boundaries to become white or black.

Several people have changed their identity and "passed" as white. For example, America's renowned literary critic, editor, and writer, Anatole Broyard "passed" as white.

He changed his identity to "pass" as white when his family joined the Great Migration during the Great Depression and moved from New Orleans to New York City where his father thought there were more opportunities. Broyard lived in Brooklyn, New York, in a working-class society that was racially diverse. As he went to school, he saw that he had little in common with the blacks, so he decided to "pass" as white like his father and mother who knew that industries were racially discriminatory toward blacks.

When Broyard began to "pass", he saw how blacks were mistreated; therefore, he took advantage of his "white identity" to own a bookstore and outdistance himself from his history. In doing so, Broyard was able to write for *The New York Times* in the 1970s, where he published essays in the column and became one of America's greatest critics of all time. Some of Broyard's colleagues and others in Greenwich Village, which was a literary community where Broyard resided, knew that he was part-black and part-white from the early 1960s. However, they were not sure how true it was. Thus, "passing" was not a secret for Broyard as it were for many people in New Orleans and other parts of the nation. Later in the 1960s, although many thought Broyard was working on his first novel, Broyard began to teach creative writing at New York University and Columbia University. He also submitted short personal essays to *Times* where they were published and people would consider his best work.

Broyard is not the only black Creole who migrates from New Orleans and "passes" as a white man, but also George Herriman, who came from a line of Free People of Color and migrated to Los Angeles during his early childhood with his family. Unlike Broyard, Herriman was not a writer, but an artist who rose to fame in his early years of youth. Landing a spot at the *Los Angeles Herald*, Herriman was able to receive two

dollars per-week to work as an assistant and occasionally sketch out drawings for advertisement and political cartoons. In 1901, Herriman traveled abroad on a freight train to New York City where he tried to find fame but was unsuccessful, until one of the leading humor magazines in the city, *Judge*, accepted his work. Herriman shot to fame when he re-joined the *Los Angeles Times*, where his work appeared on every page and resulted in the increase of newspaper sales. Being able to "pass" as white granted Herriman opportunities that no black man could have had in America because of the color of his skin. When Herriman changed his identity, he was no longer considered a Creole or a free person of color. Instead, on his identification card, he was considered white.

Broyard and Herriman were able to "pass" as white because they chose to change their identity and lose part of who they were as Negroes. Although they did lose part of their humanity–culture and traditions as African American men—,their transracial identity gave them the advantage in a racist society. They did not change their identity because they hated the color of their skin or because their ancestors were Negroes, but because they did not want to live their lives like the tragic mulattoes. "Passing" during their time meant that one could assimilate with whites, receive a better education, and more opportunities. "Passing" for white was normal, especially for blacks who were biracial. Most blacks "passed" to make a living as opposed to change their race.

Nevertheless, "passing" has changed since Jim Crow. Ironically, several whites have decided to "pass" as black, which they would change their racial identity to appear as if they were black. For example, in the 1930s, Walter Francios White was a civil rights activist and head of the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People

(NAACP) for more than twenty years. He was a Negro by choice and chose to embrace his African-American heritage. He investigated blacks being lynched and worked to put an end to segregation in the South. White's obituary in the *New York Times* referred to him as "a Negro by choice." It explains: "Only five-thirty-seconds of his ancestry was Negro. His skin was fair, his hair blond, his eyes blue and his features Caucasian. He could easily have joined the 12, 000 Negroes who pass the color-line and disappear into the white majority every year in this country." (*TIME)* White chose not to "pass" because his blood ties with Negroes were personal and deep. His family was born into slavery and endured discrimination once they were freed. Understanding the trouble that the African-Americans endured, he decided to help his people as opposed to forgetting his culture and humanity like Broyard, Herriman, and several other Negroes who "passed" as white in America.

Although White fought for African-Americans and was an esteemed activist and a powerful champion of anti-lynching legislation, some blacks mistaken him as a white intruder. In his autobiography, White explains several instances in which he was mistaken as a white man. He writes in his book, *A Man Called White*, how he mistakenly stepped on a black man's shoes: "Why don't you look where you're going? You white folks are always trampling on colored people."[5] White's life would have been a lot easier if he had decided to forget about his blackness and "pass" as white. Instead, his life was not easy, but difficult because he decided to assimilate with blacks who expressed animosity toward whites.

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[5] White, Walter. *A Man Called White, The Autobiography of Walter White*. New York: Viking, 1948. Print.

Refusing to turn his back on his heritage and those who faced a travesty of injustice from Jim Crow, White embraced his blackness and accepted the way in which he was treated. White states in his book: "I am not white. There is nothing within my mind and heart which tempts me to think I am. Yet I realize acutely that the only characteristic which matters to either the white or the colored race—the appearance of whiteness—is mine. There is magic in a white skin; there is tragedy, loneliness, exile, in a black skin." (*A Man Called White*) White understood the privileges he had as a white man, but refused to use his privileges to move up the academic and socioeconomic leader; therefore, he worked to ease the tragedy, loneliness, and exile of his black brothers and sisters.

Similar to White, who "passed" as a black man in the 1940s, Rachel Dolezal "passed" as a black woman. Dolezal, a former African studies instructor, an American civil rights activist, and former president of a local chapter of the NAACP, changed her white identity to "pass" as black. On June 11, 2015, Dolezal was questioned about her identity by a news reporter, who asked if she was black or white. The reporter states: "Are you African-American? Are your parents, are they white?" Dolezal responded to the reporter by stating that she did not understand the question and walked off. She states: "That's a very…I mean, I don't know what you're implying...I don't understand the question."[6] (*The Washington Post*)

Dolezal "passed" as black for several years and hardly anyone knew it. Her transracial identity allowed her to do so. She altered her appearance to look as if she were

[6] Moyer, Justin. "'Are You an African American?' Why an NAACP Official Isn't Saying." *Washington Post*. The Washington Post, 12 June 2015. Web. 27 Apr. 2016.

black. Receiving backlash from the African-American community and leaving her post as president of the NAACP organization, she has left several people examining the relationship between skin color and racial-justice activism. Also, although many saw Dolezal as a charlatan, several others, black and white, viewed her as a champion for African-Americans. For example, Kareem Abdul-Jabbar states that Dolezal "has proven herself a fierce and unrelenting champion for African-Americans politically and culturally."[7] (*TIME*) Changing her color and "passing" as black has come to be a surprise to several people in America, but to supporters like Abdul-Jabbar, courageous. Dolezal's adopted son, Franklin, supported Dolezal's decision to be transracial. On the Matt Lauer show, Dolezal quotes her son who states: "'Mom, racially, you're human, and culturally you're black."[8] (*Us Weekly*) What was interesting about Dolezal's son's responds to his adopted mother's change in identity, was that he understood how one could be a part of the human race and culturally a part of another race. Was Dolezal wrong for embracing black culture and changing her identity? Was it cultural appropriation and racist or was it cultural appreciation?

Dolezal decided to be black and assimilate with the African-American community over the past twenty years of her life, though she was born with white skin, blue eyes, and blond hair. She made the decision to "pass" as black because she wanted to understand the culture and advocate for African-Americans. Dolezal's and White's "passing" has given us a snap-shot of the many ways in which "passing" has changed over the past few

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[7] Latson, Jennifer. "The Surprising Story of Walter White and the NAACP." *Time*. Time, 1 July 2015. Web. 27 Apr. 2016.
[8] Webber, Stephanie. "Rachel Dolezal's Black Adopted Sister Defends Her: "I Fully Support"" *Us Weekly*. N.p., 18 June 2015. Web. 27 Apr. 2016.

decades. Transracially changing one's white identity has opened up the window for questions: Is it possible to change one's identity, culture, and ethnicity? Has "passing" given us the opportunity in today's society to become an individual? If so, can anyone "pass" as white or black whenever he or she chooses to do so?

"Passing" has been going on for years in America, but has not gain much attention from the media until Dolezal "passed" as black. What made Dolezal's story interesting was that she did not have any connection to the African-Americans, but still took it upon her own to "pass" as black. As a privilege white woman, it raises questions about what it means to be black and white in the twenty-first century. As a society, should we continue to label and categorize one another as racial taxonomist scholars once did or should we get rid of the terms "black" and "white" because White and Dolezal has proven that those terms should not determine one's race or identity?

From here, I sincerely believe we should start to question the terms "black" and "white". We should take a step back to examine and understand humanity and what it means to be human in today and age because labeling others as "black" or "white" has done nothing for the human race but caused tension and strife. It has influenced several others like Broyard and Herriman to separate themselves from the black community. It has also sparked criticism to those like Dolezal, who chose to assimilate with blacks. Does Dolezal has a choice to change her identity or does society and her color make that decision for her? Do those like Dolezal and Broyard have agency over their own lives or does society has agency over their lives? Although their individualism does not limit them to connect with other communities, society does.

Individualism and society plays a key role in "passing". If one wanted to be an individual and "pass", he or she would have to go against society and become an outcast. In Mark Twain's *The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn,* Huck does not want to be "sivilized" by the Widow Douglas and her sister, Ms. Watson. Instead, he wants to explore the world and be a part of nature. Huck's individuality is challenged throughout the novel as he continues to be himself and helps Jim escape from slavery. Traitorous to his race, but a hero to Jim, Huck finds himself being a nonconformist and not letting society choose for him. Instead, he makes the courageous decision and chooses for himself. Similar to Huck, Victor, Tee Bob and Agnes experience the same pressures as they continue to embrace their identity and go against society. One of America's greatest stories like Mark Twain's *Huckleberry Finn*, parallels with the Free People of Color, Broyard, Herriman, and Dolezal. Their individuality goes hand and hand with Twain's theme, individualism versus society.

Washington, Dunbar-Nelson, and Gaines talk about the same theme in their short stories and novels. The value of the individual is the concept that they confront with criticism and questions. They highlight the individual lives of the characters in their story to show the disadvantages and advantages they have as individuals. Underscoring the tragic lives of the characters, they reveal the benefit of separating themselves from large communities and how they are able to comprehend with blacks and whites. Dunbar-Nelson explains it best in "Brass Ankles Speaks", in which she states: "there is always a barrier, a veil—nay, rather a vitrified glass wall, which I can neither break down, batter

down, nor pierce."[9] (317) The terms "barrier" "veil" and "vitrified glass wall" sheds light on the way in which individuals like the black Creoles can see themselves through the eyes of the other and measure who they are by the souls of others in humanity.

Many believe that "passing" with a light complexion can be easy for blacks who do not look as if they are African-American. Blacks have a tough time changing their skin color and "passing" as white. The history of African-Americans makes this difficult because they have been criticized and told that their black skin is not beautiful. Receiving criticism from whites, change the way in which African-Americans view their skin. This led to a cultural movement in black communities around the nation in the 1960s, in which black women and men joined forces to proclaim "Black is Beautiful". The media and society viewed most African-Americans with a negative perception and criticized them for the color of their skin, referring to their bodies as slave statues.

Thus, the problem for African-Americans changing their skin color and trying to "pass" as white can be challenging and offensive to those who value their black skin. For instance, when iconic rap artist Lil Kim changed the color of her skin from black to white and appeared on social media in 2016 for the first time in months, the black community bristled at her actions, stating that she "is setting a bad example for young women of color."[10] (*CNN*) An African-American changing their skin like Dolezal can be frightening and troubling for most people because of history. However, it can be a good thing for the individuals because it is what makes them unique and a part from society. They are not

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[9] "Brass Ankles Speaks." *The Works of Alice Dunbar-Nelson*. Ed. Cloria Hull. Vol. 2. New York City: Oxford UP, 1988. 1-321. Print.

[10] France, Lisa Respers. "Rapper Lil' Kim Criticized for 'looking White'" *CNN*. Cable News Network, 25 Apr. 2016. Web. 28 Apr. 2016.

confined by a race of people. Instead, they step out on faith and embrace their inner desires.

Furthermore, what makes Lil Kim's skin transformation interesting is that she does not feel as if she despises the color of her skin or has any low self-esteem. She states: "It don't bother me because I told you, I'm beautiful...I love myself...People think I did it because I had low self-esteem, but that wasn't the case. I think I did it because I was a little too vain."[11] (*CNN*) Lil Kim made the decision to change her skin color because she acknowledges that she did not have the spotlight anymore. The word "vain" explains why she changed her skin color, for attention. The decision brings to question other celebrities who made the conscious decision to change their skin color or sexuality. For instance, Bruce Jenner, who embraced his transexuality by transforming himself and becoming a woman name Catlin Jenner. His individuality is similar to Dolezal and Lil Kim. Rejecting his masculinity has left several confused, but others in awe because he courageously goes against society and challenges what it means to be human and an individual. If men are able to change their gender, why women like Dolezal and Lil Kim cannot change their racial appearance and culture? Can we pair transexualism to transracialism? Is the change in masculinity to femininity similar to the change in one's race and cultural identity?

In conclusion, as scholars and avid readers of literature, we should continue to understand what it means to be an individual, what it means to "pass", what it means to be "black" and "white" in the twenty-first century, and how has "passing" changed since

[11] France, Lisa Respers. "Rapper Lil' Kim Criticized for 'looking White'" *CNN*. Cable News Network, 25 Apr. 2016. Web. 28 Apr. 2016.

the 1830s. We should also try to understand those like White, Dolezal, Lil Kim, and Jenner, who courageously become individuals and self-conscious pariahs as opposed to reducing themselves to society. In my opinion, White, Dolezal, Lil Kim, and Jenner are beyond their time and see pass race and gender classifications. They are brave individuals who have left a dent in the universe for all of us to admire or to try and understand. They understand what racism and limiting one's self to one's race entails: constraint. Race and the categorization of the human race is a difficult conundrum that sparks war between two people, two cultures, and two worlds.

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